

Moshe Idel

ON THE LANGUAGE OF ECSTATIC EXPERIENCES IN JEWISH MYSTICISM

I. Methodological Approaches to Mystical Experiences

Important as they indeed are for both mystics and scholars of mysticism, mystical experiences are hardly accessible to scholars interested in analyzing them. What we possess are reports, oral or written, about spiritual events that belong to the most private and intimate of human spiritual dimensions. Most of those documents consist in terminologies, theologies and sometimes forms of realia, which differ from the mentalities and the religiosities a scholar may encounter in his ordinary life. To be sure: many religious persons will eventually claim the different: that tradition is so powerful that it may preserve and facilitate the repetition of the paradigmatic experiences of the ancients, even millennia afterwards.

Experiences were conceived of as important parts of religious life for a variety of reasons. One of them, the older and the most dominant, is the theological one. The report of the experience allows, according to this approach, to learn something about the nature of the entity that is revealing itself in that experience: God or angels, sometimes of the demonic world. It is less the specific message than the source of the message that counts. For those who look for gaining some form of knowledge about the nature of the deity from fathoming the accounts of revelations, even the message is mostly, though obliquely, the representation of the otherwise hidden nature of the Supreme Being. Much of what has been written about the Hebrew Bible deals with issues that are not so important in the treatises that constitute this book: the alleged nature of the divinity, as reflected in the sacred scriptures. Not a theological book, the Hebrew Bible became the foundation of an infinite number of speculations about God, namely theology. This theologization of the Bible is not only a matter of the studies of the Bible but also of the study of Jewish mysticism. Indeed, the definitions of Kabbalah done from theological points of view, rather than from more experiential one, are dominant in Gershom Scholem's school.¹

There are, to be sure, also scholarly approaches that are concerned more with the content of the revelation as a message directed to the society. Whatever the source may be, scholars like Emile Durkheim will say that the message represents the spirit of the society in language, ethics and practice. Thus, experience becomes some form of transformation of collective values into a somehow novel message that is both reflecting and shaping the society within which the recipient of the revelation operates. Religious documents become, therefore, anthropological, sociological and historical documents, which intend to learn something about a society, and the interactions between it and the elite individual that produces the religious documents.

Psychologists, from their perspective, see in the religious experience one more form of basically inner experiences, shaped by the individual history of the person that undergoes that experience. As such, the main reason for their inspection of religious documents dealing with experiences is to elicit from those texts some knowledge about human psyche. This is the reason why psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung have written so much about religious texts: they were looking for the hidden mechanisms of the psyche as reflected in myths and symbols that expressed ancient experiences but also left their imprint on the present. In these cases it is not the nature of the supreme being, neither society that stands at the center of the investigation, but some form of decoding the texts in order to penetrate the unconscious, the archetype, the underlying myths, allegedly encoded in the mystics' reports of their experiences.

The three main approaches described above regard the texts as mirrors for a diversity of processes that inform those texts, and are otherwise impenetrable, or dealing with distant and remote societies, and dead persons. The details of the reports are conceived of important but faithful mirrors rather than literary documents whose strategies, genres, symbols and linguistic layers shape the message as much as the emotional or cognitive contents that may be reflected by them. Experiences, when they occur in documents, are not only reported, but also inevitably distorted or betrayed because of the complexity or the ineffability of the experience, or by the post-experiential additions by the powerful linguistic and literary nets that constitute the religious documents. As in many other cases, language is not only conveying the content of the experience, a pure vehicle, but it is also intervening in its articulation either by informing it of new – namely extraneous – concepts, or expressing the nebulous data of the experience in terms dominant in a certain environment or culture. Just as the mystical experiences are informed by a variety of pre-experiential elements, post-experiential factors, like other terminologies and conceptual structures of thought, may inform the reports of these experiences too.²

II. Experiences and Reports

Perhaps, a main scholarly question when dealing with expressions of mystical experiences is not so much the very existence of a certain expression, or even set of expressions the mystical content of which scholars will agree upon, but their 'cruciality' within an overall religious structure and the impact of the notions related to the mystical experience, or what I propose to call its *radiation*, upon other key notions in that system. It is possible to ask whether the *Gestalt*-coherence that includes such mystical expressions confers or not greater weight to their significance. My assumption is that each of the major religions includes several different structures, which may or may not incorporate mystical components. What seems to me to be problematic in the above phenomenologies is the generic attitude to complex types of religious literature, which are conceived as embodying one central type of spirituality. The essentialist approach is characteristic of the above scholars either when they speak about one religion or even when a certain phase in the history of a certain specific religion is dealt with. This is why the absence or the presence of a certain central concept, term, phrase or even experience is so crucial in this type of approach.

In lieu of the downward form of scholarly discourse that starts with theology as the most crucial issue for an experience that is supposed to happen to a mortal human, why not start with what the mystic is doing before he attains a certain experiences, and describe it as an upward movement. In the following, I would like to suggest an outline for an alternative to the theological orientation of scholars toward the issue of mystical union and ecstasy. Instead of deciding upon the nature of a certain unitive experience according to its theoretical-theological starting-point, I would prefer an emphasis of the more experiential components of the mystical event. Instead of emphasizing the nature of the object of the mystical union as part of a theological discourse, we may direct our attention to the expressions related to the experience itself, namely to the mystical techniques of its attainment, to the claims of efficacy, and to its psychological and physiological aspects.³ By shifting the focus of the scholarly concern from an overemphasis on the object of the experience to the type of the experience, at the extent we can address this issue on the base of the extant evidence a decisive change in the meaning of *unio mystica* may take place. In lieu of dealing with theology in order to establish the content of a certain phrase, we shall better look for expressions related to intensity, vibrancy, or dealing with the lasting impact of the experience. Indeed, I would say that such a shift accepts descriptions of experience whose object of union may not be the ultimate divinity, as extreme mystical experiences nonetheless. According to such a phenomenology of mystical expressions,⁴ it will be less important if the Christian mystic describes his or her union with the Christ or with the Father, if the Sufi will relate his experience of the *Hidr* and not of Allah, if a Jewish mystic will intend to become one with a lower *sefirah* or even with the Agent Intellect and not with the Infinite. The quality and intensity of the experience as described by the mystic (and subsequently less the theological object of the union), may turn crucial for the nature of the experience even more than the theological status of its content.⁵ This assessment does not mean that theology is of no importance, but that it alone does not dictate all the major aspects of the mystical experience.

III. Gestalt-Coherence and Experiences

By turning the attention of academic study to the role of the technique, the questions that will become crucial will not be whether there are expressions of mystical union in a certain type of mysticism, but the question that even when they appear, whether they are at the centre of a specific tradition or religious structure, or at its margin; or whether the concept of mystical union significantly interacts with other main concepts and practices, and qualifies them, and is qualified by such interactions. I propose to emphasize the aspect of coherence and cohesiveness of a certain system that may, or may not, be constituted by the mutual radiations between its key notions.⁶ Such a check will also be able to better answer the question whether the occurrence of certain mystical formulae is merely a matter of convention of sharing a vocabulary *en vogue* in a certain tradition without any experiential substratum, or whether even in the case of a repetition of a certain slogan there are good reasons to believe that it may reflect a deeper experience. So, for example, the fact that Abraham Abulafia does use already existing formula does not detract from the experiential mode of his mysticism, which can be judged by the

inspection of his mystical path, his mystical techniques for example, and his descriptions of the mystical experiences.⁷

In principle, we may assume an attitude that is not so far away from the dependence of mystical union on theology. However, the notion of radiation or *Gestalt*-coherence may involve a more flexible type of relationship between different notions. So, for example, the centrality of the concept of *devequt* in a certain mystical system will be greater if this kind of experience will be conceived as necessary for the success of another main kind of activity, namely the theurgical activity related to the fulfillment of the commandments. The introduction of *devequt* as a prerequisite for the mystical intention [*kavvanah*] during the performance of the commandments and for their influence bears evidence for a new stage in the development of Jewish spirituality toward what may be a full-fledged mystical phenomenon. Or, to take another example, the probability that certain unitive phrases stand for more than a repetition of a *cliche*, but may reflect an actual experience, is greater if the same mystic will stress the importance of some related concepts like *hishtavvut* [equanimity], *hitbodedut* [mental concentration and solitude or seclusion], and *Tzerufei 'Otiyyot* [combinations of letters].⁸ Therefore, it seems inadequate to decide the place and role of the mystical union in a certain literature only on the basis of the recurrence of extreme mystical expressions alone; it is possible to come somehow closer to the actual significance of extreme expressions for mystical union⁹ not only by examining the simple semantics of the phrase, but also by analyzing the more general structure of the analyzed text and, if possible, the religious behavior of the author or the group to which he belongs, in order to foster a more radical or moderate understanding of a certain phrase.¹⁰

Or, to formulate the question from a different angle: the theological criterion assumes a strong constructivist approach that either allows or informs certain forms of experiences by the dint of the articulated and abstract theological core that presides the religious phenomena that can, or cannot, occur within its domain. The predictability of the experience solely from the nature of the eidetic components of a certain religion is crucial for an essentialistic stand. However, what was the precise type of theology that was known to a certain mystic in a certain period may be a matter of debate. Some of the more learned among the mystics were presumably acquainted with more than one theology, some of them quite different from each other. To take one example that may illumine the question: Abraham Abulafia, a thirteenth century ecstatic mystic, was well acquainted, in addition to the biblical and rabbinic material, with Maimonides' Neoplatonist theology, with the synthesis between the anthropomorphic and more speculative theology of the early thirteenth-century Hasidei Ashkenaz, with the sefirotic theosophies of Catalan Kabbalists, and finally with Arabic and scholastic philosophies. He apparently studied most of them before his first mystical experiences, and his mystical expressions take in consideration a variety of elements from some of these diverse forms of thought. Though this mystic may be considered a rather exceptional case, I believe that, to a lesser degree, the same is true in many other cases in a multi-layered Jewish culture, which develops as a minority religion in a variety of cultural environments: more than one theology was known, acceptable, or at least available to medieval mystics. However, it is also possible to envisage an approach which would emphasize

the centrality of the spiritual discipline for the particular nature of experience as flawed by the same tendency to presuppose an essential dependence of the experience on its technical triggers alone.

IV. Between Theology and Technique

In lieu of a theological type of constructivism, which is problematic provided the diversity of theologies active in the cases of some of the mystics (many of them elite figures, and erudite scholars), there is also the danger of technical constructivism. Nevertheless, there is a certain substantial difference between the two forms of constructivism: while the theological one is prone to being exclusive, preventing, at least according to the methodology of G. Scholem and Robert Zaehner, extreme forms of mystical experience in Judaism¹¹, technical constructivism can be envisioned as inclusive: a variety of experiences can be induced by the same mystical technique, – given the diversity of the spiritual physiognomies of the mystics – and in some cases, a variety of techniques are available within the same mystical system. On the other side, I am not aware of an explicit assumption that there are forms of experience that cannot be attained by the means of a certain technique. I assume that though it is possible to postulate a certain affinity between the nature of the techniques and the content of the experience induced by these techniques, the nexus between them is not always an organic one, and unexpected experiences can be incited by these techniques.¹² In other words, a certain theology is considered by those scholars whom I propose to see as belonging to the „Hegelian“ approach, to be the representative of a certain religion, and at the same time, a closed system, and the nexus between it and the nature of the experience determined by a certain intrinsic logic. However, if we assume a significant affinity between the mystical experiences and the mystical techniques, we may speak about a form of relationship much more open-ended, and then make an attempt at offering forms of categorizations that will take into consideration the types of mystical techniques. Such a proposal has, perhaps, its strengths, but also its limitations, and the latter are worthwhile to be emphasized.

The forms of mystical experiences that may be correlated to a certain type of theology, even if a general one, are much more numerous than those that may be related to specific mystical techniques, for the simple reason that a scholar will be quite hesitant in reconstructing a mystical technique without solid evidence, but will, at the same time, more easily adventure in creating an affinity between a mystical experience and a theological stand, even if the latter is not mentioned explicitly by the mystic himself. Moreover, there are good reasons to assume that not all mystical experiences are related to mystical techniques.¹³ This relative absence is more evident in the Christian-Western forms of mysticism than in the Orthodox ones, and more central in Hindu, Japanese or Muslim forms of mysticism, than in the Christian ones. Phenomenologically speaking, Jewish mysticism belongs more to the latter group than to the former one, despite the fact that most of its main developments took place in the Latin West. Therefore, because of the relative irrelevance of techniques to some forms of Christian mysticism, my proposal may be less welcome by a field of research dominated by Western Christian categories.

The interplay between the concepts that are conceived as being mystical determines, in my opinion, the nature of a certain mystical literature in general, or of a specific phase of it, as much as the presence or absence of a certain concept. In our case, the centrality of the notion of *devequt* in Jewish mysticism is more important than the attempt to define it in a certain way, namely, that it stands for union or communion. Or the different forms of interaction between *devequt*, theosophy and theurgy, will define better the gist of some forms of Kabbalistic mysticism than the analysis of *devequt in abstracto*.¹⁴ Someone can develop an interesting typology of the meanings of *devequt* but ignore, at the same time, the radiations of this notion within the major developments within a certain system. Or, to take another example: the affinity, or affinities, between the nature of mystical techniques and the ideal of mystical union will clarify the status of the ideal in a certain mystical net in a way that may be different from a net where the mystical techniques that show the way to reach such an experience are absent. What impresses me more when reading the Upanishads or the Yogi treatises, the exercises of St. Ignatius, or Sufi mystical treatises, is not only the existence of fascinating theologies that allow deep mystical transformations, but primarily the existence of detailed and sophisticated treatments of mystical techniques that are supposed to induce these mystical changes. Likewise, it seems that the specific *regula* of a certain order may bear evidence of its mystical character much more than the more general theology shared by all the Christian orders. It is in the *principium individuationis* that better clues for the understanding of the specifics of mystical experiences should be searched.

In other words, it would be more reasonable to deduce the mystical nature of a system from its practices and its general spiritual disciplines rather than to reduce mysticism to a spiritual potentiality related to a certain theological belief, or to abstract ideas like theism, pantheism, panentheism.¹⁵ Instead of starting from above, namely with the theological stand, and derive thus the kind of mysticism, I would prefer to start from below, namely with the details of the mystical practices and advance then toward the experiences that are molded by these practices. In my opinion, this approach is preferable also in the case of other areas of Jewish mysticism, like the emergence of Jewish myths from the ritual, and not vice-versa.¹⁶ The prevalent assumption that Gnostic *theologoumena* were the major catalysts of medieval Kabbalah is but a complementary version of the priority given to the theology over praxis.¹⁷

In lieu of an essentialist view that can decide, *a priori*, the nature of a mystical system from its theology, I would say that the nature of the concrete praxis, the spiritual disciplines as described by the mystics, may bear a crucial testimony for the mystical nature of a certain religion. I would say that the notion that one basic theology informs a religion that developed over thousands of years is rather problematic, and if we assume that a Kabbalist was exposed to more than one kind of theology at the same time, it is very difficult to decide which of these theologies conditioned more the mystical experience of a certain individual.

What would be considered crucial for the understanding of the differences or the similarities between Jewish mysticism and any other form of mysticism will be not the very existence of the mystical union experiences or expressions but the more comprehensive structures within which they eventually function. In matters of religion it is

hard to assume that concepts function independently. The net of basic mystical notions defines the concept that enters it as much as the concept defines the dynamic net itself. Therefore, in lieu of resorting to a detailed study of the theologies that were influential in a certain type of mysticism in order to discover whether these theologies allow extreme experiences and expressions or would permit only moderate ones, as Edward Caird, Gershom Scholem and Robert Zaehner¹⁸ would say, why not turn to the inspection of the mystical paths as a major avenue of describing the mystical nature of a certain religion. By investigating the various kinds of mystical paths and correlate them to the mystical ideals, it could be more reasonable to decide whether a certain ideal was cultivated in fact, rather than consisting in a theoretical goal. The detailed description and analysis of the mystical path, the question of occurrence of initiation-rites, the intensity of the mystical techniques, may altogether testify as to the extreme nature of experiences more than the kind of theology that presides over a certain religion.

