

# The Sinaitic Theophany According to the Jewish Tradition (Part 2)

by  
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Source: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 17, No. 1 & 2 (Winter-Spring, 1985).  
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It is with sorrow that we note the death, since receiving the original of this article, of its greatly respected author, Leo Schaya, the contributor over the years of very many articles of outstanding merit. He died last year, when the previous issue of our magazine, carrying the first part of “The Sinaitic Revelation”, had already gone to the printers. The present article is typical of this writer’s clarity and depth and is, for us, a touchingly appropriate conclusion to the long association we have been privileged to enjoy with Leo Schaya.

## The Soul of Israel

However, the methods of the Kabbalah are far too numerous to be dealt with further here. Its contemplative and operative procedures are situated, as we have seen, together with those of exoterism, on manifold grades or degrees of exegesis and application of divine revelation; one stands before a veritable Jacob’s ladder rising up from the earth towards the Infinite (*Ein Sof*), through all human, heavenly and spiritual spheres. And it is on this same mystical ladder that the revelation of the Infinite comes down; it descends from the “degrees above”, the hierarchy of the *Sefirot*, to manifest itself in the innumerable cosmic degrees which are made up by the reflections of those sefirotic or ontological grades. And it is to spiritual degrees of receptivity, which are realized in created receptacles, that these grades correspond. It was in the image of the “ten degrees above”, that all the souls of Israel (including those of past and later generations) were grouped at Sinai into a hierarchy of receptacles. This was accomplished in order to receive the divine revelation according to their respective degrees of receptivity. Every soul in Israel, even before it was brought into existence, has shared in or been identified with one of the Sefirot, one of the great Divine Archetypes in which all the other Archetypes are reflected and of which every soul is thus a “hidden vase”, a predetermined mode of ontological receptivity. All inherent receptivity is reflected on the “face of the [cosmic] waters”, the supreme degree of creation, which is also called *Arabot* or the “seventh heaven”. It is here—in the dwelling called *Guf*, its

prototypical “Body”—that the created soul awaits the divine command to descend into an earthly body, the body of a human being, of an Israelite. Before that descent, the soul enjoys the vision of God face to face, according to that soul’s own degree of “receptivity”.

Thus, the souls of Israel that were not incarnated at the moment of the Sinaitic revelation received the order to descend to the “Celestial Land”—the *Shekhinah*—which lay above the mountain, and to attend, together with the incarnated souls (which were temporarily detached from their bodies) the revelation of the ten *Sefirot*, which took the shape of the Ten Commandments that summarize the entire Torah. At that time, each soul received the sefirotic revelation directly, according to its own degree of receptivity which, as we have seen, is essentially linked with one of the *Sefirot* without, however, being separated from the others. Each *Sefirah* contains all the others in the light of its own infinite Quality or Perfection: it unites the soul through that Perfection, which is its eternal Archetype, with the indivisible Unity of all the *Sefirot*. Therefore it is this Divine Unity which is revealed to each soul, according to its own eternal degree of receptivity,

separately, to the captains of the tribes, to the women, to the leaders of the people...as it is written [in Deut. 29:10–13, concerning the Renewal of the Covenant with Moab, which the Kabbalah, as we have seen, spiritually identifies with the Sinaitic event]: “Ye stand this day all of you before YHVH your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel,...” which indicates the five degrees on the right side [of the Divine Clemency, which corresponds to a powerful, or “solar”, spiritual receptivity], whereas the five degrees on the left side [Rigor, which refer to a lesser or “lunar” receptivity] are [according to the rest of the scriptural text] “your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water [which indicates the possibility of the conversion of non-Jewish souls to Mosaicism and thus, of their assimilation into Israel]: in order to enter into the covenant of YHVH, your God, and into the oath of the covenant which YHVH your God concluded with you on this day, in order to establish you today as His people and to be your God Himself...” These ten degrees [which obtain from the subdivision of Israel effected in the verse just quoted] correspond to the ten [sefirotic] degrees mentioned, through which Israel received the ten words [or commandments] and which are its eternal possession, the essence of all the commandments, the good [or Divine] part of Israel. (*Zohar* 2:82a)

