

Potencies of the Body and Soul: Ascetic Ideals and Ritualistic Meals in the Writings of R. Baḥya ben Asher

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Abstract

This article examines asceticism in the writings of R. Baḥya Ben Asher ibn Ḥalawa from Saragossa (1255–1340), through a study of two Halakhic practices of fasting and feasting. The first part of the article analyzes Baḥya's perceptions of fasting, engaging with its effects on the relationship between body and soul, and more specifically on the inner relations between the different faculties of the soul. The ritual of fasting is thus portrayed as focused on the human soul, not on the body, ultimately leading to the ascension and empowerment of the intellectual soul over the animalistic one. The second part of the article is devoted to a study of ritualistic meals in Baḥya's writings. This study revolves around Baḥya's interpretation of the two biblical feasts: Isaac's feast before his death (Gen. 27:4) and Jethro's feast celebrating his conversion (Ex. 18:12), which serve as models for halakhically mandated celebratory meals. Here Baḥya relied on the interesting interpretation of his teacher R. Solomon b. Aderet's (known as Rashba) – to which he added the mystical element of the drawing down of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the article examines related topics such as Baḥya's critical view of the status of fasting among Christians and Muslims, his perception of the relationship between fasting and feasting, as well as his attitude toward joy, the heavenly eating of Adam before the fall, and vegetarianism.

Introduction

In this paper we will explore the role of fasting and feasting in the writings of R. Baḥya ben Asher ibn Ḥalawa of Saragossa (c. 1255–1340).¹ The role of ascetic practices in early kabbalah is part of a wider

1 A note on translations: Baḥya's Torah Commentary was translated in its entirety into English and annotated by Eliyahu Munk, *Midrash Rabbeinu Bachya: Torah*

question regarding the relation between ethics and mysticism, and in particular mystical perfection and ideals of religious transformation and perfection.² While the role of ascetic practices has been studied in earlier and contemporary literature, such as the writings of the German Pietists, Nahmanides's commentary on the Torah, the writings of Jonah Gerondi, Moses de Leon's *Mishkan ha-Edut*, the *Zohar*, and others,³ Bahya's writings on this key topic have not been

Commentary, second revised edition (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 2017). In 1980, Charles B. Chavel translated most of *Kad ha-Qemah* into English, based on his 1970 Hebrew edition. On the omissions in this translation, see his own note: *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts* [כד הקבוה / רכבו בחיי / כד הקבוה], translated and annotated by Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1980), XII, n. 15 (and see further in our discussion below). *Shulhan shel Arba* was translated into English by Jonathan Brumberg Kraus, based on Chavel's Hebrew edition: https://www.sefaria.org.il/Shulchan_Shel_Arba%2C_Introduction?ven=Shulhan_Shel_Arba,_translated_by_Jonathan_Brumberg-Kraus,_2010&lang=en. No English translation has yet been made of Bahya's commentary on *Pirquei Avot*. While we used Brumberg Kraus's translation of *Shulhan shel Arba*, in the case of Bahya's Commentary on the Torah and *Kad ha-Qemah* we preferred to translate all the quotations ourselves. Exceptional cases were noted. We thank Eugene D. Matanky for his help in preparing this article for publication.

- 2 See Shaul Magid, "Ethics Disentangled from the Law: Incarnation, the Universal, and Hasidic Ethics," *Kabbalah* 15 (2006): 31-75; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 186-285; idem, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 161-199; idem, "Heeding the Law beyond the Law: Transgendering Alterity and the Hypernomian Perimeter of the Ethical," *EJJS* 14 (2020): 215-263; Patrick B. Koch, *Human Self-Perfection: A Re-Assessment of Kabbalistic Musar-Literature of Sixteenth Century Safed* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2015), 165-176; Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986); idem, "Hebrew Ethical Literature and Via Mystica," in *Expérience et écriture mystiques*, ed. P.B. Fenton and R. Goetschel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 77-88.
- 3 Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Peering through the Lattices: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 33-92; Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Mysticism and Asceticism in Italian Rabbinic Literature of the Thirteenth Century," *Kabbalah* 6 (2001): 135-149; Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 51-102, and the bibliography on 253, n. 243; Jacob Elbaum, *Repentance and Self-Flagellation in the Writings of the Sages of Germany and Poland 1348-1648* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 11-53; Isaiah Tishby and Fischel Lachower, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. David Goldstein (Oxford and Portland:

explored, despite his detailed and explicit discussions of fasting, even devoting an entire section to the topic in his *Kad ha-Qemah*.

Ascetic ideals and practices appeared in various forms in early kabbalah.⁴ Drawing from Ashkenazi sources, specific ascetic practices were said to atone for specific misdemeanors.⁵ These ascetic practices were introduced in the context of certain kabbalistic ideals of repentance and atonement and, therefore, were not a component of a regular religious and halakhic lifestyle. In fact, these practices were only applicable to penitent sinners, and therefore would be irrelevant to someone who had not sinned.⁶ Another kind of ascetic practice was introduced by certain ecstatic kabbalists as an anomian component

[Published for the Littman Library by] Oxford University Press, 1989), vol. 3, 764-767; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Asceticism and Eroticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophical and Mystical Exegesis of the Song of Songs," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe, B.D. Walfish, and J.W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92-118; Avishai Bar-Asher, "Penance and Fasting in the Writings of Rabbi Moshe de León and the Zoharic Polemic with Contemporary Christian Monasticism," *Kabbalah* 25 (2011): 293-319 (Hebrew); Jeremy Phillip Brown, "Distilling Depths From Darkness: Forgiveness and Repentance in Medieval Iberian Jewish Mysticism (12th-13th Century)" (PhD diss., New York University, 2015); idem, "Gazing into Their Hearts: On the Appearance of Kabbalistic Pietism in Thirteenth-century Castile," *EJJS* 14 (2020): 1-38; Hillel Ben-Sasson, "The Concept of Repentance in the Zohar," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 26 (2021): 97-125; Oded Yisraeli, *R. Moses b. Nachman (Nachmanides) Intellectual Biography* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2020), 270-280 (Hebrew); idem, "'Taking Precedence over the Torah': Vows and Oaths, Abstinence and Celibacy in Nahmanides's Oeuvre," *JJTP* 28 (2020): 121-150; Carmi Horowitz, "The Attitude of R. Joshua ibn Shu'eib Towards Asceticism," *Daat* 12 (1984): 29-36 (Hebrew).