V. Some Definitions of Ecstasy

Experiences are not given events, even less objects. They are basically remembered inner events, sometimes after lengthy periods of time, oftentimes formulated in terms which may reflect terminologies or worldviews, which were adopted by the mystics after the occurrence of the experience. If ecstatic experiences are involved, the awareness of what happens during those events is even less plausible. To stand outside oneself, which means ecstasy, and to feel what is going on inside, is always a difficult issue. Thus, elusive and volatile as experiences are, the ecstatic ones are even more imponderable and their literary expression more indebted to conventions and terminologies that constitute forms of adaptations of the inchoate psychological events in forms of transmittable narratives. When interrogating the meaning of ecstasy, it does not suffice to analyze the semantics of the word, by resorting to dictionaries and encyclopedias, but we should also take a careful look to the ways in which different scholars of religion have used the term.

I believe that we may identify several major meanings of ecstasy in modern scholarship of religion. However, they are far from agreeing upon a major type of experience as ecstatic. So, for example, at the beginning of the 20th century Martin Buber wrote about the ancient meaning of ecstasy as follows:

Ecstasy is originally an entering into God, enthusiasmos, being filled with the god. Forms of this notion are the eating of the god; inhalation of the divine fire-breath; loving union with the god (this basic form remained characteristic of all the later forms of mysticism); being rebegotten, reborn through the god; ascent of the soul to the god, into the god.¹⁹

The richness of the 'notion' of ecstasy is quite obvious, and encompasses most of the forms of mysticism. Buber himself preferred a view of ecstasy as related to the unity of the experiencing self. It is the unity of the 'I' that is experienced by the mystic in his ecstatic experience.²⁰ Unlike the manner in which Buber describes the original meaning, which is replete with references to god, his own understanding is much more anthropocentric. This shift from the theological to the anthropological represents a major

change in scholarship in modern time, though it did not yet take place in a complete manner. In any case, Buber assumes that ecstasy means both the ascent to God and the „opposite“ case of entrance of God into man and his rebirth because of it.

Scholars who studied ecstasy have attempted to adopt one basic feature of the many ones attributed to ecstasy in Buber's passage. So, for example, Mircea Eliade, the subtitle of whose book on *Shamanism* is *Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, takes ecstasy to be a state of consciousness during which the shaman performs his ascent to other worlds.²¹ One of the most erudite and innovative book on ecstasies is Ioan P. Couliano's monograph entitled *Experiences de l'extase*, a book that unfortunately remained at the margin of scholarship on the topic, both in general studies and in Judaica. In this book the term ecstasy stands basically for the journeys of the soul through various supernal realms, heavens or planets, in some late antiquity Greek, Hellenistic and Jewish literatures.²² To compare it to the title of his other books, the English revision of the former book entitled *Psychanodia*²³, and his later book *Out of this World*²⁴, we can well-perceive his main intension when resorting to the term ecstasy: out-bodily kind of experiences, basically celestial journeys. Different as the material under scrutiny in Eliade and Couliano is, Asian Shamanism in the former, versus Hellenistic and Jewish material in the latter, the meaning of the term ecstasy is rather similar: the ascent of the soul to other realms for a variety of aims. The author of another earlier book on ecstasy, Ioan M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, displays a substantially different perception of the term. He is basically concerned with the sociological aspects of possession, and it is phenomena of possession that represents the thrust of his analyses.²⁵ Though his material is closer to that used by Eliade than that of Couliano, Lewis' emphasis differs also from Eliade, who did not conceive the phenomenon of possession as an essential feature of shamanism.²⁶

Much more comprehensive is the resort to the term ecstasy in the more recent monograph of Jess B. Hollenback, who sees in the term ex-stasis, out-bodily experiences, an inclusive category of a variety of different modes, like the journeys of the soul and autoscopy, though not with the category of possession. He was interested especially in the phenomenon of *enthymesis*, namely empowerment, related to ecstatic experiences.²⁷

Methodologically speaking, I propose to integrate the various meanings of ecstasy as found in the monographs mentioned above. The gist of my description below has to do with covering a variety of experiences in which the soul – or alternatively the intellect – is imagined to be, in one way or another, out of its normal type of function, on one hand, but nevertheless, the function of the person happens by the dint of another spiritual entity, on the other hand. I shall check the existence of the different categories in Jewish material²⁸ and attempt to avoid referring to the more diffuse meaning of ecstasy as a feeling of elation, intoxication, excitement, rapture, or even trance, found sometimes in scholarship and in some mystical texts, since they are too vague.²⁹ Given the fact that a certain type of literature confines my analysis here – namely Jewish mystical literatures – I do not attempt to offer a more general description of concepts of ecstasy, in the way it has been done, for example, in the voluminous and analytical work of Marghanita Laski.³⁰

VI. *Ecstasy and Judaism*

I decided upon one possible definition, and will try to work with it. To be sure, it is going to be quite difficult, since it is hard on one hand to remain faithful to my definition, or a definition adopted from another scholar, and at the same time reflect faithfully the content of the passages I shall analyze below, and I am aware of this methodological problem concerning any definition referring to a variety of different texts. However, since persons now dead have written the passages I analyze, few of them, if at all, may protest against my distortions.

Much more difficult is the situation with an attempt to describe Judaism. It is not only a matter of the polymorphous nature of the phenomenon, as we shall see immediately, but also the fact that Judaism is an ongoing process, whose recent articulations project backward on the selection of what is relevant in the past and on our understanding of it. And what is even more difficult, is the fact that there are many scholars of Judaism who will disagree with each other, and with me, as a matter of principle, about what Judaism was and is. However, beyond those quandaries, there is a more basic question of nomenclature: the Greek term *ecstasy* was never used by a Jewish mystic, or even by a traditional Jew before the 20th century (Philo of Alexandria is however, a great and important exception), and the problem is to identify Hebrew terms or descriptions that may correspond to it, or to related experiences to what has been conceived of as ecstatic in the senses mentioned above. There are several terms that may sometime reflect concepts of ecstasy as described here: *nevu'ah* and *hitnabe'ut*, both reflecting the process of prophecy, *hitpashetut ha-gashmiyyut*, the divestment of corporeality, or *hitpa'alut* a term difficult to translate. In this context I cannot engage their sources, or the history of their semantic shifts, which is still a scholarly desideratum. Neither can we easily compare them to other terms for ecstasy like *wajd* or *wujud* in Islam, nor Hindu views related to Tantra, or parallels in Shamanism.

Let me first turn to scholarly discussions in which Judaism has been described as possessing or missing the ecstatic elements, similar to those found in other religions. My general assumption is that in Jewish mysticism, all the scholarly categories mentioned above may be identified; and the problem is not the specificity of this type of mysticism when compared to other, but of the statistical proportion and the relative emphasis Jewish mystics put on one of those categories or another.³¹

When describing the earliest extensive brand of Jewish mystical literature, the *Heikhalot* literature of late antiquity, Gershom Scholem emphasizes that:

Ecstasy there was, and this fundamental experience must have been a source of religious inspiration, but we find no trace of a mystical union between the soul and God. Throughout there remained an almost exaggerated consciousness of God's otherness, nor does the identity and individuality of the mystic become blurred even at the height of ecstatic passion.³²

This emphasis on the difference between ecstasy and *unio mystica* recurs also in Scholem's description of all the major forms of Jewish mysticism. „No trace of mystical union“ is a strong negation. Later on in the same book we find a qualification:

It is only in extremely rare cases – he writes – that ecstasy signifies actual union with God in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of the complete submission in the divine stream. Even in his ecstatic frame of mind the Jewish mystic almost invariably retains a sense of the distance between the Creator and His creature (...) he does not regard it as constituting anything so extravagant as identity between the Creator and creature.³³

It is interesting that Scholem distinguishes, at least implicitly, between ecstasy that may be moderate, and extreme forms that may culminate in union. His emphasis on the basic difference between Creator and creature recurs in Scholem's vision of Judaism.³⁴ In fact, the predominance of this ontological distance, which Scholem attributes to the classic of Kabbalistic literature, the *Zohar*, is the explanation he proposes for its extraordinary success.³⁵ This reticence toward admitting the possibility of an extreme form of ecstasy is also evident in his later book, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, where he reacts to a footnote of his student Isaiah Tishby:

Tishby³⁶ attempted to give the passages on *debhequth* in Ezra and Nahmanides an interpretation that goes much further, in the sense of a complete ecstatic union with the deity, but this thesis seems to me unacceptable. Insofar as *debhequth* really contains moments of ecstasy, the individuality of the mystic nonetheless remains preserved in it.³⁷

Later on in the seventies, Scholem wrote:

Devequt results in a sense of beatitude and intimate union, yet it does not entirely eliminate the distance between the creature and the Creator, a distinction that most Kabbalists like most Hassidim were careful not to obscure by claiming that there could be a complete unification of the soul and God. In the thought of Isaac of Acre, the concept of *devequt* takes a semi-contemplative, semi-ecstatic character.³⁸

The occurrence of the term 'semi-ecstatic' is characteristic of a certain retreat from his resort to the term *ecstasy* in the book written in 1939. It represents an attempt to counteract some unitive descriptions found in the writings of R. Isaac of Acre, and discovered in the sixties by another student of Scholem's, Efrayim Gottlieb.³⁹ Elsewhere in the same book, Scholem restricts the extreme forms of ecstasy to Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah alone, but claims that even in the writings of his followers, who include also R. Isaac of Acre „there is little of the latter's ecstatic extravagance, and ecstasy itself is moderated into *devekut*."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he admits that in the school of the leading Hasidic master of the mid-18th century, R. Dov Baer of Mezdiritch, there are descriptions of 'ecstatic abandon'.⁴¹

To summarize Scholem's view of ecstasy: he occasionally admits that ecstatic experiences are found in three major forms of Jewish literature: the late antiquity *Heikhalot*, the medieval Kabbalah of Abulafia, and the pre-modern Polish Hasidism. From time to time, he would describe also Sabbatai Tzevi as an ecstatic.⁴² However, we may feel that even in those cases, Scholem attempts to relegate the extreme forms of ecstasy to the margin of his general picture of Jewish mysticism. To put it differently: with the emergence of attempts made by Scholem's students to qualify his stronger demarcation

between Jewish mysticism and other forms of mysticism where there are descriptions of unitive experiences, he reacted by somehow reducing, not enhancing, the realm of the ecstatic experiences in Jewish mysticism.

In my opinion, Scholem's phenomenology represents a later version of a strong and widespread phenomenology of religion, found in an influential distinction that becomes a tradition in scholarship of religion. So, for example, in his classic book on ancient Judaism Max Weber wrote:

The prophet never knew himself emancipated from suffering, be it only from the bondage of sin. There was no room for a *unio mystica*, not to mention the inner oceanic tranquility of the Buddhist arhat (...) Likewise his personal majesty as a ruler precluded all thought of mystic communion with God as a quality of man's relation to him. No true Yahve prophet and no creature at all could even have dared to claim anything of the sort, much less the deification of self (...) The prophet could never arrive at a permanent inner peace with God. Yahwe's nature precluded it. There is no reason to assume the apathetic-mystic states of Indian stamp have not also been experienced on Palestinian soil.⁴³

The sharp distinction between the divine and the human, the awareness of this distinction, and the ensuing suffering are described as characteristic of the ancient Jewish or biblical religious landscape, a fact that preclude the blurring of the gap between God and man. Moreover, the nature of God precludes a more peaceful relationship between him and his emissary, the prophet. An immanent struggle is postulated, which shapes the nature of the experience. The sharp distinction between the prophetic and the mystical has been inherited from Max Weber and was also used by Friedrich Heiler's famous book on prayer, and by Arnold Toynbee in his stark phenomenological juxtaposition of the Judaic and the Buddhist families of religion.⁴⁴ In this vein also Robert Zaehner wrote as follows:

If mysticism is the key to religion, then we may as well exclude the Jews entirely from our inquiry: for Jewish mysticism, as Professor Scholem has so admirably portrayed it, except when influenced by Neo-Platonism and Sufism, would not appear to be mysticism at all. Visionary experience is not mystical experience: for mysticism means if it means anything, the realization of a union or a unity with or in something that is enormously, if not infinitely, greater than the empirical self. With the Yahweh of the Old Testament, no such union is possible. Pre-Christian Judaism is not only un-mystical, it is anti-mystical, as is the main stream of Protestantism – and for the same reason: each is exclusively obsessed by the transcendental holiness of God and man's nothingness in the face of Him. The Jews rejected the Incarnation and, with it, the promise that as co-heirs of the God-Man they too might be transformed into the divine-likeness; and it is therefore in the very nature of the case that Jewish 'mysticism' should at most aspire to communion with God, never to union.⁴⁵

It seems that there is some agreement between the most important scholar of Jewish mysticism, and another major scholar of mysticism, insofar as the limited forms of ecstasy, a view that ensures maintaining the difference between Judaism and other forms of religion in matters of mysticism.

On the other side, we should be aware of the existence of a certain reticence toward the concept of ecstasy in Western Europe. As we can easily see in the surveys of Ioan Lewis, and in the much earlier description of ecstasy by R. Bastide, it has been oftentimes regarded with suspicion.⁴⁶ Sometimes ‚good‘ ecstasy, namely the Christian one, was juxtaposed to the negative, almost ‚suicidal‘ one of the Hindus.⁴⁷ In fact, we may speak about a development in the study of religion in which some of the negative categories, like magic, regarded with suspicion by the Inquisition, or Church authorities, slowly return in the nomenclature of scholars. Ecstasy should be understood, together with magic or enthusiasm, as categories that have been more recently, and partially, emancipated from the negative halo of the earlier generations of both thinkers and scholars. Just as the Enlightenment and the traditional forms of Christianity contributed to the suppression of some uneasy aspects of religion, also in Judaism, the impact of Jewish rationalism, as represented by Maimonides and Jewish Enlightenment figures, contributed to the suppression of the role played by magic, myth, enthusiasm, and ecstasy in Judaism.⁴⁸ So, for example, one of the major analyses of the concept of prophecy in the Bible, Abraham Y. Heschel's *The Prophets*, written originally in Berlin in the thirties, distinguishes sharply between prophecy and ecstasy, assuming that prophets were not ecstatics.⁴⁹ In the last generation, however, the affinity between prophecy and ecstasy were strongly emphasized, especially in two Hebrew studies by Benjamin Uffenheimer.⁵⁰ Moreover, the affinity between the two concepts is found explicitly in Philo of Alexandria, and this affinity is recurring also in some medieval views of prophecy.⁵¹

Even Buber's *Ecstatic Confessions*, a groundbreaking collection of texts as it was in its time, allowed quite a modest place to the ecstasy in Judaism, as Paul Mendes-Flohr has remarked.⁵² The timid admissions of the existence of ecstatic experiences in mystical forms of Judaism seem, in the perspective of what happened in the last generation, understatements. First and foremost, in a seminal study of the prayer in early Rabbinic literature by Shlomo Naeh, the mode of prayer cultivated by two figures, R. Hanina ben Dossa and R. Aqivah, has been described as ecstatic prayer.⁵³ Phenomenologically speaking, their prayer constituted an invasion of the divine within the person who prays, and he was aware of the efficacy of prayer by its smoothness.⁵⁴ If this analysis of prayer is correct, and I have good reasons to think so, then ecstasy is not a matter of some small groups in Judaism, but is represented also in the founding documents of Rabbinism, the Mishnah and the Talmud.