These ten degrees of receptivity were, in their turn, subdivided into as many steps as there were souls present at the revelation; for each soul is, in its essence, a “unique” receptivity (*yehidah*) of the One (*Ehad*), even if it shares roots in a particular *Sefirah* with others. As we have seen, each soul at Sinai saw, in the light of the *Sefirah* from which it originated and according to its own participation in that *Sefirah*, all the other *Sefirot* at the same time as its own; it saw, in its own

“unique” way, the sefirotic Infinity, the divine Unity in all Its aspects. And that is how there was erected the immense ladder of all the shades of interpretation and authentic application of the seventy fundamental aspects which each word of Divine Revelation presented. All this spiritual richness, the whole Torah, which is a boundless ocean of shining lights, is forever stored in each soul of Israel. But although, in the seventh heaven, the Jewish soul perpetually enjoys the beatific and unifying vision of Him Who reveals Himself and, although this was bestowed here below on Sinai, this spontaneous vision came to an end after the renewal of original sin in the presence of the golden calf. The “eyes” of the soul have been veiled, and the soul has lapsed into imperfections and transgressions, as the history of Israel shows. That is why the Psalmist (119:18) wrote “Take off the veil from mine eyes...”, and that is why, in the name of all the prophets of Israel, he urged his people to realize the Divine Will and Truth as revealed in the Torah. “Take off the veil from mine eyes, that I may consider the wonders locked within the Torah.” Only the Torah, written and spoken, only the final comprehension of its Divine Contents, can restore to Israel cognitive union with God.

But how is it possible that the soul which has its eternal ground in God, which dwells in constant union with Him in the seventh heaven, which remains, even here on earth, sacred in its “subtle pinnacle” hidden in the heart’s depths, and which received the entire treasure of the Torah at Sinai, can voluntarily become estranged from its own divine essence and founder into sin? Here lies the mystery of man’s free will: the mystery of man, who can choose to follow either of the two opposite paths which the Creator Himself has gifted to him: the path to the true and good, named *Yetser tob*, the “leaning towards the good”, and the path to error and evil, *Yetser hara*, the “leaning towards evil”. *Yetser tob* springs up from the divine light in man and attracts him towards his own luminous and absolute essence. *Yetser hara* is like the shadow of that light, an obscuration or an inner veil, which separates and estranges the soul from its divine essence or from the One, in order to lure it into “vanity” (*habel*), which is the illusion of the “other-than-the-One”; this is the illusion of the “I” and the “world”, of the multitude of created things supported by the cosmic substance, the very objectivation and coagulation of the shadow or inward darkness. In the beginning, this substance was still transparent, like a tenuous veil through which divine and beatific light illuminated creation; but because of sin, the fruit of the leaning towards evil, and because of attachment to the “other-than-the-One”, and thus to multiform substance, the light was withdrawn, causing the darkness of this substance to appear. According to the Kabbalah, this entire process of negation reflects the principial “retreat” (*tsimtsum*) of the Divine light into its own Infinite Essence, whereby the actualization of primordial darkness, and of the finite and created within it, became possible. The darkness of the created substance, which in the beginning was illumined by the *fiat lux*, re-emerged to a certain extent, as we have seen, following upon original sin, and upon attachment to this substance shot through and through with every kind of illusion and becoming ever harder in proportion to the growth of attachment to it, until it became an opaque “encrustation” (*q’lipah*) enclosing the Divine light. The human soul perceives and pursues no more than the crowd of “sparks” that fell into the darkness of the “I” and the “world” when the light of the One was withdrawn. Divine

and luminous as it was, the soul has become dark, dissipated, manifold; its substance is, as it were, an aggregate of different psychic layers, of various “souls” of diverse natures which come together to form a whole that is individual but not homogeneous, being deprived of its primordial spiritual unity.

Man possesses a “sacred soul”, *neshamah*, which mounts up unceasingly to its supreme source and whose light it reveals because its nature is identical to the ascendant “inclination to the good” (*Yetser tob*); and he has a “vital” or animal soul, *nefesh*, which, on the contrary, goes down unceasingly into the darkness of the earthly body, which materialized with Adam’s fall, when he lost his luminous body. Even so, the corporeal soul is not itself identical with the “inclination to evil” (*Yetser hara*), for God created the human body “in His image”, the image of the infinite “Body” of the ten *Sefirot*, so that man, realizing his “deiformity” can return from his “fall-point” to his supreme starting point. And man realizes his deiformity not by attachment to his theomorphic, yet fallen, body, but by the submission and uniting of his body or corporeal soul to the spirit or to the sacred and spiritual soul filled with the true Presence of the *Sefirot*, with all the Divine Perfections capable of being manifested. This submission and union are the work of the reasoning soul, *ruah*, the discursive spirit of man, his mind: this is the specifically human soul, which is called upon to distinguish between the inclinations to good and to evil, between good and bad, true and false, real and unreal, spiritual and material, Divine and non-divine. The “reasoning soul” can turn either to what is above or to what is below; it can make the upper descend into the lower and raise the lower to the higher. *Ruah* can have the spiritual soul subdue the animal soul, or it can refrain from doing so; it can reveal or veil the light of *neshamah*, it can make the darkness of *nefesh* triumph, or not; it is the intermediary; the mediator or the separator between the upper and the lower soul; it identifies itself either with the inclination to good or with the opposite. Through the positive influence of *ruah*, the animal soul is subjected to the Divine Will, its bodily “shell” is itself integrated into the union of reason with *neshamah*, into the spiritual ascent of the being towards Truth; it loses the “weight” acquired through the fall of Adam and serves as a vehicle, a sacred “chariot” for the ascent of man towards God, as it was in Paradise and, later, on Mount Sinai during the great theophany.

In this paradisiacal state, the threefold soul is homogeneous and reveals two supplementary aspects of its inward and Divine unity. Its intermediary element is no longer *ruah*, reason, but *neshamah* which from then on serves as mediator between the individual soul with its two aspects, the mental (*ruah*) and the animal or corporeal (*nefesh*) and the supra-individual or universal soul of man; *neshamah* constitutes the universal, and even divine, center of the individual earthly soul, *ruah-nefesh*, and it is in this center, this spiritual heart, that man has received, and can continue to receive, Divine revelation directly—or receive the Sinaitic revelation if he is one of the children of Israel. Indeed, just as *nefesh* has two psychic layers which together represent man’s individual and lower inferior soul where evil can reside, it also enfolds the two supreme, universal and divine aspects of the human soul; these are the two transcendent aspects of the eternally pure and sacred essence of man, whereas *neshamah* is the

immanent aspect of it which is not, however, affected by the existential vicissitudes of the psychic-physical individuality of the human being. These two transcendent aspects are: *hayah*, the (eternally) “living soul”, which dwells in the seventh heaven in perpetual union with Him Who reveals Himself; and *yehidah*, the “unique soul” which has never come out from Him, but which constitutes the eternal archetype of the human being in the transcendent world of the *Sefirot*. Thus, *neshamah*, radiates divine light into the individual sphere of man, illuminates his “mental soul” and nourishes his “vital soul” on the one hand; but ascends on the other—thanks to that enlightening and life-giving light, up through all the heavens as far as *Arabot*, the seventh heaven or the “surface of the waters”, in order to integrate itself into *hayah*, united with Him Who “rides on heaven, by His name *Yah*” (Ps. 68:4).<sup>1</sup> Thus the sacred soul, by means of union with the Divinity truly present in the supreme degree of creation, regains access to His Transcendence where, from eternity to eternity, *yehidah* is hidden, at one with *Yahid*, the “One and Only”.

The man who wanders here on earth suffers no decrease in the purity of his sacred and universal soul, but he can tarnish his individual soul to the point that it remains cut off, as it were, from its Divine essence: it then suffers the consequences of its errors until it has eliminated the impurities of its vital “shell”, *nefesh*, and restored the transparency of its mental “veil”, *ruah*. God then “removes” this “veil,” and the “eyes” of *neshamah*, which are *hayah* and *yehidah*, are “opened”, so that man, now illuminated and united with the One, “sees the miracles contained in the Torah”. In this way, a child of Israel realizes on earth what he perpetually and eternally possesses above, where he is at one with Him Who reveals Himself to all the souls on the surface of the waters, and Who has revealed Himself in particular to Israel at the summit of Mount Sinai in assuming the form of the Torah.