In a series of studies I claimed that ecstatic experiences, including unitive ones, are to be found in Jewish mysticism much more than G. Scholem and his followers had claimed.⁵⁵ As I put it many years ago, „The ecstatic element in Jewish mysticism is to be understood as an important constant, of a varying intensity, rather than the prerogative of a certain phase or school.“⁵⁶ More recently, some younger scholars have resorted to the term ‚ecstasy‘ in order to refer to a broader spectrum of matters in Jewish mysticism than I did.⁵⁷ However, since the issue of ecstasy in this mystical literature has not yet been dealt with in a systematic manner, a preliminary attempt to begin to do so with may be helpful. Let me first distinguish between three basic terms: the variety of descriptions of ecstasy or of the ecstatic experiences, as they will be defined below; the

ecstatic model, namely the conjugation between a technique and an experience ensuing from resorting to the technique; and finally ecstatic Kabbalah, namely a literature which gravitates around the centrality of attaining an ecstatic experience. While the descriptions of an ecstatic experience may appear in a variety of literatures, like poetry, autobiography, or even in Kabbalistic books that have other religious foci as their main concern, the ecstatic model, in the way I use the term, is much more restricted, and found in Kabbalistic forms of literature or their sources, though those do not have to belong, automatically, to a certain school. This model can be conjugated to other Kabbalistic models, and create more complex structures, as I pointed out in my book on Hasidism. Ecstatic Kabbalah is a school, which not only deals with techniques and descriptions of experiences, but sees them as the main center of religious life. This literature, therefore, includes both the descriptions of the experience and the ecstatic model, or models, but attributes them a centrality that differs from the recording of the ecstatic experience. In principle, an ecstatic literature, or an ecstatic Kabbalah, may reflect what a Kabbalist pronounces during the ecstatic trance, even if the content is not Kabbalistic, however, presently I am not acquainted with such a literary phenomenon.

The ecstatic Kabbalah creates a new religiosity that is much more focused around the ultimate role of the ecstatic experience. A description of an experience and a discussion of an ecstatic model may move from an ecstatic Kabbalistic text to another Kabbalistic text that does not belong to this school, without transforming the new literary milieu into a treatise belonging to ecstatic Kabbalah. On the other hand, a Kabbalist may be a main exponent of a non-ecstatic type of Kabbalah, Lurianic Kabbalah in the case of R. Hayyim Vital, while writing an ecstatic treatise, as it is the case of his *Sefer Sha'arei Qedushah*.

VII. Four Types of Ecstatic Experiences in Jewish Mysticism

Analyses of vast literatures, especially when dealing with complex and sometimes nebulous material like the descriptions of experiences, must at least start with clear definitions. Those definitions are oftentimes impositions of scholars and, as mentioned above, cannot exactly fit the complex material under scrutiny; this shortage is a major problem in humanities in general. However, those definitions have at least one major positive aspect: they allow a better understanding between the scholar using them and the audience for which the studies are written: namely other scholars. Agreement between scholars concerning terminology they use is important, though not strictly necessary, in order to develop some mutual understanding.. What matters is the fact that scholars will define their resort to key terms, so that readers will be capable of following their intention more easily, by having at their disposal the specific meaning of the main terms used by the these scholars. As scholars dealing with certain traditional texts, we cannot change their nature, but we can improve our methods of interpretation and communication when dealing with them, by attempting to clarify to ourselves and to others the meaning of the terms we use, and try to use them as consistently as possible. To my best knowledge, most of the scholarly discussions of ecstasy in Jewish mysticism did not start with definitions, and this is the reason why it is hard to understand exactly what those scholars mean when they resort to such a polyvalent term like ecstasy. Char-

acteristically, Scholem's resort to ecstasy involves an attempt to negate the existence of the extreme forms of ecstasy rather than a positive analysis of what he conceived of as the thrust of this phenomenon. Neither can we find detailed analyses and definitions in the post-Scholemian scholarship on the topic, which resorts more and more to the term ecstasy in order to describe many aspects of Jewish mysticism.⁵⁸ Just as the reluctance of using this term is characteristic of Scholem's generation of scholars, the recurring resort to it characterizes the present generation of younger scholars.

Let me attempt therefore to define ecstasy and apply it to Jewish mystical descriptions of experiences. Following the descriptions above, we may distinguish between four major meanings of this term: unitive ecstasy, ascensional ecstasy, autoscopic ecstasy, and finally, possessive ecstasy. What those four forms of ecstasy have in common is a double process: first, separation of the soul from the body, reflected in the prefix 'ex' in the term ecstasy, and then the occurrence of a more positive event, which differs from one category to another. In other words, after the moment of spiritual or mental dissociation⁵⁹, another process, constituted by what I propose to call an event of spiritual association, takes place, and the consciousness is filled with certain content, differing from one category of ecstasy to another, during the second phase. The first phase is, *mutatis mutandis*, related to what is known as *via purgativa*, and to techniques to remove common experiences in order to prepare the higher experiences, approximating *via unitiva*. The occurrence of the second phase is dislocating the normal consciousness by another one, and this dislocation seems to me important for differentiating ecstatic experiences from more general unitive experiences in which expressions of dislocation are not essential. However, the shift from one form of consciousness to another is not just a matter of moving to another level of consciousness, but sometimes also involves a different external behavior that reflects the inner change by an external one. In my opinion, this double move is characteristic of four main types of ecstasies we shall survey immediately, though the nature of each of the two stages differs from one Jewish mystical school to another. Unlike most of the phenomena described as unitive or communitive, I assume that ecstasy involves a moment of dramatic shift, or change in personality, because of the new form of consciousness that is connected to the normal self as standing outside its ordinary locus. It is therefore not just the intensification of earlier forms of activity, or the touch of the human self to what he assumes is a higher entity, though these processes may well be part of the path followed by ecstasies. Ecstasy, in the way I propose to describe it, is less of a continuous development that may culminate in arriving to or adhering with a divine source than a sudden event that may indeed be expected, cultivated and induced.

VIII. Unitive Ecstasy

a. Expressions of Union of the Soul

The most famous form of psychanodia related to ecstasy and to a mystical union is found in the classic of Neoplatonic literature, Plotinus's *Enneads*.⁶⁰ In a passage that has been quite influential in its Arabic formulation and its Hebrew translations on Jewish thinkers, both philosophers and Kabbalists, it is said:

Aristotle⁶¹ has said: Sometimes I become as if self-centered and remove my body and I was as if I am a spiritual substance without a body. And I have seen the beauty and the splendor and I become amazed and astonished. [Then] I knew that I am part of the parts of the supernal world, the perfect and the sublime and I am an active being [or animal]. When this has become certain to me, I ascended in my thought from this world to the Divine Cause [*ha-'Illah ha-'Elohit*] and I was there as if I were situated within it and united in it and united with it, and I was higher than the entire intellectual world and I was seeing myself as if I am standing within the world of the divine intellect I was as if I was united within it and united with, as if I am standing in this supreme and divine state.⁶²

Removing the body – the ‚ex‘ of ecstasy – is the starting point of the experience of becoming, ‚as if‘ part of the spiritual world – standing ‚stasis‘ – and become united with it. The experience described here does not represent a final dissolution of the contact with the body, death in the moment of ecstasy but a strong, introversive experience, which changes for a while the complex structure of man into a divine and spiritual, simple being. This later stage also constitutes an experience of mystical union, or divinization. It should be pointed out that union in this case is not a touch of the lower by the higher, but includes first the removal of the complexity of the human being so that its divine part is capable of understanding its real essence and to feel united with its source. The complexity of the human personally is reduced to its spiritual dimension, and this simplification is a major issue in Plotinus’s thought in general. Given the fact that this passage has been repeatedly translated into Hebrew and copied by various authors, including Kabbalists, without raising any form of critique against it, it is hard to subscribe to Scholem’s assumption that Jews were reticent of using unitive language. To be sure: the experience described here has to do with reaching a super-intellectual realm and becoming assimilated with it.

However, in most of the cases, medieval Neoplatonism was more concerned with the actual, not just metaphorical, ascent of the human individual soul to the cosmic soul, and its union with it. So, for example, in a classic of Kabbalistic literature written sometime at the beginning of the 14th century:

the soul of the righteous one will ascend – while he is yet alive – higher and higher, to the place where the souls of the righteous [enjoy their] delight, which is ‚the cleaving of the mind.⁶³ The body will remain motionless, as it is said [Deut. 4:4]: ‚But you that cleave to the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day‘. Those are the perfect righteous, and similar to this [state] is when they separate themselves from the world.⁶⁴

The act of separation is implied here by both the verb ‚*hippard*‘ and by the ascent. This separation is reflected also in the cataleptic description of the motionless body, while the soul is united with the sefirotic level. Let me compare this passage to an earlier passage, which is quite similar. R. Ezra of Gerone wrote:

The righteous causes his unblemished and pure soul to ascend [until she reaches] the supernal holy soul [and] she unites with her [the supernal soul] and knows future things. And this is the matter [in which] the prophet acted, as the evil inclination did not have dominion over him, to separate him from the supernal soul.

Thus the soul of the prophets is united with the supernal soul in a complete union.⁶⁵

The pure soul points to a purified soul, and the evil instinct loses its grasp in a certain moment so that the soul may ascend and unite with the higher soul. There can be no doubt that the two souls involved in this process represent a reverberation of Neoplatonic terminology of the cosmic and particular souls. This terminological remark points to the plausible Neoplatonic source of R. Ezra's interpretation of prophecy as a unitive experience, and it should not be ignored when the development of the views of prophecy in Gerona are dealt with. It is important to point out the resort to the term 'prophet' in order to describe the experience of the religious *perfectus*. What happened here is the continuation of an intellectual process that started much earlier in Jewish thought: the interpretation of Jewish biblical values in Neoplatonic terms. It is already in the early Jewish Neoplatonists, especially in Isaac Israeli, that prophecy has been interpreted in such a mystical manner.⁶⁶ As we shall see below, and in many other cases that cannot be adduced here, the term 'prophecy' sometimes stands for ecstatic experiences the Middle Ages. It should be pointed out that in R. Ezra's passage there is nothing like a cataleptic situation or any other external symptom.

The assumption that a way of attaining the supreme experience is found in another Kabbalistic passage, an anonymous text of mid-13th century, where it is called *middah*-attribute:

And this attribute was transmitted to Enoch son of Jared, and he kept it, and would attempt to know the Creator, blessed be He, with the same attribute. And when he adhered to it, his soul longed to attract the abundance of the upper [spheres] from the [*sefirah* of] wisdom, until his soul ascended to and was bound by the [*sefirah* of] discernment, [Binah], and the two of them became as one thing. This is the meaning of what is written [Genesis 5:22]: „And Enoch walked with God.“ And it is written in the *Alpha Beta de-Rabbi Akiva* that he transformed his flesh into fiery torches, and he became as if he were one of the spiritual beings.⁶⁷

Here the soul is mentioned as the subject of ascent, though the purpose is the knowledge of God. Indeed, the involvement of the intellect, not only of the soul, in ecstatic experiences is evident also in other instances, as we shall see immediately. The transformation is depicted here in terms reminiscent of Plotinus' passage quoted above, though at the end, the bodily aspect of this transformation is quite evident.

Let me turn now to a text of R. Isaac ben Shmuel of Acre, whose name has been mentioned above as allegedly 'semi-ecstatic':

When Moses our Master said: 'show me thy glory', he sought his death, in order that his soul should obliterate the barrier of her palace which separates between her and the wondrous divine light, which she was eager to contemplate. But because Israel still needed Moses, God did not wish that Moses' soul would leave her palace in order to apprehend this light of His (...) Now you, my son, strive to contemplate the supernal light since I have certainly introduced you into 'the sea of the Ocean', which surrounds the [whole] world. But be careful and guard your soul from gazing and your heart from pondering [upon the light], lest you sink; and the effort shall be to contemplate but [at the same time] to escape from

sinking (...) Let your soul contemplate the divine light and certainly cleave to it, as long as she dwells in her container.⁶⁸

The recommended experience is not an ecstatic death that removes corporeality – the palace or the container mentioned in the passage – in order to cleave to the supernal light. It is not death in the supreme union that R. Isaac envisions, but a contemplation of and adherence to light, which is combined with a possibility to remain alive. This contemplation is understood as an immersion in and adherence to the encompassing sea or light, which means in my opinion, the *'Ein Sof*, or the Infinity. This entering of the supernal sea consists in an outpouring of the self, as we learn from another passage in the same book, where R. Isaac writes that:

It will attach itself to the Divine intellect, and it will attach itself to it (...) and it and the intellect become one thing, as when a person pours a pitcher of water into a bubbling spring, with everything becoming one. This is the secret of the intent of the Rabbis, of blessed memory, when they said, „Enoch is Metatron“.⁶⁹

Let me turn to a much later figure, the late 16th and early 17th centuries R. Hayyim Vital Calabrese, who describes an imaginary ascent of the soul, which starts with the divestment of the soul from the body and culminates in an act of union:

Behold, when someone prepares himself to cleave to the supernal root, he will be able to cleave to it. However, despite the fact that he is worthy to this [achievement] he should divest his soul in a complete manner, and separate it from all matters of matter, and then you should be able to cleave to her spiritual root. And behold, the issue of divestment that is found written in all the books dealing with issues of prophecy and divine spirit, a real divestment that the soul exits from his body really, as it happens in sleep, because if it is so this is not a prophecy but a dream like all the dreams. However, the dwelling of the holy spirit upon man takes place while his soul is within him, in a state of awakedness, and she will not exit from him. But the matter of divestment is that he should remove all his thoughts whatsoever, and the imaginative power (...) will cease to imagine and think and ruminate about any matters of this world as if his soul exited from it.⁷⁰ Then the imaginative power transforms his thought so as to imagine and conceptualize as if he ascends to the supernal worlds, to the roots of his soul which are there, from one to another, until the concept of his imagination [*tziyyur dimyona*] arrives to his supernal source (...) All this is the divestment of the power of imagination from all the thoughts of matter in a complete manner.⁷¹

Here, divestment of the soul' or the divestment of imagination from material thoughts, as well as the term separation, point to disassociation, while the cleaving represents the association event. This is a process of transformation of the thought, and this act seems to refer to a change that is quite short. This ascent prepares, and thus differs, from prophecy, which consists in the subsequent dwelling of a divine power in the soul while it is in the body.