But here again, the question arises of how it can be possible that the souls of Israel, as soon as God had “lifted the veil” and “showed them His miracles”, His own Aspects, His truly present and entire Glory, and had thus joined them to Himself, could lapse into “the inclination to evil” through the adoration of the golden calf, which is a crude illusion of an “other-than-Him”?

Actually, what we have just stated concerning the constitution of the human soul refers only to the possibility of sin in general without touching upon the particular sin committed at Sinai almost immediately after the enlightenment of Israel and its union with God. We must revert, therefore, to the events of Sinai: there, Israel saw the spiritual reality of each word of the Decalogue; it saw the synthesis of the Torah and, in that synthesis, the essence of the revelation,

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1. The word *HaYah* is composed of the initial of *hayim*, “life”, or of *hokhmah*, “wisdom”, and *YaH*, one of the essential Divine Names, the Name of the “Merciful Father”. The two letters *Y* and *H* of the name *YāH* form the first—and “transcendent”—half of the Tetragram *YHVH*, and, from another point of view, the “synthesis” of it, combining the initial and the final letters. According to this Kabbalistic interpretation, the word *HaYaH* indicates the union of the immortal or eternally “living” and “knowing” soul with the “transcendent” which has made Itself immanent in the supreme degree of the cosmos in the form of the “Merciful Father”.

God Himself. The Lord revealed Himself to His people in His first word: *Anokhi*: “I,” which is His “I-ness” as well as the Divine “Self” of all beings. Each child of Israel embodied *Anokhi*, and thereby “penetrated into the Mystery of supreme Wisdom”. Time and space were, for one instant, obliterated “in the eyes of all the people”; and yet—and this is one of the essential factors which lead to a better understanding of the drama of Israel—the cyclical conditions into which this event intervened were not reabsorbed thereby once and for all; they re-asserted themselves once more as soon as the great theophany faded. For one moment, paradise on earth and a dazzling spiritual ascent of an entire people towards God had become actual, but the time for perfect, final and universal deliverance had not yet come. It had been no more than momentarily prefigured in the heart of an ethnic collectivity as yet imperfectly prepared to receive the supreme Gift. The human receptacles stood in different degrees of closeness to the Mountain of light; their outward remoteness corresponded to their inward distance from the Divine Presence. Although for one moment God’s light obliterated that distance, He did not remove it. The cycle of humanity towards the end of time had to evolve in the direction of a general downfall, a spiritual downfall broadly involving all the people in the world, including Israel.

Indeed, if all evil had totally vanished at Mount Sinai, each Israelite could have followed Moses closely in his approach to God, and could have united with Him in a perfect, final way, as all the chosen will do, by the grace of the Merciful, at the final coming of the Messiah. But the Lord did not want his Sinaitic community to “break” all the spiritual “barriers” yet or to realize—with the “righteous of all nations”—Messianic Plenitude. That is why He said to Moses: “Go down, charge the people lest they break through unto YHVH to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to YHVH, sanctify themselves, lest YHVH break forth upon them.” And: “Come up unto YHVH, thou, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. And Moses alone shall come near YHVH: but they shall not come nigh: neither shall the people go up with him” (Exod. 19:21–22, 24:1–2). Thus, within one and the same community of visionaries of God, a spiritual hierarchy was crystallized out. Union with God was actualized in an immense ladder of degrees which could then be scaled according to the measure of intensity of “thirst for the One” which each of them bore in his heart. Supreme union and final deliverance were accorded only to those who enjoyed an extremely heightened state of inward preparedness. For the others, union with the Divine was transitory, but each retained an indelible imprint of it in his heart such as to serve as a permanent support for spirituality and ultimate union with YHVH. All the souls of the former and later generations of Israel, present at Sinai, were impregnated in the same way. Each child of Israel saw God and would be able to see Him again and find Him again in his heart: that was and is the immense, and lasting, grace of the Sinaitic theophany.

The foregoing remarks permit us to come to a conclusion about the serious problem of Israel’s having seen God and been united with Him, yet still remaining capable of worshiping an idol. Such a fall from the state of union can occur—right up to the ultimate and Messianic Redemption—when union is simply passive and bestowed upon man by pure grace, when man

himself has not cooperated actively in the realization of union, as was the case with Adam and Eve in paradise and with most of the children of Israel at Sinai. In this event, the soul is open to the influence of the enshrouding and separative power of the dark “shells” of created substance. These subtle or psychic “shells” envelop, as we have seen, the spiritual light that dwells in creatures and emanates from their divine and uncreated essence. In order for man to be able to dominate this anti-spiritual and dualistic influence which separates and estranges him from his own Divine Self, he must devote all his intelligence, will, and faith to the *active* and *integral* purification of the dark outer layers of his soul. With the help of God he must strive to transform and re-integrate them completely into his own original immaculate substance, the “Primordial Ether” (*Avir qadmon*), the “chariot” (*merkabah*) or transparent vehicle of the Spirit that is hidden in his heart; he must—with the help of God—aspire to triumph completely over his “inclination to evil” which leads to *havel*, vanity, illusion, unreality, by means of his “inclination to good” which attaches and unites him with *Emeth*, the “Truth”, the One and Only Real. Finally, he will become part of—or, seen “from above”, be made part of—the “One without second”, which implies that he will be totally effaced and, at the same time, spiritually resurrected in Him. Then, and only then, will he be a perfect servant of God, delivered forever from the “I” and the “world”. So long as he has not completely conquered the double illusion of an “other-than-the-One”—and thus is not yet true “Master of the cosmic house”—he risks falling away even from such paradisiacal and angelic purity as the Children of Israel obtained “without fee” at Sinai, after two days of specific preparations.<sup>2</sup> This preparation was sufficient for a passive union, but could by no means take the place of integral, spiritual realization; for most Israelite souls it could, however, be a point of departure, charged with a quite exceptional superabundance of grace. On the other hand, there seems no reason to doubt that this same preparation coincided with the final phase of the active spiritualization of the elite, which probably started at the beginning of the ministry of Moses and Aaron, before the Exodus. This spiritualization was such as to lead, in an active and perfect way, to the Sinaitic union with God on the part of the chosen, preventing them and their followers from worshipping the golden calf.

### **The Sin of the Golden Calf**

According to the *Zohar* (2:191a-192b) the fabrication and worship of the golden calf were due to the initiative of the Egyptians who, recognizing the superiority of YHVH over Pharaoh, joined Israel at their exodus. But during the forty days and nights spent by Moses on Mount Sinai in the presence of his Lord, these Egyptians succumbed again to the influence of the “shells”: they began to be impatient and to play a role analogous to that of the tempter who entered the Garden of Eden to beguile Eve, and then Adam, into evil. The Kabbalah considers these

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2. This is why, apart from purely contemplative reasons which induce them to teach the permanent invocation of God, the spiritual Masters—of whom we quote Rabbi Nahman of Bratislava (1772-1810)—generally insist on the need to “raise one’s heart up to God ceaselessly”, to “cry out to Him unceasingly with one’s whole heart”; for, said the Rabbi, “man is in great danger in this world”.

Egyptians as being “intruders” into the earthly paradise created at the foot of Mount Sinai. In the manner of Satan clouding the minds of the first men these “intruders”, and especially the “magicians” amongst them, made so many Israelite souls cynical and impure that the brother of Moses feared that the Covenant with YHVH would be utterly revoked. It was because Aaron wanted to limit the loss of Israelite souls as far as possible, that he permitted the fabrication of the golden calf at the urgent request of the Egyptians and their followers. But he also had an altar constructed and dedicated to YHVH so that the pure could demonstrate their opposition to the impure, and the worship of the true God of Israel would annul, if possible, the fruits of idolatry. Without the intervention of Moses, who was prepared to give his life for his people, Israel would have been crushed by God’s wrath despite Aaron’s gesture; and it was only after the expiatory death of thousands of apostates that His wrath was fully appeased.