Let me turn now to a mid-18th century figure, R. Dov Baer of Medzhiretz, the disciple of the founder of Hasidism. He resorts to the view of the High Priest as the prototype of the mystic who must start with practicing solitude, and attain a total oblivion of everything except God to whom he cleaves. This resort to the high priest as an ec-

static figure has a long history, which includes Philo, Abraham Abulafia, and the book of the *Zohar*⁷²:

‘and the priest’ – that is, the one engaged in worship – ‘shall bear his linen garment’ [Lev. 6:2–3.] For it states in *Hovot ha-Levavot* that man must accustom himself to the practice of solitude, to be separated from other people, until he accustoms himself so that, even if he is among a thousand people, he will also be attached to Him, blessed be He, and there will be nothing separating or interrupting him from his attachment to Him, blessed be He. And as I explained the verse ‘And no person shall be in the Tent of the Meeting when he enters to atone for himself and for his household’ [Lev. 16:17.]. For it is known that prior to prayer a person must divest his corporeality and attach his thought to the exaltation of God, as if he is not standing among people but among angels in the supernal worlds and then when he forgets that he stands among people he is able to pray with great *kavanah*⁷³ and without self-interest. Of this it is said ‘And no man shall be in the Tent of Meeting’ – that is, the synagogue or the House of Study, in the place where people gather to pray. Then, ‘there shall be no man’ in your thoughts – that is, you shall divest your corporeality so much so that you shall forget that you are standing among people.⁷⁴

The state of oblivion of the presence of the others recurs in the context of the passage and it represents the separation from the ordinary experience, and this separation is not only keeping the senses closed to the others around him, but is also purifying the thought of anything corporeal. Only then the attachment to God is deemed possible. The allegorization of the High Priest and his service is very instructive. It assumes that his service had been interpreted as an act of separation already, and this act of corporeal isolation has been allegorized here as pointing not to the seclusion between the mystic and other men, but an act of strong concentration, or an inner spiritual isolation which allows an uninterrupted adherence to God, even amidst the crowd. This ideal of being alone even among people, which is recurrent in Hasidism, has been conceived as the innovation of the Besht,⁷⁵ draws, in fact, from much earlier Jewish sources, such as R. Bahya ibn Paqudah’s *Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot*, who drew, at his turn, from the Sufi concept of *halwat dar anjuman*.⁷⁶ In any case, the Great Maggid is explicitly referring to his sources in R. Bahya ibn Paqudah.⁷⁷ Paradoxically enough, the most elitist experience in Judaism, that of the High Priest entering alone in the Holy of the Holies, had been interpreted as pointing only to the initial step for a much longer process of learning how to master oneself even when among the crowd. We may describe the emergence of the mystical-allegorical understandings of the High Priest as practicing solitude in the Holy of Holies as a deep change in the nature of Jewish religiosities. While in the Biblical-Talmudic literature the High Priest is the most faithful representative of the corporate personality of the Jewish people, in the allegorical understandings of this figure he becomes much more of a private person striving for personal perfection.

b. Expressions of the Union of the Intellect

While the basic terminology of the earlier passages is Neoplatonic, Kabbalists, since the seventies of the 13th century, resorted also to another major form of terminology in or-

der to express the framework of their experiences: the Neoaristotelian one. In lieu of the emphasis on the spiritual experiences gravitating around the soul, the center of the new terminology is the intellect. The accent is now not on the return of the soul to the source in a more comprehensive or cosmic soul, but on the adherence to the source of knowledge, the cosmic intellect or the agent intellect as conceived of by the Arabic philosophers and their Jewish followers. A pertinent example for an ecstatic union of the intellect has been adduced above from a book of R. Isaac of Acre. However, his description is part of an earlier development, whose major exponent was R. Abraham Abulafia. He cites several times Maimonides' definition of prophecy and inserts in it new linguistic terminology that transforms it into a synthesis between the Great eagle's Neoaristotelian terminology and some earlier Jewish traditions, especially some stemming from Hasidei Ashkenaz.⁷⁸

The two elements, i.e. dissociation and association, are quite evident in the general structure of Abraham Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah. He repeatedly resorts to the assumption that someone should first untie his knots to the corporeal or material existence and then adhere to the spiritual realm.⁷⁹ He resorts to a numerical game that demonstrates the equality between *heter* – untying – and *ha-qesher* - binding. Both nouns amount to 605 in the gematria. For Abulafia, such a device may point to the semantic identity of the two members of the gematria or he may understand them as opposed to each other; the latter is the case in Abulafia's thought. Thus, in order to adhere to the divine, the spiritual power of someone must first release its ties to corporeal reality. So, for example, we read in his epistle to his former student R. Yehudah Salmon of Barcelona:

All the inner forces and the hidden souls in man are differentiated in the[ir] bodies. In fact, when their knots will be untied, the essence of each and every force and soul will run to their prime source, which is one without any duality, which comprises all multiplicity *ad infinitum*. This untying reaches up to the highest [degree] as that when someone pronounces there the [divine] name he ascends and sits on the head of the supernal crown and the thought draws a threefold blessing from there (...) thus the pronouncer of the name is drawing the blessing from above and he pulls it down.⁸⁰

Abulafia capitalizes upon some version of the Platonic vision of *soma/sema*: the body imprisons the soul by binding the spiritual faculties to the corporeal world. Separation from the body, in my terminology dissociation means, therefore, also the return to the source, which is an adhesion to the spiritual, caused by a special attraction of the like by the like. This return seems to be an involuntary, almost automatic effect of the liberation of the spiritual from the corporeal imprisonment.

Since God wanted us, He announced to us (...) the secrets of this world, which is sealed with His name,⁸¹ in order to untie all the knots, by whom they [the knots] were knotted according to Him [the name] and with it [the name] we were composited, so that we are able to become simple⁸² [spiritual], loose from all remaining compositions, and he will remain uncomposite, neither the composition of his natural disposition, nor material composition, and we shall become innovated entities, possessing simple [spiritual] ideas, separated of any matter and

composited of all forms; we shall become the caused [entities] of all the divine causes, the simplest of them being composited out of all the others and the most composite of them being the simplest one [the most spiritual].⁸³

The return of the composite man to the source means becoming free of the corporeal bounds and being „simplified“ which means „spiritualized“, he becomes an effect of the divine causes. Thus, separation from the binds opens the spiritualized person to the impact of the supernal causes. Thus, there is here a transformation of a person from a compounded being to an entity that acts under the aegis of the divine powers. The intellectual nature of this transformation depends on the existence of an intellectual continuum that is constituted by both the human and the divine intellects:

Intellect is a term [applied] to the entity which rules over everything, i.e. the first cause of all; and it is called the form of the intellect. The [term] intellect is also [applied] to the entity separated from matter,⁸⁴ which is emanated from the first cause; by the means of this emanation the first entity rules over the moving heavens.⁸⁵ However⁸⁶ He, may He be exalted, is the simple⁸⁷ intellect. The [term] intellect is the name of the first cause, which is close and acts upon whatever exists beneath the heavens, and this is the active intellect, which causes [the emergence of] the intellect in the human soul. Therefore there are three stages, all three being but one essence; God, His emanation which is separated [from matter], and the emanation of this emanation which is attached to the soul and the soul is attached to it in a very tenacious way, though the two [i.e. the soul and the emanation of God's emanation] are but one essence.⁸⁸

The dissociation from matter means automatically a reintegration in the intellectual continuum. However, what distinguishes Abulafia's discussions from the more philosophically oriented descriptions of intellectual union is the presence of strong corporeal feeling, connected explicitly to the technique of reciting divine names, as we learn from one of his most widespread handbook for attaining prophecy, or the world-to-come:

he should transpose all its letters [of the Divine Name] frontward and backwards, using many tunes⁸⁹ (...) and he must master very well the secrets of the law and their science in order to recognize [the meaning of the combinations of letters resulting from] the transposition of the combinations and his heart will become aware of the intellectual, divine and prophetic mental concept. And the first thing which will come out of the combination [of letters] during his concentration⁹⁰ upon it, is the emergence of fear and trembling upon him, the hairs of his head will stand up whereas his limbs will convulse. Afterwards, if he is worthy [of this experience] the Spirit of the living God will dwell upon him (...) and he will feel as if his whole body, from tip to toe, were anointed with the unction oil, and he will be the Messiah of God and His messenger.⁹¹

This passage shows that for Abulafia, the experience achieved by resorting to the technique is refracted on the body, and is not just a feeling of union or communion.

IX. Ascension on High and Ecstasy

As seen above, the unitive experiences are described as being achieved by ascension on high. However, in addition to the ascent of the soul, psychanodia and a metaphorical ascent of the intellect, *nousanodia*, both reflecting basically Greek modes of expression, we may speak about a third model of ascent on high that has Hellenistic origins: the ascent of the astral body. Recently, scholars have stressed the concept of transformation experienced by the *Heikhalot* mystics, and in the context of arguments I develop later, although no adherence between the ascending mystics and the deity is described in this literature, there is some justification in referring to a mystical union with an extension of God, the angel Metatron.⁹²

In my opinion, the theory that informs some of the discussions related to the so-called *Heikhalot* literature can be better understood by using the theory of the ascent of a body that differs from the corporeal body, which remains here below, as it is the case of R. Nehunyah ben ha-Qanah's trance, according to *Heikhalot Rabbati*.⁹³ The ascending entity is also described as a body, and this double, or spiritual, body may reflect the impact of the concept of astral body. From this point of view there is here an ex-stasis, at least insofar as one aspect of the human personality is involved.⁹⁴ However, in the *Heikhalot* literature we may also speak about a more ordinary bodily ascent, as it is in the case of Enoch, described as translated on high by elevating and transforming his body so that he will become adapted to the angelic world as imagined by those late antiquity authors.⁹⁵ The assumption that a bodily ascent is possible remained part of the views of some few elite figures in the Middle Ages as well, in a period when the philosophically inclined worldviews become part and parcel of many elite groups in Judaism. So, for example, we read in a passage attributed, correctly in my opinion, to R. Yehudah ben Samuel he-Hasid, a major figure in the small movement name Hasidei Ashkenaz. Starting with the assumption that Enoch was translated on high and became an angel that is identical with Metatron, the Hasidic master writes:

Both Enoch and Elijah had an angelic aspect within them while they were in the compounded form as we found in the Midrash⁹⁶ in the case of Pinheas that it is written [Joshua 2:4] '[and she] hid them', and Pinheas had an angelic aspect. And this is possible in accordance to a true demonstration, that there are women who float in the world during nights and become spirits, and there is in some instances that some men become wolves.⁹⁷

This approach to the possibility of ascent and transformation is not a matter of personal testimony but of a practical mind. Since it is possible to believe in the transformation of women into spirits, and in their flights during the night – some form of Sabbath of witches *avant la lettre* – there is reason to assume that a similar transformation could not take place in the case of the ancient apothetic figures in the Bible. Thus, the two biblical figures possessed also an angelic nature, which allowed their transformation and ascent, by shifting from the human to the angelic. The separation of one of the 'natures' from the other allows the process of complete angelization. Immediately after this passage, a lengthy passage from the *Hebrew Book of Enoch*, dealing with the patriarch's translation is cited. Though operating with a theory different from the astral soul,

the medieval figure offers a view not far away from the manner in which I interpreted the Heikhalot literature: there is a double identity, or two souls, or two aspects in man, and when they separate, an ascent takes place, the higher part standing outside the lower one.

X. *Ecstasy as Autoscopy*

Another phenomenon, which constitutes a case of ecstasy according to the above criteria, is the seeing of one's own self as standing before the eyes of the mystic. It is as if the higher self is separated from the human psyche and is reified in an entity standing before the mystic. This sight of himself, an *autre moi*, represents the positive aspect of the ecstatic experience. The mystic assumes some form of split between two aspects of the psyche and the experience of both the difference between them and their similarity is crucial for this type of ecstasy.⁹⁸ As G. Scholem pointed out, this form of experience is related to the encounter with the twin according to Manicheism and the *alter ego* of Hermeticism.⁹⁹

Two phases constituting ecstasy as proposed above are found together in a passage written by a Moroccan Kabbalist R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka who composed, sometimes in the middle of the 13th century¹⁰⁰, a *Commentary to Sefer Yetzirah*, where it is written that

I have seen with my own eyes a man who saw a power in the form of an angel while he was awake, and he spoke with him and told him future things. The sage said: ,Know that he sees nothing other than himself, for he sees himself front and back, as one who sees himself in a mirror, who sees nothing other than himself, and it appears as if it were something separate from your body, like you.' In the same manner, he sees that power which guards his body and guides his soul, and then his soul sings and rejoices, distinguishes and sees.¹⁰¹

The mirror image points to the event of disassociation and externalization, while the revelation represents the second phase of the ecstatic experience. This quote is part of a broader worldview that was strongly impacted by astrology. The astral aspect of the revelation, which reflects the impact of Muslim astro-magical sources, is not the single explanation ibn Malka offers for the experience of the self-revelation. Immediately after the above citation, he proposes an explanation that describes the process as a psychological one, namely as taking place between three inner faculties:

And three powers overcome him: the first power is that which is intermediary between spirit and soul, and the power of memory and the power of imagination, and one power is that which imagines. And these three powers are compared to a mirror, as by virtue of the mixing the spirit is purified, and by the purification of the spirit the third power is purified. But when the spirit apprehends the flux which pours out upon the soul, it will leave power to the power of speech, according to the flow which comes upon the soul, thus shall it influence the power of speech, and that itself is the angel which speaks to him and tells him future things.¹⁰²

The introduction of the inner senses in order to describe the psychological mechanism of revelation is important since it internalizes the revelatory event in terms that are not characteristic of the more objectivistic astral-magical systems. Therefore, a personal angelic guide, who is of an astral nature is revealing, by using the psychological organon of a certain person, future events, a view that would not be especially surprising in the Middle Ages. However, what seems to be of importance for the understanding of this Kabbalistic prophethology is the claim, recurrent in the book, that not only prophecy in general should be understood in an astral framework, but also Moses' prophecy. According to ibn Malka, the speech heard by Moses from „the bush“ originates in Moses himself. He resorts to the gematria, *ha-Seneh* [the bush] = 120, which was the number of years that Moses lived. Ibn Malka interprets the verse in Zech. 4:1 in a similar manner, referring to „the angel who spoke to me“ in the sense of „from within me.“¹⁰³ The Hebrew form used by the translator of the original Arabic in order to describe the transmission of information is once *heggid lo `atidot* – he told him future things – and then several times just *maggid `atidot*. I would like to suggest that already in ibn Malka we have an anticipation of the later important category related to revelation that proliferated since the 16th century, *Maggid*, as a personal guide or celestial angelic mentor. Shlomo Pines had already drawn attention to the affinity between some forms of Arabic astrology as found in Abu-Aflah al-Syracusi's *Sefer ha-Tamar*,¹⁰⁴ which were known in a Hebrew translation since the beginning of the 14th century in Spain, and the later Kabbalistic phenomena.¹⁰⁵

Let me turn to some later examples from the Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia, whose vision of union of intellects we have analyzed above. In *'Otzar `Eden Ganuz*, the ecstatic Kabbalist says „All the letters are engraved in your heart from the holy spirit which is within your spirit (...) and this is the holy spirit that is engraved within you from the holy spirit itself, and it is speaking within you and outside you.“¹⁰⁶ Both the externalization of the inner power as a result of a process of disassociation and then its communication with the mystic, the association, are mentioned here. In more detail, we see a dialogical situation, according to another book of the same Kabbalist:

Direct your face towards the Name, which is mentioned, and sit as though a man is standing before you and waiting for you to speak with Him, and He is ready to answer you concerning whatever you may ask him, and you say „speak“ and he answers (...) And begin then to pronounce, and recite first „the head of the head“ [i.e., the first combination of letters], drawing out the breath and at great ease; and afterwards go back as if the one standing opposite you is answering you, and you yourself answer, changing your voice, so that the answer not be similar to the question. And do not extend the answer at all, but say it easily and calmly, and in response recite one letter of the Name as it actually is.¹⁰⁷

One of Abulafia's students, R. Nathan ben Sa`adyah Harar, active in Messina at the end of the eighties of the 13th century, refers again to the process of externalization, though he does not claim to have reached the dialogical situation:

If he is able to compel and to further draw [from his thought] it will emerge from within to without, and it will be imagined for him by the power of his purified imagination in the form of a pure mirror, and this is ‚the shining rotating sword‘

whose back side is transformed and becomes the front, and he recognizes the nature of its inner side from the outside, like the image of the *'Urim and Tummim*, which in the beginning cast light from within. And their message is not arranged in a straight and ordered [manner], but only when combined. This is because its form is incomplete, separate from its essence, until it is distinguished [from it] and clothed in the form of his imagination, and therein it joins the letters by a perfect joining, ordered and ready. And this seems to me to be that form which is referred to by the Kabbalists as 'garment' [*Malbush*].¹⁰⁸

Another passage related to the same Kabbalist says:

Know that the fullness of the secret of prophecy to the prophet is that suddenly he will see his own form standing before him, and he will forget himself and disappear from it, and will see his own form standing before him and speaking with him and telling him the future. Of this secret the sages said,¹⁰⁹ 'Great is the power of the prophets, for they make the form similar to its creator,' and the sage R. Abraham b. Ezra said¹¹⁰, 'The one hearing is a man, and the one speaking is a man.'¹¹¹

In another passage preserved in the same collection of Kabbalistic traditions, whose author is R. Isaac of Acre, it is said that:

I, the young one, know and discern by a certain knowledge that I am not a prophet neither a son of a prophet, and I have not the holy spirit and I do not make use of the 'daughter of the voice', since I have not been vouchsafed them, and I have not taken off my garment or washed my feet' [Cf. Song of Songs 5:3]. Nevertheless, I call heaven and earth to witness – as the heavens are my witness and Guarantor is on high [Job 16:19] – that one day I was sitting and writing down a Kabbalistic secret, when suddenly I saw the form of my self standing in front of me and my self disappeared from me.¹¹²

The disappearance of the self and then its reappearance in front of the mystic reflect the two phases we proposed as characteristic of the ecstatic experience. The experience of meeting himself is described again as a prophetic one, despite the fact that R. Isaac admits that he is not a prophet. Though no technique triggered the emergence of this specific experience, the Kabbalist considers this seeing himself as a sublime experience. The recurrence of the adverb 'suddenly', *pito'm*, is quintessential for the way in which the shift of consciousness is portrayed in this Kabbalist's reports.¹¹³ Though the occurrence of this adverb is characteristic only of R. Isaac's books, in both Abulafia and R. Nathan the attainment of the ecstatic state of consciousness is achieved in a rather short period of time, by resorting to a very intense type of technique, and can be repeated every night, or even several times during one night. As I suggested elsewhere, it seems that there is a certain affinity between Abulafia's understanding of his Kabbalah, and the Avicennian theory of intuition.¹¹⁴ It should be pointed out that despite the fact that in the above passages R. Isaac of Acre does not mention a technique, he did so in several instances where the affinity between his *via mystica* and that of Abulafia's and R. Nathan Harar's is quite evident.¹¹⁵

What is characteristic of the above passages, and for other ones in ecstatic Kabbalah, is the resort to confession in the first person, and the explicit recommendation of

methods to reach ecstatic experiences to others, by committing to writing detailed techniques and testimonies. Moreover, a technical terminology that is rather consistent to each of the ecstatic Kabbalists refers to a certain type of experience. These three features together are unique in this Kabbalistic school, and the convergence between them distinguishes it from the variety of interpretations of ancient phenomena like prophecy in Neoplatonic introvert terms, as it is the case, in my opinion, in Geronese Kabbalah. Indeed, G. Scholem formulated the difference between these two schools in too sharp terms when he wrote:

Gerona was thus no center of ‚enthusiasm‘ of the kind that, in Abraham Abulafia’s teaching concerning the „prophetic Kabbalah,“ later invoked – paradoxically enough – the authority of Maimonides himself. The voices speaking to us here are those of introvert contemplatives rather than of flaming ecstasies.¹¹⁶

XI. Ecstasy as Positive Possession

Possession is to be understood in this context as the feeling of overcoming one person’s psyche by another spiritual power, and the momentary obliteration of the normal psyche. Since the normal psyche does not totally vanish, it is conceived of as only temporarily removed, exiting from the body, or a drastic change in normal consciousness, and then being able to return. In this case, it is not the normal or heightened spirit of man that plays the main role in the experience but the entrance of an external power that dictates the nature of the possessive experience. We may describe this form of experience as negative ecstasy from the point of view of the normal psyche.

In Kabbalistic literature, there are two main forms of possession: the positive one, when an angel, and angelic mentor, or Elijah understood as some kind of angelic presence, takes over the consciousness of the mystic and speaks out of his mouth, or dictates lengthy books. This phenomenon has been described mainly as *Maggid* especially since the mid-16th century.¹¹⁷ This phenomenon of possession has been attributed to males and has been evaluated as a source of reliable religious information. On the other hand, possession has been attributed to women, and conceived of as negative, as the possessing spirit was portrayed as a sinner. This phenomenon is known, much later than its first manifestations, by the name *dibbuq*.¹¹⁸ In both cases the dislocation of the normal spirit – what I called dissociation – takes place before the association of the extraneous spirit with the body of the normal spirit. Also in this case some form of information is made available by the evil spirit, when the exorcist is capable to interrogate him. However, I would regard only the cases described as *Maggidism* as ecstasy, since in those cases only do we find explicit discussions of the two processes discussed above. According to one of its descriptions, found in R. Hayyim Vital’s writings:

Know that the power of the angel that is made out of the Torah [that is studied] is greater than those [powers] emerging from man’s [performance of] the commandment, and this is the secret of the angels telling [*ha-mal’akhim ha-maggidim*] to men and announcing to them the future things and hidden secrets. Those [angels] are made out of the Torah and the commandment [performed by] man.¹¹⁹

The angel is conceived of as growing out of the ritual operations of the mystic. Either by his studying the Torah or by performing commandments, the mystic is conceived of as creating his own angel, which reveals to him matters of religion. To be sure; this is not a regular angelic revelation but a reification of human religious activity, which takes an objective status and then interacts with the mystic. Here we have some form of dissociation – the human energy related to the ritual or study and accumulated in one form or another detaches itself from the person – and then a sort of association takes place: revelation. The angel as a guide is some form of the higher self that communicates with the self, though the latter is conceived of as marginalized during the experience. The special relationship between the cause – the mystic – and the effect – the angelic mentor – is maintained, and produces some form of information passed from the latter to the former only. The human energy – as structured by the recitation of the studied text – is deemed to stand outside man, and to interact with him. In a way, there is a continuum between the ritual activity, which generates the angel, and the experience, when the angel turns to man. In some cases, the angel is taking over the psychical apparatus of man, and removes for a while the normal spiritual operations, and this is the reason why the description of possession is fitting this type of ecstasy. Let me adduce one more example about the Maggid-phenomenon, as related by Rabbi Joseph Karo, the eminent Halakhic figure of the 16th century: „I have come – says the Maggid to him – to delight myself with thee and to speak in thy mouth, „not in a dream but as a man speaketh with a friend‘.“¹²⁰ This speech of what is imagined to be an external power with[in] the mouth of the recipient mystic is reminiscent of the category of speech of the person to himself in the case of autoscopy as described above. In this case, the possessive aspect of the experience is evident: another entity is envisioned as manipulating Karo's vocal apparatus. This is the reason why I would resort to the term ecstasy as defined above also in this case: Karo's experience consists of the overcoming of his mouth, and so I assume his normal consciousness, by what is conceived of as an external power. This phenomenon of a personal association of the angel and its specific human addressee recurs many times in the mystical diary of Karo. As to the process of dissociation, it is triggered by the repetition of chapters of the *Mishnah*, as the main technique for inducing the speech, which is a reified voice imagined to be coming from outside.¹²¹ It should be mentioned that the speech of the Maggid emerges soon after the Kabbalist recites short chapters of the *Mishnah*.

Possessive ecstasy seems to be a pertinent label for some of the descriptions of the founder of Hasidism, R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov's view of ecstatic prayer. Drawing upon earlier views of *devequt* as God's overtaking the personality of man, R. Gershom of Kutov, the Besht and his followers emphasize the obliteration of the person who prays and some of the accounts of his own way of prayer describe his loss of control over his limbs. In a precious testimony about the manner in which R. Gershom understood this issue we learn:

I have heard it said that the holy Rabbi, our teacher R. Gershon [of Kutov] once said this to our master R. Israel Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, „As long as you are able to recite voluntarily in your prayers the words ‚Blessed art Thou‘ you should know that you have not yet attained the ideal of prayer. For when he

prays a man must be so stripped that it is impossible for him to find the energy and the intellectual activity to speak the words of the prayers." This is perfectly true. Yet there is a still higher truth. This is when a man is stripped of all corporeality, of every kind of will, and is bound only to his Creator, so that he no longer knows how to recite his prayers because of the awe he experiences and because of his attachment to God, yet none the less, he recites his prayers in good order. This is because heaven has pity on him, endowing him with speech and the power to pray, as it is said [Psalms 51:17]: "O Lord, open my lips".¹²²

Prayer should be pronounced in a state of detachment from the normal spiritual activities, and thus unable to recite the prayer. Then the person will be overtaken by the divinity, who will use the mouth of the person in ecstasy in order to pray. The states of renouncing one's will in order to allow God to overtake the man are a precondition for real prayer. Here to strip of corporeality is rather a preliminary stage, and the act of prayer is conceived of as higher than the loss of personality. God enters the emptied personality, and this association generates an ecstatic prayer, in which human consciousness is lost. While Nahmanides's famous passage describing the state of *devequt* assumed that while a union with God is the highest religious experience, a person may still maintain the regular relations with other persons, even when he is in such a sublime state.¹²³ Interestingly enough, this piece of evidence as to the transmission of one of the major approaches to prayer, from R. Gershon to the Besht, has been ignored in the different accounts of the emergence of Hasidism. If this testimony is faithful, it may show that the Besht owes a main mystical-ecstatic understanding of prayer to a Kabbalist, namely his brother-in-law, which means that an ecstatic pattern and perhaps also praxis, is found among traditional Kabbalists before the ascent of the Besht.¹²⁴ Later on, this ecstatic type of prayer was attributed to the founder of Hasidism and his followers in several early Hasidic sources. The assumption was that God is the real prayer, and is even designated by this term.¹²⁵

XII. Some Concluding Remarks

Let me reflect for a while on the importance of the recurrence of ecstatic phenomena not only in the writings of professional mystics, if such a term is not an oxymoron. Karo was no doubt one of the most accomplished figures in matters of Halakhah in medieval Judaism, just as the late antiquity R. Aqivah, who has been mentioned above in the context of prayer. Those two masters constitute main protagonists of Rabbinic Judaism, and it would not be an exaggeration to see in their stand the quintessence of Rabbinism. Their association with ecstatic experiences, some forms of possession in both cases, may demand a different phenomenological understanding of their activities, and I would dare to say also another understanding of the range of experiences found in Judaism in general.

One of the most obvious conclusions to be drawn from the above discussions is the existence of a variety of models that inform the descriptions of ecstasy. The existence of Neoplatonic, Neoaristotelian, and Hermetic language and views dealing with the self-encounter, or the higher self, demonstrates that Kabbalists have been open to terminologies and to wider intellectual structures found in their speculative environ-

ments. This is true also in the case of the Jewish-Sufi circles, which were influenced by Sufism,¹²⁶ and plausibly also some Kabbalists. Just as their contemporaneous Jewish philosophers, Jewish mystics were also able to adopt and adapt new material, by appropriating elements and themes that helped them build their comprehensive ontological and psychological structures, and express their experience by resorting to common speculative languages.

On the other hand, ecstatic experiences are not only a matter of recondite interpretation of sacred texts by resorting to a certain type of nomenclature, but they may also be conditioned by a sustained praxis of techniques and rituals. Here I could not enter in this important topic. However, I would like to point out that it is possible to show the existence of strong affinities between the details of the rites and techniques used in order to trigger a certain experience, and the nature of that experience.¹²⁷ Now, most of the details of those techniques stem from Jewish sources, some of them documented in late antiquity. Therefore, the description of ecstatic experiences in medieval Judaism should take into consideration both the speculative heritage stemming from the Greek and Hellenistic sources as mediated by Arabic sources, basically Neoplatonic and Hermetic, and sometimes also Sufi and Hindu elements, on one hand, and the contribution of indigenous elements that predated the nascent phases of Kabbalah on the other.

Let me address another aspect of the „upward“ approach that puts in relief the importance of the technique. The resort to the term ecstasy is late in the history of mysticism, and it is related to the bodily divestment and implies much more of a human experience than a divine inspiration or a prophetic illumination. The main approach that describes the experience as a reflection of the supernal presence within man, in order to disclose some form of sublime information, theological in its nature, will be less concerned with ecstasy. However, by focusing on this term, I do not propose to reduce the religious experience to a psychosomatic event, but to put the emphasis upon those elements that are more available to the scholar, while keeping a more neutral position insofar as the external elements: divine or others, that did interfere in the experience.

After dealing with the technical language of ecstatic experience and some of its sources, a psychological interpretation of processes designated above as ecstasy, the disassociation and new form of association may be in order. The first process may be understood as a disruption of the normal psychological processes. Either as a type of mental concentration, *hitbodedut*, or, as divestment of the corporeality, *hitpashetut ha-gashmiyyut*, or by an intense technique of combining letters and reciting them, we may assume forms of strong intervention in the normal form of consciousness. This disassociation or rupture prepares the possibility for a rapture, to resort to a pun. By a process of deautomatization¹²⁸ of human behavior, produced by various techniques, the routine mode of thinking is attenuated and new forms of experiences and reasoning are made possible. This restructuring facilitates certain openness and a rupture in the routine, the removal of inhibitions, which shape own consciousness, may be one of the reasons for the creativity so characteristic of ecstatic mystics.¹²⁹

I attempted above to cautiously expand the significance of the term ‚ecstatic‘ in a bigger picture of Judaism, by bringing together the views of Benjamin Uffenheimer and

Shlomo Naeh, who dealt with non-Kabbalistic material, as well as by pointing to ecstatic elements in other bodies of Kabbalistic literature, in addition to the writings that belong to ecstatic Kabbalah. Dealing so much with this type of Kabbalah, I attempted neither to restrict it to this body of Kabbalistic literature, nor to become ecstatic about ecstasy. Let me therefore attempt now to clarify the extent of the term ecstatic. To be sure, the existence of rare ecstatic elements or even of few descriptions does not transform a certain literature into an ecstatic literature. I assume that the prophetic literature in the Bible is not an ecstatic one, since its main purpose is not to describe the way of achieving the experience, or techniques to do so, but some religious messages that concern the people of Israel. As A.J. Heschel and Andre Neher have pointed out, classical biblical prophets were not in search of an experience, they did not initiate it¹³⁰, neither were most of the later consumers of this literature – major exceptions being Philo and the ecstatic Kabbalists – looking to this literature as if concerned mainly with ecstatic experiences. This is also the case with the Mishnah and Talmud, texts in which the descriptions of ecstatic prayer of R. Hanina ben Dossa and R. Aqivah have been preserved.

As mentioned above, literatures wherein ecstatic experiences are recorded do not automatically become ecstatic literatures. This is also the case in the vast literature known as Kabbalah. Not every type of Kabbalistic literature, or school, is ecstatic even if it incorporates a description of ecstatic experiences. Such descriptions may sometimes be imaginary or play only a secondary role, and thus do not radiate on the other key notions of their system. In the case of ecstatic Kabbalah, however, the thrust of the literature is to teach and disseminate a range of techniques to reach ecstatic experiences, and Abulafia has seen these activities as his main goal, inspired by divine revelations. The central role of the technique in this literature, and the importance of the ecstatic experience, are reflected in the two special definitions he invented for his Kabbalah: the syntagm *Qabbalat ha-Shemot*, the Kabbalah of the divine names, pointing to the technique, and *Qabbalah Nevu'it*, literally the prophetic Kabbalah referring to the aim of this lore, namely the attainment of an ecstatic experience.¹³¹ Moreover, the ideal of prophecy, understood in those writings as an ecstatic experience, was conceived of as attainable, and in some cases the Kabbalists even confessed to have attained such an experience, and recommended to others to engage such an experience, too. The paramount importance of prophecy as possible in the present is evident in this literature, as a present possibility, as we learn from a prophetic treatise of Abulafia: „prophecies and deliveries [coming] to all the speaking and intellectual soul[s]. This is the reason that every illuminati in search of prophecy and delivery, should contemplate the power of *He'*.”¹³² Nothing similar can be discerned in other Kabbalists dealing with mystical understandings of prophecy. No Jew before him since the antiquity wrote a book he imagined as being prophetic, none resorted to the first person discourse in this context, none described elaborated techniques in special books aiming to teach how to attain an ecstatic experience.

However, not every document preserving an ecstatic description belongs to ecstatic Kabbalah, or should be understood as being ecstatic literature. So, for example, *Sefer Shushan Sodot*, by R. Moshe of Kiev, in which a few sentences adduced above deal

with the experiences of R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah and R. Isaac of Acre, is certainly not belonging, in its entirety, to ecstatic Kabbalah. Both the main topics of the book and its structure point in quite a different direction, and reflect specific developments in 14th century Byzantine Kabbalah, as represented in *Sefer ha-Temunah* and in *Sefer ha-Qanah we-ha-Peliyah*.