However, the first Tablet of the Torah, the first state of union between Israel and God, and the Sinaitic paradise were lost, and had it not been for another intervention by Moses, YHVH would not have accompanied this “stiff-necked people” to the Promised Land. The Lord had meanwhile warned Moses of the risk he would run by accepting the Egyptians into Israel’s bosom, but he, in hopes of their genuine conversion when they saw the works of the living God, put their case favorably to YHVH. Finally, God allowed man to exercise his free will, as He had before when Adam and Eve in paradise fell victim to the “intruder” in spite of God’s warning. Thus it was that original sin and man’s fall came to be repeated at Sinai and the reinstatement of the paradisiacal state and union with the One assumed the aspect of a simple planting of the seed that would grow into universal Redemption, and only then, would evil disappear from the earth forever.

This seed had fallen on the soil of a collective soul, which would have to be tilled for thousands of years by legions of the pious, the just and the prophets, in order to bear a spiritual harvest leading to final Deliverance. From the pure spirituality of the first Tablets, Israel moved on towards the exoterism of the second; but the esoterism of that first hour, the Kabbalah, the “reception” and realization of the “Mysteries of the Torah”, was conserved by the elite. Despite all the failings of the chosen people, the “chain of the Esoteric Tradition” (*shalsholet ha-Qabbalah*), the initiatic transmission of the sacred means that lead to the vision of the Divine and to union with Him, has remained intact since Moses and must necessarily endure until the final coming of the Messiah. The luminous traces of the original Tablets are hidden in the letters of the second Tablet, the Torah, and in the hidden light dwells the first state in *unio mystica*. In order to recover that state of beatific vision and sacred union of Sinai, Israel must return to the Torah and immerse itself in it until it penetrates its intimate reality. The history of Israel is an ineluctable coming-and-going between fidelity and faithlessness towards the Torah, between the worship of YHVH and that of the “golden calf” or other false gods. It is for this reason that the Eternal destroyed the two Temples of Jerusalem, exiled the people from the Holy Land and withheld Himself from the inner eye of most of the Children of Israel. Even before the destruction of the second Temple, he forbade the invocation of His holy Name *YHVH*, that

essential vestige of the first Tablet through which many a soul of Israel had achieved union with Him after His revelation at Sinai. In that Name God had placed all His Goodness, Grace and Mercy. He had uttered it before Moses so that Moses could speak it out aloud before Israel and Israel could invoke It and thus be enlightened and delivered by the Infinite Goodness and True, Redeeming Presence contained in that most precious utterance of the Eternal:

I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will pronounce the name of YHVH before thee; and will grant grace to whom I will grant grace, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy (Exod. 33:19).

And YHVH descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of YHVH. And YHVH passed by before him, and proclaimed YHVH! YHVH! God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation (Exod. 34:5–7).

With the loss of the invocation of the Name *YHVH*, Israel was subjected to the worst of all punishments and degradation: the loss of immediate union with God. In fact, the particular grace of this Name consists in the immediate and redeeming “descent” of the Transcendent—whose symbol is formed by the first two letters of *YHVH*. His descent is represented by the letter *V*, the ideogram of the Messiah, who operates on earth through the letter *H*, which is the symbol of the real and revealing Presence, the *Shekhinah*. It is this redeeming descent that procures union with the Divine and which is represented by the last two letters of the Tetragram—its “immanent half”—which was taken away from the Jewish people. Only a few rare initiates of the “Kabbalistic chain” who were qualified for direct union could continue secretly to invoke the Holy Name, the Divine Content of which must be permanently actualized here on earth “from generation to generation” (cf. Exod. 3:15). However, God left the “first [transcendent] half” of His Name—that is, *YH*, pronounced *YaH*, to all Israel. This is the Name of His Merciful Transcendence which, together with certain Names of His Immanence, such as *Elohenu* (Our God) and *Adonai* (My Lord) continues to manifest His Grace within the withdrawal of His Grace: this manifestation is weakened and “indirect”, and is thus appropriate to the limited receptivity of the generations of the “last days”, who are no longer capable of assimilating and supporting a direct descent of the Divine.