A similar case is Zoharic literature: major parts of it, like the early stratum *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, and the later strata: *Ra'aya' Mehemna'* are not interested in ecstatic experience, and do not use ecstatic language in any significant way. Whether the main bulk of the *Zohar* can be described as an ecstatic type of literature, I have more than serious doubts. By and large, following Hellner-Eshed's analysis of the vast majority of the mystical experiences in this part of the Zoharic corpus, it is reasonable to assume that most of the relatively few mystical experiences described in it may be viewed as „contained', moderate or restrained, and thus distinct from sharp ecstatic ones.¹³³ As Scholem has pointed out, ecstatic experiences have been attributed in this book to the High Priest in the Holy of the Holiest, namely to an ancient and probably by now conceived of as an obsolete type of experience, even if it is depicted in quite positive terms.¹³⁴ On the other hand, Elliot R. Wolfson is convinced that what he calls „genuine ecstatic experiences“ underlie discussions in the *Zohar*.¹³⁵ Since his criteria for distinguishing between so-called genuine and non-genuine ecstatic experiences are not self-evident for me, and his definition of ecstasy is quite lax, I keep my reservations for the resort to the term ecstatic experiences when the *Zohar* describes living Kabbalists, though sometimes it may hold for figures depicted there as about to die. In any case, an examination of the substantial Kabbalistic literature written in Hebrew in the immediate vicinity of the Zoharic corpus, in Castile of the late 13th and early 14th century, does not, to my best knowledge, display any significant interest in ecstatic experiences.¹³⁶ Neither does a voluminous literature of commentaries on the *Zohar*, expatiating on ecstatic experiences.¹³⁷ Even the lengthy descriptions of the enthusiastic homilies in this book, sometimes described by scholars as ecstatic, are not met by whatever I am acquainted with in the Castilian Jewish literature. Sporadic mentioning of ideals that may, or may not, fall in the category of ecstasy according to one definition or another, most of which deal with after-death experiences, do not transform the gist of a certain literature, like the 13th century Hasidei Ashkenaz writings, or Provencal, Geronese, and Castilian forms of Kabbalah, including the *Zohar*, or the Habad literature¹³⁸, into ecstatic literatures.

Much more complex, however, is the question of the descriptions of individuals who had an impact on Jewish mysticism, but have left but a little literary legacy, like Sabbatai Tzevi¹³⁹, Nathan of Gaza, and the Besht, who are sometimes described by scholars as ecstasies. We may even ask whether there are ecstatic elements in R. Isaac Luria's experience of revelation of Elijah. In this context we cannot enter in detailed analysis as to the accuracy of such descriptions. Also problematic would be the characterization of early Hasidic literature as a whole as ecstatic. No doubt, the recurring resort in this literature to concepts like *hitpashetut ha-gashmiyyut*, or *bittul ha-yesh*, the annihilation of existence, and even prophecy, both reminiscent of the terminology used in ecstatic Kabbalah, may indicate a strong interest in ecstasy, as is the new interest in dance, music and alcoholic drinks. In fact the two concepts appear together in an im-

portant Halakhic writing of 14th century, *'Arba'ah Turim*, in connection to prayer, though this fact certainly does not transform this literature into an ecstatic one.¹⁴⁰ The same terms may, nevertheless, inspire a much more vibrant interest in ecstasy in early Hasidism. So, for example, R. Aharon Kohen of Apta, resorted to both of them in an interesting passage written shortly before 1800:

The issue of prophecy is [as follows]: it is impossible, by and large, to prophesy suddenly, without a certain preparation and holiness. But if the person who wants to prepare himself to prophecy sanctifies and purifies himself and he concentrates mentally and utterly separates himself from the delights of this world, and he serves the sages, [including] his Rabbi, the prophet, – and the disciples that follow the path of prophecy are called the 'sons of the prophets' – and when his Rabbi, [who is] the prophet, understands that this disciple is already prepared to [the state of] prophecy then his Rabbi gives him the topic of the recitations of the holy names, which are keys for the supernal gate (...) the account of the chariot is by the recitation of the names of purity (...) prophecy is like the lightning that is seen when the heavens have been opened (...) and this is like a lightning, a divine light descending upon the prophet who merited it because of his purity and holiness, and in the moment of prophecy the prophet has a great apprehension of and access to [*hillukh*] the Holy One, blessed be He (...) and when Moses came before God he removed the mask, i.e. he had [the experience of] the divestment of corporeality because corporeality is a mask screening spirituality.¹⁴¹

A rather detailed path is described, whose components are well known from earlier Kabbalistic traditions. A *via purgativa* that consists in separation from worldly matters, concentration and recitation of divine names has been described as conducive to a prophetic experience. The technical aspects of this quote are as evident as the fact that it seems to reflect a present practice of initiating students in a mystical path by someone described as a prophet.

In short, a better understanding of voluminous literary corpora demands a more comprehensive vision, which distinguishes carefully what is characteristic, dominant, or essential in one form of literature, in a certain trend or another. Without explicit assessments describing the relative role played by ecstatic elements – not just mystical ones – in a certain literature or system, readers are left with vague impressions.

It is needless to say that an attempt to define the various ecstatic categories as proposed above does not imply the reduction of all types of mystical experiences to ecstasy, or an assumption that literary corpora that are not ecstatic according to my definition, are also not mystical. I attempted to avoid a lax resort to the term ecstasy, and described some forms of experience that may be understood as ecstatic, according to a certain, rather broad, definition of this phenomenon. Without distinguishing between the more general and diffuse realm of mystical experiences on one hand, and the more specific kinds of ecstatic ones on the other, more confusion may be created by resorting to terms without defining them adequately. Since the present analysis is based upon terminologies and their conjugation, it gravitates around terms like prophecy, divestment, separation and adherence, or suddenness, and much less on impressions left by a vague impression a passage may have on one scholar or another. I used 'ecstasy' as

an umbrella term in order to bring together various descriptions, which employed explicit terms that approximate it.¹⁴²

Let me summarize: I attempted to define ecstasy in a non-essentialistic, or non-reductionalist manner; then I exemplified the various categories of ecstasy-language in Jewish mysticism; and finally to speak about the general role of these phenomena in the general economy of Jewish mysticism. Given the limited framework, this survey is a tentative one, which requires a more elaborate analysis of each of the three topics, as well as their contribution to the structure of the systems in which they appear.

¹ On this issue see S. Magid: „Gershom Scholem’s Ambivalence toward Mystical Experience and His Critique of Martin Buber in Light of Hans Jonas and Martin Heidegger,” in: *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1995), pp. 245–269; M. Idel, „Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names,” in: *Mystics of the Book. Themes, Topics, & Typology*, ed. R. A. Herrera, New York 1993, pp. 97–99; idem, „The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia’s Kabbalah to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism,” in: *Gershom Scholem’s Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 50 Years After*, ed. P. Schaefer – J. Dan, Tübingen 1993, pp. 131–133; idem, „On the Theologization of Kabbalah in Modern Scholarship,” in: *Religious Apologetics – Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. Y. Schwartz – V. Krech, Tübingen 2004, pp. 123–174.

² See the debate between the stand of Steven Katz and Robert Forman about the nature of the mystical experience, printed in the various volumes by Oxford University Press. Cf. note 3 below. I am aware of the methodological limitation of relying solely on linguistic testimony, see the observations of J.E. Smith, *Experience and God*, London 1968, pp. 41–45.

³ See, especially, the important observations of Peter Moore on technique and the mystical experience in his „Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique,” in: *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. S. T. Katz, New York 1978, pp. 112–114. On a vision of philosophy as a path to spiritual experiences see P. Hadot, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, Paris 1995; idem, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris 1993; idem, „Exercices Spirituelles”, *Annuaire de la V section de l’école pratique des Hautes Etudes*, Paris 84, pp. 25–70; P. Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness*, The Hague 1963; R. T. Wallis, „Nous as Experience,” in: *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. Baine Harris, Norkfold 1976, pp. 122 and 143 note 1 for the pertinent bibliography; M. Morgan, *Platonic Piety, Philosophy & Ritual in Fourth-Century Athens*, London 1990.

⁴ For my proposal to emphasize the importance of the linguistic representation of the mystical experience see M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, trans. J. Chipman, Albany 1988, pp. 124–126, 130–134; idem, „Universalization and Integration. Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism,” in: *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith. An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. M. Idel – B. McGinn, New York 1989, pp. 49–50 and note 7 below. Thus, what I have to say has to do much more with the language that expresses the hypothetical experience, rather than an analysis of the types of the experience itself.

⁵ See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 124–134. The way in which I propose to use the term mystical, as referring to a claim of contact with God, or to a comprehensive spiritual being, follows Plotinus, and G. Scholem among other scholars. See M. Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, Los Angeles 2005, p. 4 note 3.

⁶ *Hasidism, Between Ecstasy and Magic*, Albany 1995, pp. 49–50, for the discussion of this issue and the sources that inspired me.

⁷ See *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany 1989, pp. 10–11.

⁸ On the existence of a structured mystical path I hope to elaborate elsewhere: see, meanwhile, Idel, *ibidem*, pp. 103–134. and idem, *Hasidism, Between Ecstasy and Magic*, pp. 55–57; idem, *Enchanted Chains*.

⁹ See, e.g., *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 7–11.

¹⁰ Compare to Ithamar Gruenwald, „From Talmudic to Zoharic Homiletics,” in: *The Age of the Zohar*, ed. J. Dan, Jerusalem 1989, p. 293. (Hebrew).

¹¹ See below par. 6.

¹² See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven 1988, pp. 84–85, 88, 110–111. and the evidence from R. Nathan ben Sa’adya Harar, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, who described unexpected mystical experiences after a relatively long period of exercises. Cf. the text translated by G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1967, pp. 150–152. Though an element of wonder is evident in this case, I am less inclined to attribute to wonder a major role in ecstatic Kabbalah. For wonder and religion see H.D. Lewis, *Our Experience of God*, London–Glasgow 1959, pp. 120–126.

¹³ Compare the absence of any discussion of mystical techniques in the most recent monograph on mystical union in Christian mysticism, by N. Pike, *Mystic Union. An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism*, Ithaca–London 1992.

¹⁴ See, e.g., my discussions in *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, pp. 53–58.

¹⁵ On the criticism of the theory which sees in ideas the origin of myth see W. Burkert, *Homo Necans. The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, tr. P. Bing, Berkeley 1983, pp. 26–29.

¹⁶ See M. Idel, „Between Rabbinism and Kabbalism. Gershom Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism,” in: *Modern Judaism* 11 (1991), pp. 281–296.

¹⁷ See also idem, „Some Remarks on Ritual, Mysticism, and Kabbalah in Gerone,” in: *Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993), pp. 111–113.

¹⁸ On these three figures as well as for the nexus between the way and the experience see M. Idel, „»Unio Mystica« as a Criterion. »Hegelian« Phenomenologies of Jewish Mysticism,” in: *Doors of Understanding. Conversations in Global Spirituality in Honor of Ewert Cousins*, ed. S. Chase, Quincy 1997, pp. 305–333, and idem, *Enchanted Chains*.

¹⁹ See *Ecstatic Confessions*, Collected and Introduced by M. Buber, ed. P. Mendes-Flohr, tr. E. Cameron, Syracuse 1996, p. 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

²¹ *Shamanism. Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton 1974, p. 223; idem, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, Harper Torchbooks 1960, tr. P. Mairet, pp. 63–64, 95–98; *Zalmoxis*, tr. W. R. Trask, Chicago–London 1972, pp. 34–44; *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, New York 1958, tr. W.R. Trask, pp. 100–101. See also his *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton 1969, where the term ecstasy is used in a rather more qualified manner. See, e.g., p. 103. More on ecstasy and Shamanism see L.E. Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum. An Orientation to meaning in South American Religions*, New York–London 1988, pp. 390–431.

²² See *Experiences de l'extase*, Paris 1984. See especially pp. 22–24, where he analyzes the Greek sources of the term.

²³ I. P. Couliano, *Psychanodia I. A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and its Relevance*, Leiden 1983.

²⁴ I. P. Couliano, *Out of this World. Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein*, Boston–London 1991.

²⁵ *Ecstatic Religion. An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*, Harmondsworth 1971, p. 28.

²⁶ See Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 5–6. See also his *Myths, Dreams*, p. 63.

²⁷ J. B. Hollenback, *Mysticism, Experience, Response and Empowerment*, Pennsylvania 1996, especially pp. 135–149, 150–179. For a similar move see already my *Hasidism*, where I treated the mystico-magical model as a seminal feature in Jewish mysticism. As to his specific definitions of ecstasy, see *Mysticism*, pp. 136–137: „Ecstasy often appears in mystical literature to refer to an intense state of exaltation, bliss, and thrilling excitement that is often of such intensity that the mystic loses awareness of both his or her physical environment and body (...) Ecstasy also has a second connotation that implies an even more radical process of abstraction from them body and the physical world.”

²⁸ For short descriptions of ecstasy, on which I elaborate here in much more detail see Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 29. and *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, p. 210. Let me mention that below, as well as in my earlier writings, I envision the expressions that may be described as states of ecstasy as recurring especially in a certain literature, the ecstatic Kabbalah, as part of a wider structure, the ecstatic model, which includes practices mentioned above. However, I never restricted the existence of expressions of ecstasy to this school or literature alone. See, e.g., Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 55: „the presence of various elements of the ecstatic model are easily detectable in Neoplatonic philosophy and in Geronese Kabbalah. However, in a more crystallized form, and under the influence of Abraham Abulafia's thought, the ecstatic model is visible at the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th centuries.” See also Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 165 note 149, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, pp. 43–44, 89, and *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 32–33. Even some Zoharic descriptions have been described as ecstatic: See *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, p. 315 note 64. Thus, the presentations of my stand as excluding possibilities of ecstasy in other Kabbalistic schools, as found recently in E.R. Wolfson and H. Pedaya, who adduced examples of what they consider to be ec-

static discussions in order to argue that the differences I pointed out between the ecstatic school of Kabbalah and the theosophical one are thus attenuated, are an inadequate understanding of my stand. See below note 57. For a much more perceptive presentation of my views on the topic see M. Hellner-Eshed, *A River Issues Forth from Eden: On the Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar*, Tel Aviv 2005, pp. 372–377 (Hebrew). For the divergences between the deep structures of Abulafia's Kabbalah and the other types of Kabbalah in the 13th century see M. Idel, „On the Meanings of the term ‚Kabbalah‘: Between the Prophetic Kabbalah and the Kabbalah of Sefirot in the 13th Century,” *Pe'amim* 93 (2002), pp. 69–73. I presented differences between structures of Kabbalistic literatures, not between the existence or absence of one element of another. These basic differences have been recognized from time to time by Wolfson. See his *Abraham Abulafia. Kabbalist and Prophet, Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy*, Los Angeles 2000, pp. 116–117. I hope to return to this issue elsewhere in a more detailed manner.

²⁹ See Bastide, *The Mystical Life*, p. 94.

³⁰ See her *Ecstasy in Secular and Religious Experiences*, Los Angeles 1961.

³¹ For this approach to Jewish mysticism in general see my „On Some Forms of Order in Kabbalah,” *Daat* 50–52 (2003), pp. XXXI–LVIII. See more at the end of the present article.

³² *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1967, p. 55.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 122–123. Scholem's description of ecstasy probably influenced E.R. Wolfson's view. See below note 56.

³⁴ See the analysis of this point in Scholem's thought in Joseph ben Shlomo, „Gershom Scholem on Pantheism in the Kabbalah,” in: *Gershom Scholem. The Man and His Work*, ed. P. Mendes-Flohr, Albany 1994, pp. 60–61.

³⁵ *Major Trends*, p. 123. See also his *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 1974, p. 181. I cannot enter here the complex argument against such a distance. It will suffice to mention that the *Zohar*, following earlier Kabbalistic psychologies, assumed on the one side that human soul is divine, and on the other side, that immediately after the *Bar Mitzvah* the Jew become a son of God. See, for the time being, M. Idel, „*Nishmat 'Eloha*: On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and His School,” in: *Life as a Midrash, Perspectives in Jewish Psychology*, ed. S. Arzi – M. Fachler – B. Kahana, Tel Aviv 2004, pp. 338–380 (Hebrew). On the term ‚abandon' in the context of ecstasy see also below beside note 41.

³⁶ See the observation of I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar. An Anthology of Texts*, tr. D. Goldstein, London–Washington 1991, vol. III, pp. 1010–1011, note 354.

³⁷ *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 303 note 206. For another statement about ecstasy in this book (p. 408), see below on the difference between the Geronese Kabbalah and the prophetic one.

³⁸ *Kabbalah*, p. 176, idem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, p. 227.

³⁹ *Studies in Kabbalah Literature*, ed. J. Hacker, Tel Aviv 1976, pp. 231–247 (Hebrew).

⁴⁰ *Kabbalah*, p. 181.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* See also above note 35. The resort to the term abandon reflects here and in the other passage of Scholem, an understanding of a passive aspect of ecstasy.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁴³ *Ancient Judaism*, trans. H. H. Gerth and D. Martindale, Illinois 1952, p. 314. See also *ibid.*, p. 315.

⁴⁴ See, respectively, *Prayer*, London–New York 1933, ch. VI, especially pp. 136, 142–144, etc., and *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, London 1956, pp. 10, 14, 18–19, 85–86. It should be noticed that Heiler ignores the existence of Jewish mysticism. See *ibid.*, pp. 136–137.

⁴⁵ See his *At Sundry Times*, London 1958, p. 171. In many of his writings Zaehner is trapped in his stark theological distinction between theistic mysticism, positive in his opinion, and monistic one, which he disregarded. However, even in the case of a theistic religion like Judaism, real or genuine experiences are prevented by another stark theological assumption: only the belief in incarnation ensures genuine mystical experiences. See *ibid.*, pp. 25–26. It seems that this erudite scholar of mysticism was not acquainted with Philo and possible contributions of his views on mysticism and ecstasy, on nascent Christian mysticism. See, e.g., B. McGinn's seminal remarks on the ‚Jewish matrix' of Christian mysticism in his *The Foundations of Mysticism*, New York 1991, pp. 9–22. It

seems that Philo even influenced Plotinus' vision of mystical union. Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, p. 39. Mysticism has, therefore, not only a phenomenology, but also a history, and Philo preceded all the Neoplatonists and even the Middle Platonists' discussions of ecstasy and mystical union. For more phenomenological critiques of Zaehner's approach to mystical union see Pike, *Mystic Union*, pp. 177–193.

⁴⁶ R. Bastide, *The Mystical Life*, trs. H.F. Kynaston-Snell – D. Waring, New York 1935, pp. 93–97. For a much more positive attitude to ecstasy see E. Underhill, *Mysticism*, New York 1961, pp. 358–379 and her *The Mystics of the Church*, New York 1971.

⁴⁷ Bastide, *ibid.*, p. 97 and note 45 above.

⁴⁸ See Y. Lorberbaum, *The Image of God. Halakha and Aggadah*, Tel Aviv 2004, pp. 146–169 (Hebrew).

⁴⁹ See A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, Philadelphia 1962, pp. 324–366. An issue that cannot be dealt with here is the fact that some of the main Jewish figures who studied in Berlin, and contemporaries of Heschel, were quite reticent to admit the existence of ecstatic experiences in Judaism, as it is the case of R. Joseph Baer Soloveitchick and Isaiah Leibovitz.

⁵⁰ See *Classical Prophecy. The Prophetic Consciousness*, Jerusalem 2001 especially pp. 80–91 (Hebrew) and his *The Ancient Prophecy in Israel*, Jerusalem 1973 (Hebrew). See also H. Pedaya, *Vision and Speech, Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism*, Los Angeles 2002 pp. 54–60 (Hebrew).

⁵¹ See *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit*, no. 68–70, 259–265. For a detailed account of the synthesis between Greek terms for frenzy and the biblical descriptions of prophecy in Philo see H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, Cambridge 1968, II, pp. 24–27. For a survey of the various philosophy understandings of prophecy in the Middle Ages, in which the difference between the philosophical and the non-experiential nature of the discussions of prophecy, and the Kabbalistic one, see H. Kreisel, *Prophecy. The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Dordrecht 2001, especially pp. 626–627. and F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, London 1958.

⁵² *Ecstatic Confessions*, p. XXIII. See *ibid.*, pp. 147–150.

⁵³ S. Naeh, „»Creates the Fruit of Lips: A Phenomenological Study of Prayer According to *Mishnah Berachot* 4:3, 5:5,“ in: *Tarbiz* 63 (1994), pp. 185–218 (Hebrew).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, *idem*, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, and *idem*, „Universalization and Integration,“ pp. 27–58, 157–161.

⁵⁶ „Contribution,“ p. 129. See also *ibidem*, p. 128: „Abulafia's detailed explication of the quest for ecstasy, in his own term *nevu'ah*, prophecy, is part and parcel of a quest that was inherent in Jewish mysticism, much more outside Spain rather than in the Iberian Peninsula.“

⁵⁷ See E. R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines. Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton 1994, pp. 330, 333–336; *idem*, „Forms of Visionary Ascent as Ecstatic Experience in the Zoharic Literature,“ in: *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 50 Years After*, ed. P. Schaefer – J. Dan, Tuebingen 1993, pp. 209–235, especially pp. 210–211 where he uses the term „ecstatic illumination“, and defines „a state of ecstasy, i.e., an experience of immediacy with God that may eventuate in union or communion“ (see also above note 33, Scholem's definition of ecstasy); Ch. Mopsik, introduction to R. Moses de Leon's *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, Los Angeles 1996, pp. 6–8 (Hebrew), Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, *passim*, especially p. 31, Z. Mark, *Mysticism and Madness in the Work of R. Nahman of Bratslav*, Tel Aviv 2003 (Hebrew), and J. Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem 2004 (Hebrew). Recently, however, a more detailed analysis of the language of mystical experiences in the book of the *Zohar*, refrained from applying the term ecstasy to most of the descriptions found in it, referring to them – correctly in my opinion – as „contained“ or „moderate“ experiences, or „soft ecstasy“. See Hellner-Eshed, „A River Issues Forth from Eden': On the Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar,“ pp. 372–377, but see pp. 289, 389, in contexts of ecstatic homilies, or 375–377 or soft ecstasies.

⁵⁸ See above, note 55.

⁵⁹ Compare Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, p. 38, Couliano, *Experiences de l'extase*, p. 22.

⁶⁰ *Enneads* IV:8:1. On ecstasy in Plotinus as a super-intellectual and sudden experience see E. Brehier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, tr. J. Thomas, Chicago 1958, pp. 147–163 and A. Kellesidou-

Galanou, „L'extase plotinienne et la problematique de la personne humaine,“ in: *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 84 (1971), pp. 384–396. A more cautious view of Plotinus' resort to the term ecstasy see G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblicus*, University Park, Pennsylvania 1995, pp. 232–236.

⁶¹ The quote is from the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, the format in which parts of the *Enneads* have been preserved in Arabic, and known by some Jewish figures. See also Kreisel, *Prophecy*, pp. 626–627. and note 13.

⁶² Cf. the Hebrew translation of R. Shem Tov Falaquera, *Sefer ha-Ma'alot*, ed. L. Venetianer, Berlin 1894, p. 22. See also G. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, New York 1991, pp. 257–258; idem, *Major Trends*, pp. 203, M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, New Haven 1998, p. 52. On the impact of this work on 13th century Jewish thought see A. Altmann, „The Delphic Maxim Medieval Islam and Judaism,“ in: *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernen Aufklärung. Studien zur Juedischen Geistgeschichte*, Tuebingen 1987, pp. 26–28; A. Altmann – S. Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, Oxford 1958, pp. 191–192, and P.B. Fenton (Ynnon), „Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera and the *Theology of Aristotle*,“ in: *Daat* 29 (1992), pp. 27–40 (Hebrew).

⁶³ *Devequt ha-da'at*. On this and similar concepts see Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, pp. 46–49. and *On Ecstasy, A Tract by Doh Baer of Lubavitch*, tr. L. Jacobs, New York 1963, p. 82.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, Mantua 1558, fol. 98b. On the importance of separation of the soul from the body or lower activities see Altmann-Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 187–191, and G. Holzman, „Seclusion, Knowledge and Conjunction in the Thought of R. Moshe Narboni,“ *Kabbalah* 7 (2002), pp. 138–139 (Hebrew).

⁶⁵ R. Ezra of Gerona, *The Secret of the Tree of Knowledge*, translated in: Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of Godhead*, pp. 66–67. For detailed analyses of other of R. Ezra and R. Azriel's passages understood as expressing a form of ecstasy, see Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 149ff. In my opinion, those passages, like the one adduced here, represent indeed mystical experiences of *devequt*, but they scarcely fit the criteria of ecstasy as proposed above. The content of those passages deserves additional clarifications, which cannot be done in this limited context. See, meanwhile, M. Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati, the Kabbalist*, Tel Aviv 1998, I, pp. 128–136 (Hebrew), and idem, „The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of 'Arayot in Early Kabbalah,“ *Kabbalah* 12 (2004), in various footnotes at pp. 100–138 (Hebrew).

⁶⁶ See Altmann-Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, pp. 185–217. It should be emphasized that at least one of Isaac Israeli's writings have been quoted by R. Azriel of Gerona. See A. Altmann, „Isaac Israeli's »Chapter on the Elements,“ in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (1956), pp. 31–57. This text has been criticized by Nahmanides, another Geronese figure. See M. Idel, „*Nishmat 'Eloha*. On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and His Schools,“ in: *Life as a Midrash, Perspectives in Jewish Psychology*, ed. S. Arzy – M. Fachler – B. Kahana, Tel Aviv 2004, pp. 344–345 (Hebrew). In this text the souls of the prophets and righteous are described as united with God. See Altmann, *ibid.*, pp. 48, 56. This association of righteous and prophet is found indeed also in R. Ezra's passage dealt with here.

⁶⁷ Ms. Jerusalem 1959 8 fol. 200a.

⁶⁸ *Sefer 'Otzar Hayim*, Ms. Moscow-Guenzburg 775, fol. 161b. See Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, p. 67. For contemplation of light and prophecy see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 77–83. For the term „extase prophetique“ in context of seeing light see N. Sed, „Lumiere et prophetie dans la Kabbale medievale,“ in: *Lumiere et cosmos*, Paris 1981, pp. 99–105, dealing basically with prophetic Kabbalah

⁶⁹ *Sefer 'Otzar Hayim*, Ms. Moscow-Guenzburg 775, fol. 111a. More on Enoch/Metatron see below.

⁷⁰ I read it as if it deals with the world, though it is possible to understand also that the soul exited from the body of man.

⁷¹ *Sha'arei Qedushah*, Benei Beraq, 1973, pp. 102–103. For an analysis of this passage see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 69–70 and Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 320–323.

⁷² See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 181 and M. Idel, „*Hitbodedut*. On Solitude in Jewish Mysticism,“ in: *Einsamkeit, Archaeologie der literarischen Kommunikation*, VI. Bd, ed. A. Assmann – J. Assmann,

München 2000, pp. 192–198.

⁷³ On the meaning of *kavanah* in Hasidic prayer see Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 149–188.

⁷⁴ R. Benjamin of Salositz, *Sefer Torei Zahav*, Mohilev 1816, fols. 38d–39a, quoting the Great Maggid of Medzirech. See also R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism. Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, Jerusalem–Princeton 1993, tr. J. Chipman, p. 253 and note 28. More on ecstatic prayer see in the material referred below in note 106.

⁷⁵ See J. Weiss, *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, ed. D. Goldstein, Oxford 1985, pp. 132–133.

⁷⁶ A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill 1978, pp. 243, 364, and Holzman, „Seclusion, Knowledge, and Conjunction,” pp. 134–136. For Sufi views on ecstasy see J. Dering, *Musique et extase*, Paris 1988, and C.W. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, Albany 1985.

⁷⁷ Apparently *Hovot ha-Levavot*, IX:3, p. 532; IX:5 p. 536.

⁷⁸ On this issue see M. Idel, *R. Abraham Abulafia's Writings and Doctrines*, Ph. D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1976, pp. 86–128 (Hebrew).

⁷⁹ See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 134–137.

⁸⁰ From his epistle ‚We-Zot li-Yhudah,’ in: *Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik*, I. Heft, ed. A. Jellinek, Leipzig 1853, pp. 20–21. On this text see Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 98. Abulafia draws upon a theosophical-theurgical theme, which describes the supernal aspect of the sefirotic realm as blessing. In my opinion, his treatment of this theme is, conceptually speaking, quite independent, implying the preponderance of the ecstatic move.

⁸¹ According to Jewish ancient texts, the world was created by and was sealed with the name of God at the time of creation: see N. Sed, *La Mystique cosmologique juive*, Paris 1981, pp. 79–131. Abulafia presents his teaching as a technique of untying the knots, which emerge with the creation of the world or of man.

⁸² This verb means ‚to strip oneself’ and figuratively points to the separation from materiality.

⁸³ Ms. Sassoon 290, pp. 234–235. *Notarat* is obviously a pun: it may mean both „remaining” and „untied”.

⁸⁴ „An emanation emanated” in Abulafia: *sekhel nishpa*.

⁸⁵ Here a lengthy discussion on the nature of the intellect and intelligibilia occurs in Abulafia's work.

⁸⁶ „However ... intellect” missing in *‘Or ha-Sekhel*.

⁸⁷ I.e. the most spiritual intellect.

⁸⁸ The text translated above is the summary of Abulafia's discussion in his *‘Or ha-Sekhel*, Ms. Vatican, 233, fol. 117b–118b, as it is found in two collectanea of Kabbalistic materials: Ms. Oxford-Bodliana, 1949, Ms. Paris BN 776, fol. 192b. The slight differences between Abulafia's version and that in the collectanea will be pointed out in the footnotes.

⁸⁹ On this issue see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 53–71.

⁹⁰ *Behitbodeduto*. On this term see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 108–111.

⁹¹ *Sefer Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, Ms. Paris, BN 777, fol. 109a. On additional discussions about corporeal symptoms of the ecstatic experience in both Abulafia and R. Nathan ben Sa’adyah Harar see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 74–77.

⁹² See P. Schaefer, *The Hidden and the Manifest God*, Albany 1992, pp. 165–166; M. Idel, „Enoch is Metatron,” in: *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990), p. 225 note 18, and E. R. Wolfson, „*Yeridah la-Merkavah*. Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism,” in: *Mystics of the Book. Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, ed. R.A. Herrera, New York 1993, pp. 13–44.

⁹³ See L. Schiffman, „The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the *Hekhalot Rabbati*,” in: *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976), pp. 269–281.

⁹⁴ On this issue see M. Idel, *Golem. Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid*, Albany 1990, pp. 285–286. and Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 75–81.

⁹⁵ See Idel, „Enoch is Metatron,” pp. 220–224.

⁹⁶ Cf., *Numbers Rabbat* 16:1. See also Rashi on Joshua 2:4, where it is said expressly that Pinchas was an angel.

⁹⁷ Quoted in R. Menahem Tziuni, *Tziuni*, Jerusalem 1964, fol. 7a. I cannot elaborate in this con-

text on the possible implications of this quote for the history of the Sabbath of witches-theme as treated by Carlo Ginzburg. See his *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, Radius 1991.

⁹⁸ On the neurological interpretation of the content of the texts adduced here see the forthcoming study S. Arzy – M. Idel – O. Blanke, „A Man Speaks with his Self. Autoscopic Phenomena in writings from the Ecstatic Kabbalah of the 13th Century.”