Another disgrace of the most terrible kind, and not unconnected with what has just been recounted, was inflicted upon Israel with the destruction twice of the Temple, the House of the “final *H*” of *YHVH*, His *Shekhinah*, His Presence as It was tangibly manifested to the people. Priestly service, sacrifices offered for the reconciliation and union of Israel with YHVH, no longer exist. The saving presence of the *Shekhinah* no longer radiates from the divine “Center of

the world”; it was exiled with the people wandering through the earth. His Light is, as it were, dispersed in countless sparks that have fallen into the darkness of a world nearing its end, and Israel can do no more than search for those sparks, collect them and raise them to their Divine Source, in order to rise up once more and, from the depth of continuous suffering, ascend to YHVH. This great spiritual effort is possible, in spite of the loss of the Sanctuary and of the Name *YHVH* for three fundamental reasons declared by Tradition: in the first place, “the *Shekhinah* has accompanied Israel in its exile”, so that God has not abandoned His people, but is close to each of the children of Israel that love Him; secondly, He has allowed the Israelites to replace the sacrifices by prayers and invocations—such as the invocation of His Name *YaH*; thirdly, the Torah still exists and it perpetuates the Tablets of Testimony formerly kept in the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy of Holies of the first Temple. For the children of Israel, who transcribed the Torah onto countless scrolls and carried it to the four corners of the earth, it represents the Dwelling of the *Shekhinah* itself, the Sacred House of the True Presence in Synagogues all over the world. Ritual readings, observation, intellectual study and spiritual realization of the Torah—including the ensemble of canonical prayers, invocation of the Divine Names, contemplation of the Qualities (*Middoth*) of God or the *Sefirot*, as well as other revealed modes of union with the One—are the means by which the Eternal Light can be actualized, the “sparks” raised up to their Supreme Source, and Israel united with the *Shekhinah* and, thereby with the Holy One, Blessed be He.

### **The Inextinguishable Light of Sinai**

Thus it is that God, after revealing Himself at Sinai in His redeeming Light, in the form of His Word, the Torah, has remained with His people through all the vicissitudes of history. After coming down from His glorious Throne to the summit of Mount Sinai and raising Israel from the foot of the mountain up to Himself in heavenly union, He descended again, clothed in the Torah, so that Israel too could descend and conclude the Covenant of Sinai on earth with Him. It was a Covenant of Love, sealed with the divine “kiss” which the children of Israel were given when the Voice of God

spoke to each of them and asked: “Will you accept Me with My commandments [the Torah]?...” The Israelites answered: “Yes!” Then the [divine] voice [of the Torah]...kissed each Israelite on the mouth, as is written (Song of Solomon 1:2): “Let Him give me kisses from His Mouth...” (*Zohar* 2:146 a, b).

And although His unfaithful people have broken the Covenant many times, the Lord in His Mercy renews it whenever one of the children of Israel comes back to the Torah, in which God is truly present. To return to the Torah is to return to YHVH and seal the Covenant of Love again. This return to God through the mediation of the Torah is liturgically symbolized in the way the Israelites approach the Sacred Book to recite it or greet it during the procession in the synagogue where it is carried by the officiant: on these occasions, they kiss the scroll of the Torah in

remembrance of the kiss of the Covenant and the union with God at Sinai; and they know that they must embrace it with their whole being and their whole life—which comes forth from the very Essence of the Torah—if they wish the Supreme Spirit and their own spirit to “unite until they are one”, as it was on Sinai.

This holy union is possible today as it was in earlier times, not only because each soul is divine in its essence and because, coming from God, it sees Him and is united with Him before descending to earth, but also because the souls of the Israelites, including those of present generations, “were present at Mount Sinai and saw God face to face”, being at one with Him before they returned to earth. Union is possible now as it was in the past, because each Israelite soul that has come down into this world “sees God again” at the moment of circumcision (girls participate in a passive way in the grace of this Abrahamic rite reserved to newborn males).