⁹⁹ See *On the Mystical Shape*, pp. 255–257. For additional instances of autoscopic ecstasy see *ibidem*, pp. 258–260.

¹⁰⁰ See M. Idel, „The Beginning of Kabbalah in North Africa? A Forgotten Document by R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka,” in: *Pe'amim* 43 (1990), pp. 4–15 (Hebrew).

¹⁰¹ Ibn Malka, *Kitab Uns we-Tafsir*, ed. G. Vajda, Ramat Gan 1974, pp. 22–23, and see the important parallel on p. 26. See also G. Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim, philosophe juif Marocain*, Paris 1954, p. 140. and note 1; C. Sirat, *Les Theories des visions surnaturelles*, Leiden 1964, p. 77; D. Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, Ramat Gan 1999, pp. 113 note 45, 115, 137–138. A very similar story appears in the anonymous *Perush ha-Tefillot*, which is close to both Abulafia and to Ibn Malka. See Ms. Paris BN 848, fol. 52b, printed now in A. Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Los Angeles 2004, pp. 25–26, 285–286 (Hebrew). In the last case, the recipient of the angelic revelation is described as studying on the one hand, and the combinations of letters and divine names are also mentioned in the context. Moreover, according to this story solely the recipient sees the revealing angel.

¹⁰² Ibn Malka, *Kitab Uns we-Tafsir*, p. 23, and see also p. 26, where this experience is described as that of the prophets.

¹⁰³ *Kitab Uns we-Tafsir*, pp. 31, 41.

¹⁰⁴ Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim*, p. 140 had already pointed out shortly the affinity between Ibn Malka's astro-magic and that of *Sefer ha-Tamar*.

¹⁰⁵ See S. Pines, „Le Sefer ha-Tamar et les Maggidim des Kabbalists,” in: *Hommage a Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon – Ch. Touati, Louvain 1980, pp. 333–363; *idem*, „On the Term *Ruhaniyyut* and its Sources and Influence On Judah Halevi's Doctrine,” in: *Tarbiz* 57 (1988), pp. 511–540 (Hebrew); *idem*, „Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's Kuzari,” in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 165–251. This theory recurs several times in the Pseudo-Ibn Ezra *Sefer ha-Atzamim*.

¹⁰⁶ Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1580, fol. 17a. Compare also the discussion in Abulafia's *'Or ha-Sekhel*, where the holy spirit and the spirit stand for, respectively, the inner speech, namely the human intellect, and for the outer speech. Ms. Vatican 233, fol. 16b, and in his *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, where the holy spirit is the intellectual influx descending from above, while the spirit is the human intellect, Ms. New York JTS 1801, fol. 29a. For an earlier source which approximates this view see R. Abraham ibn Ezra's *Commentary on Exodus* 26:1, and later on, the formulation of R. Shmuel ibn Motot, *Sefer Tehillot ha-Shem*, Ms. Vatican 225, fol. 58b.

¹⁰⁷ *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, Ms. New York, JTS 1801, fol. 9a, and Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 87–88.

¹⁰⁸ *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, p. 27, translated by Scholem in *Major Trends*, p. 155 in a different manner.

¹⁰⁹ *Genesis Rabba'* 97:1.

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., his commentary on Daniel 10:21.

¹¹¹ *Shushan Sodot*, Koretz, 1784, fol. 69b; Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, pp. 253–254; *idem*, „Eine Kabbalistische Erklärung der Prophetie als Selbstbegegnung,” in: *MGWJ* 74 (1930), pp. 285–290. and Hollenback, *Mysticism*, p. 148.

¹¹² *Shushan Sodot*, *ibid.*

¹¹³ On this term see the other passage from this Kabbalist quoted above, and the important text translated in Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 92–93. This feature of the ecstatic experience is reminiscent of the term *exiphanes*, suddenly, which occurs in Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI:7:36. It occurs already in the Stoa and Philo. See A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*, Oxford 1983, p. 34 note 14. For later discussions of the suddenness of intuition since Avicenna, though basically influenced by Plotinus see Holzman, „Seclusion, Knowledge and Conjunction in the Thought of R. Moshe Narboni,” pp. 124–130, 169–170 and A. Eiran, „The View of *Hads* in R. Yehudah ha-Levi and Maimonides,” in: *Tura'* 4 (1996), pp. 117–146 (Hebrew). The emphasis on

sudden occurrence of ecstasy conflict with Maimonides' assumption in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, that prophecy cannot occur suddenly, but after long preparations.

¹¹⁴ See Idel, „On the Meanings of the term ‚Kabbalah‘,” pp. 59–61. See also H. Kasher, „The Term *Kabbalah* and *Mekubal* in the Writings of ibn Latif,” in: *Daat* 42 (1999), pp. 7–12 (Hebrew).

¹¹⁵ See e.g., Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 112–119, and *Hasidism*, pp. 60–63.

¹¹⁶ *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 408. Compare, however, my view above note 28.

¹¹⁷ See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 257–286. and, for earlier sources, see Pines, „Le *Sefer ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des Kabbalists,” pp. 333–363.

¹¹⁸ See J. H. Chajes, *Between Worlds. Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Modern Judaism*, Philadelphia 2003, and in: *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, ed. M. Goldish, Detroit 2003. On the similarity between possession and Maggidism see M. Idel, „Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to Early Hasidism,” in: *Religion, Science, and Magic in Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Neusner et al., New York–Oxford 1989, pp. 107–108. See also the Christian parallel of the similarity between the two categories in M. Shluhovsky, „Spirit Possession as Self-Transformative Experience in Late Medieval Catholic Europe,” in: *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religion*, ed. D. Shulman – G. Stroumsa, New York 2002, pp. 150–170.

¹¹⁹ *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, Vilnius 1886, fol. 60ab; R. Abraham Azulai, *Hesed le-'Avraham*, Lemberg 1863, fol. 15a. The Kabbalistic trend from which the Maggid-phenomena emerged is related to forms of Hermeticism, as pointed out by Pines. See above note 93.

¹²⁰ Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, p. 259.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–111, 272–274, and L. Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos. Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*, Stanford 2003, pp. 294–295; *idem*, „Recitation of *Mishnah* as a Vehicle for Mystical Inspiration. A Contemplative Technique Taught by Hayyim Vital,” in: *Revue des Etudes Juives* 141 (1982), pp. 183–199.

¹²² R. Israel, known as the Maggid of Kuznitz, *Sefer 'Avodat Yisrael*, Munkacz 1928, fol. 99a. More on ecstasy and prayer in some descriptions of the Besht see M. Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism. A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov*, Berkeley 1996, pp. 191, 193–194, 205–208; I. Etkes, *Ba'al Hashem, The Besht. Magic, Mysticism, Leadership*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 129–139 (Hebrew), and H. Pedaya, „The Besht, R. Jacob Joseph of Polonoy, and the Maggid of Mezeritch. Basic Lines for a Religious-Typological Approach,” in: *Daat* 45 (2000), pp. 25–73 (Hebrew). See also the material collected by L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, New York 1978, pp. 93–103, especially p. 94, where the translation of this passage is found, and M. Idel, „On Prophecy and Early Hasidism,” in: *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and Babi-Baha'i Faiths*, ed. M. Sharon, Leiden 2004, p. 70. See also note 74 above. On R. Gershon of Kutov see A.J. Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov*, ed. S. H. Dresner, Chicago 1985, pp. 44–112, especially p. 46 note 12. On ecstatic prayer see Heiler, *Prayer*, pp. 190–191.

¹²³ Cf. his commentary on Deuteronomy 11:22, and the discussion of G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, New York 1974, pp. 204–205.

¹²⁴ For another instance in which it seems that the Besht attributes to his brother-in-law an acquaintance with a technique of the ascent of soul on high see the Besht's famous *Holy Letter*. For the existence of pneumatic circles in Kutov, in the immediate vicinity of the Besht see J. Weiss, *Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism*, London 1985, pp. 27–46, and Idel, „On Prophecy and Early Hasidism.”

¹²⁵ See the texts adduced in Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism*, pp. 172–173. and Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, ch. 4.

¹²⁶ See, e.g., *The Treatise of the Pool, al-Maqal al-Hwadiyya by Obadyah b. Abraham b. Moses Maimonides*, ed. & tr. P. Fenton, The Octagon Press 1981; *idem*, *'Obadyah et David Maimonide, Deux traites de mystique juive*, Lagrasse-Paris 1987; *idem*, „Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham ha-Hasid, the Jewish Sufi,” in: *Journal of Semitic Studies* 26 (1981), pp. 47–72; *idem*, „The Literary Legacy of Maimonides' Descendants,” in: *Sobre la Vida y Obra de Maimonides, I Congreso internacional*, ed. J.P. del Rosal, Cordoue 1991, pp. 149–156; *idem*, „A Mystical Treatise on Perfection, Providence and Prophecy from the Jewish Sufi Circle,” in: *The Jews in Medieval Islam*, ed. D. Frank, Leiden 1995, pp. 301–334. For the hypothesis that there was a Sufi impact on Geronese Kabbalah

see Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 170–191. It should be pointed out in this context that many discussions of Muslim philosophers on prophecy should be taken in consideration much more for their possible impact on Jewish mysticism, and they occur from time to time together with views of ecstatic Kabbalah. See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, p. 628, Holzman, „Seclusion, Knowledge and Conjunction in the Thought of R. Moshe Narboni,” pp. 111–174, and Eiran, „The View of *Hads* in R. Yehudah ha-Levi and Maimonides.” The impact of Avicennian prophetology and gnoseology is evident already on the early Maimonides and in many Jewish authors, including Kabbalists, in medieval Spain.

¹²⁷ See my *Enchanted Chains*, passim, and *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism*, Concluding Remarks.

¹²⁸ I took this term from A.J. Deikman, „Deautomatization and the Mystic Experience,” in: *Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. Ch. T. Tart, New York 1962, p. 40 and, following him, R. E. Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness*, San Francisco 1972, pp. 132–135. See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 82–83. Here I use the term in a context that is slightly different from both Deikman and my own early resort to it.

¹²⁹ See Laski, *Ecstasy*, p. 282.

¹³⁰ See Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 358–359 and Neher, *Prophetes et propheties*, Paris 1983, pp. 56–57.

¹³¹ See Idel, „On the Meanings of the term ‚Kabbalah‘. Between the Prophetic Kabbalah and the Kabbalah of Sefirot,” pp. 54–69, as well as Idel, „Defining Kabbalah.”

¹³² „Abraham Abulafias *Sefer ha-Ot*,” in: *Jubelschrift zum 70. Geburtstag des Prof. H. Graetz*, Breslau 1887, p. 75.

¹³³ See Hellner-Eshed, *And a River Issues Forth from Eden*, pp. 368–398. This distinction holds also for the more moderate type of hermeneutics of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists, when compared to the more radical one of the ecstatic Kabbalists. See Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, pp. 208–209 and *Absorbing Perfections*, New Haven 2002, p. 255, and Hellner-Eshed, *ibid.*, pp. 258–259 note 129. I prefer to describe the nexus between theurgy and interpretation on the one hand, and theosophy on the other, as experiential, rather than ecstatic, be it soft or hard. See *Absorbing Perfections*, p. 309. and in more general terms *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*, p. XVIII.

¹³⁴ See above note 72. Interestingly enough, critiques concerning claims of prophecy are known in the writings of opponents of Hasidei Ashkenaz, Abraham Abulafia, Sabbateanism, and early Hasidism, but not in the critiques addressed to Geronese Kabbalists. The possibility that a rank close to prophecy may be achieved even during prayer, is found in an Halakhic writing (see note 140 below). Thus one may doubt the actual ecstatic dimension of a discussion of prophecy, if someone does not present it in a way that makes reference to one's own experience. The theory that Jews in the Middle Ages did hide their mystical experiences, advocated by G. Scholem, is problematic and needs some more serious elaboration. For the time being I am inclined not to rely too much on such an assumption. This does not mean that thinkers did not have their – sometimes elaborated – theories above prophecy, just as they had about sacrifice, though they never sacrificed anything by themselves, or about the nature of the land of Israel, though they never visited there.

¹³⁵ See his *Through a Speculum that Shines*, p. 330.

¹³⁶ The only exception seems to be R. Moses de Leon's quoting Plotinus's passage from the *Theology of Aristotle* that has been adduced above. See his latest book *Mishkan ha-Edut*, cf. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, pp. 257–258. As to R. Nissim ben Abraham, the youth of Avila, a contemporary of the *Zohar*, it is hard to describe him as an ecstatic since his only attainment is the production of an entire literature, dictated to him by an angel.

¹³⁷ Compare, e.g., R. Hayyim Vital's *Commentary on the Zohar*, and many other non-ecstatic writings, to his quite influential book *Sha'arei Qedushah*, where the impact of ecstatic Kabbalah is obvious and the *Zohar* plays quite a negligible role. However, with the emergence of Hasidism, where ecstasy became much more prominent, a major commentary on the *Zohar*, R. Isaac Aizik Yehiel Yehudah Safran of Komarno's *Zohar Hai*, is sprinkled with many ecstatic remarks, some related not to the text he interpreted but to his own experiences or that of his uncle, R. Tzevi Hirsch of Zhidachov, another commentator in the *Zohar*. See, e.g., *Zohar Hai*, Lemberg 1869,

vol. I, fol. 7d.

¹³⁸ See Jacobs, *On Ecstasy. A Tract by Dohb Baer of Lubavitch*; R. Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, tr. J.M. Greene, Albany 1993, and N. Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite. The Emergence of the Habad School*, Chicago 1990.

¹³⁹ For a testimony of Tzevi himself as being „divested“ when he received the revelation concerning his messianic mission see M. Idel, „On Prophecy and Magic in Sabbateanism,“ in: *Kabbalah* 8 (2003), pp. 15–17, 20–21.

¹⁴⁰ 'Orah Hayyim, par. 98. For the background of this passage see Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 64.

¹⁴¹ 'Or ha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim, col. X, fol. 4b. See also ibidem, fol. III, fol. 4b. R. Aharon quotes, like many other Hasidic masters, the 14th century passage mentioned above, ibidem, col. IV, fol. 1a. See also M. Idel, „On Prophecy and Early Hasidism,“ in: *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and Babi-Baha'i Faiths*, ed. M. Sharon, Leiden 2004, p. 68 where parallels to Abulafia's thought are pointed out.

¹⁴² Compare to Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 31ff., 138ff, who uses a Hebrew neologism, *hitpa`amut*, which she defines as God or his revelation resonating within the mystic, in order to refer to descriptions that are understood by her as ecstatic. The crucial element of standing outside' is, however, absent in most of the texts dealing indeed with intense emotional and spiritual arousals of Geronese Kabbalists. Interestingly enough, in another discussion of *hitpa`amut*, she does not relate the term to ecstasy. See her *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind*, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 96–102 (Hebrew). My emphasis above was on terms and techniques, rather than descriptions of experiences, which may or may not be ecstatic, depending on the definition of ecstasy someone adopts.

Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism. pronounce [his] speech before God in a perfect way and full of illumination. This is the intention of the Tiqqunim by positing the combination of letters House Head, namely to make a house to the Head that is God, Blessed be He and His name, [so] that He may dwell in the words and the speeches of his Torah and his prayer. 8. 43. This instrumental concept of language is characteristic of those types of Jewish mysticism that focused on ecstatic experiences as an important religious ideal, such as the medieval ecstatic Kabbalah and late Polish Hasidism. 4. Finally, language is considered to be a means by which one can attract or capture the divine in the lower world. Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960; 2nd improved edition, 1965. "Reflections on the Nature and Origins of Jewish Mysticism," in Gershom Scholem's MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM 50 Years After, edited by Joseph Dan and Peter Schafer (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1993) 11-14. Halperin, David J. The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Eze^{kiel's} Vision. Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text [SUNY SERIES IN JUDAICA: HERMENEUTICS, MYSTICISM, AND CULTURE]. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. Poetics of Ascent offers a translation of Ma'aseh Merkabah with a speculative analysis regarding the functions of this text's "ritual language."