This “Abrahamic Covenant”, which is renewed on the eighth day after the birth of a male child by circumcision, is the opening move on earth in the direction of the Divine Mysteries. According to tradition, the immortal prophet Elijah is invisibly present at this rite and bestows his spiritual influence on the child. This Abrahamic Covenant—described in Genesis 17:9-14—realizes the “union” of the sacred soul (*neshamah*) with the body animated by the vital soul (*nefesh*) which envelops the mental soul (*ruah*). At the moment when the body of the child is “marked with the sacred sign”, he “sees God” and the real Presence, the *Shekhinah*, settles in his heart.<sup>3</sup> This “sight of God” is, in fact, no more than a transitory and passive “contact” with the Divine, but it suffices to place the *Shekhinah* into the soul; and the “Sinaitic Covenant”, renewed by the male child at the age of thirteen by his formal admission to the ritual recitation of the Torah—which enables him to participate fully in the “Sacred Community of Israel”—opens up to him the possibility of realizing this first passive “vision” of God actively, and then of being united forever with the Presence which dwells both in his heart and in the revealed Book.<sup>4</sup>

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3. cf. *Zohar* 1:94a.

4. Here again, girls benefit by passive participation in the grace that is bestowed upon male children. The mystery of female participation in the graces granted to the male is explained in Judaism by the biblical revelation according to which man was created “male and female”, that is, androgynous. Eve came from a “rib” of the androgynous Adam, who was then divided into man and woman. This is why each woman has a male sister soul, the graces of which she shares, either before marriage, in the absence of the male, or through a spouse who is only a “symbol” of the real sister soul. In marriage this participation can blossom on all human levels, its highest point being the union of two sister souls: “they will become one flesh”, one soul, one spirit: they will be one in the image of the One. “On the day that God created man, in the likeness of God [Who Himself possesses the two “masculine” or “paternal” and “feminine” or “maternal” aspects] made He him. Male and female created He them [or manifested them—His two aspects—in the form of an androgynous human being], and blessed them, and called their name Adam...” (Gen. 5:1, 2); “...and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth...” (Gen. 1:28). After procreation, male and female souls, united in heaven, descend separately to earth where they seek each other out. If these “sister souls” do not find each other in this world, the law of participation has

The active and unitive realization of revealed Truth begins with ritual admission to the Torah. This admission normally implies the assimilation of the letter of the Scripture, followed by the assimilation of its traditional exegesis and, of course, obedience to the commandments, all of which is intended to integrate the psychic and physical elements of man into the *Shekhinah*. The realization of the Truth is furthered by progressively more profound interpretation and application of the Revelation; and this spiritual intensification leads the elite, beginning with exoterism or the Talmud, up to initiation into the “Mysteries of the Torah”, which can raise man up to the Sinaitic vision and supreme union.

We have seen to what extent “union” was given to the whole of Israel at Mount Sinai during the great theophany, and how this was crystallized in the first Tablets of the Torah. We saw them broken after the worship of the golden calf. Except for its elite, Israel was relegated from the domain of the “Mysteries”, or esoterism, to that of the “Law”, or exoterism. The law and its esoteric essence was concretized in the second Tablet of the Torah, which no longer communicates the Mysteries directly but hides them under the veil of the commandments and sacred history, to be unveiled by the assimilation and realization of the spoken doctrine in the two aspects of Talmud and Kabbalah.

Instead of being able to contemplate God through the transparency of the first Tablets of “heavenly sapphire”, the Jew is required to strive humanly and spiritually to “break” the opaque stone of the second Tablets—at the same time as the “stone” in his heart—and to free the sparks of the Hidden Light.

In this task, each Child of Israel is, in virtuality, a visionary of God, a “part (or portion) of YHVH” Himself, a spark of the Supreme Sun, destined to flame in love and knowledge of his own Divine essence, until he becomes the “Great Light”, the Infinite Light which radiates without cease from the eternal Sinai.

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a spiritual role; each feminine element possesses a masculine complement, and all Jewish souls are united in spirit, through their common *corpus mysticum*, the “sacred Community” that is realized on earth in the ethnic unity of Israel, which in itself is nothing but the *Shekhinah*, the real Presence of the One amongst His people. In celibacy—which is an exception in Israel—the “sister soul” can be found spiritually in union with the One.