- 4 On asceticism in early kabbalah, see Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky, trans. Allan Arkush (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 227-248; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 296-332.
- 5 Bar-Asher, "Penance and Fasting." For helpful distinctions regarding these kinds of practices, see Moshe Sokol, *Judaism Examined: Essays in Jewish Philosophy and Ethics* (New York: Touro College Press 2013), 85-87.
- 6 See Scholem, *Origins*, 227-234; Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Transgressions and Punishments: The Special Contribution of Rabenu Yonah Gerondi's Sha'arei Teshuvah," *Tarbiz* 86 (2019): 63-106 (Hebrew). Cf. the ascetic path of the anonymous *Sefer ha-Yashar*, where such practices are perceived as a religious ideal: Shimon Shokek, "'Sefer Hayashar' within the Framework of 13th Century Hebrew Ethical Literature" (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986), 235-237.

leading to ecstasy.⁷ A different form of kabbalistic asceticism, which is our primary focus, is considered an ongoing feature of religious life — a necessary and regular component of the halakhic lifestyle, designed to facilitate spiritual and mystical transformation. In this case, the ascetic elements are either identified and emphasized within preexisting halakhic practice or are grafted and intertwined upon the halakhic path. Such practices might develop into hypernomian practices in the advanced stages of perfection, as in the case of the biblical Nazirite.⁸ However, Bahya's focus in his writings is on nomian ascetic practices such as ritual fasting.

The common ascetic practices — those designed for the common person to perform — are forms of mild asceticism, generally related to corporeality as a key feature of the individual's striving toward perfection.⁹ These mild ascetic practices, which include regulated,

7 In some trends of kabbalah, in particular ecstatic kabbalah, ascetic practices are anomian. See, e.g., Moshe Idel, "Metamorphoses of a Platonic Theme in Jewish Mysticism," *Jewish Studies at the Central European University* 3 (2002-2003): 67-86; Moshe Idel, "Performance, Intensification, and Experience in Jewish Mysticism," *Archæus* XIII (2009): 116-118; cf. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia — Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000), 204-228.

8 The Nazirite represents an advanced hypernomian ideal in that he forswears certain practices required by halakhah (such as drinking wine on certain occasions). According to Bahya, the biblical Nazirite lives in an advanced state in which he governs his desires and undergoes an ongoing shift in the inner balance between his soul and body. See Bahya's opening for the weekly Torah portion of *Qedoshim*, Rabbenu Bahya, *Be'ur al ha-Torah*, ed. Hayyim Dov Chavel, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1966-1968), Lev. 19:1, 520; Num. 6:2, 26. For Bahya's theosophical-theurgical interpretation of this concept, see idem, Num. 6:3, 27, and Efraim Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher ibn Ḥalawa* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1970), 188, 202-203.

9 One example can be found in his mystical and possibly theurgical understanding of marital relations as a halakhic practice. Bahya reduced sexual intercourse solely for the purpose of procreation within the confines of Jewish marriage and was interested in the intensification of this corporeal-halakhic action for the drawing downward of the intellectual soul and holy spirit to the newly created fetus. See Bahya, *Be'ur*, Gen. 1:28, 48-49; Gen. 30:38, 265-266 and n. 24; Gen. 2:8, 66-67; Gen. 4:1, 88 and n. 81 (cf. Gottlieb, *Bahya*, 52); Lev. 15:19, 487. On the implicit possibility of a theurgical effect as a result of marriage and probably also procreation, see *Shulḥan Shel Arba'*, in *Kitvei Rabbenu Bahya*, ed. Hayyim Dov Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1970), 483, and Idan Pinto, "A Small Kabbalistic Compilation from the Thirteenth Century and its Traces in the Writings of R. Bahya ben Asher," *Kabbalah* 49 (2021): 231 (Hebrew). It seems

ritualized, and communal fasting, are integral to the halakhic system, and they result in both temporary and long-term mystical achievements. In this manner, Baḥya is similar to his contemporaries, understanding the halakhically prescribed ascetic practices, which exclude extreme forms of asceticism and hedonism, as vital to the individual's mystical growth. The halakhic lifestyle is one of balance, in which each element has its own time and place that serve the mystical path of the devotee.

There are common features in Baḥya's understanding of the effects of ritual fasting and ritual feasting: Both halakhic practices are designed to affect the relation and balance between the body and soul, assisting a reconfiguration of the intellectual soul as superior over the body. The assumption is that the soul and body are intertwined, and that the path toward perfection is a continuous practice of reshaping and redesigning the individual's interiority; therefore, the measures used are balanced, mild, and part of daily halakhic behavior, which include certain ascetic elements. The focus of the mild ascetic practice, in particular ritual fasting, is the soul and its interface with the body. The loosening of the soul's attachment to the body is a critical stage in the reconfiguration of the individual's internal faculties. In the following, we will focus on fasting and feasting in Baḥya's thought, which act as key features in the transformative process of body and soul.

Fasting and the Animalistic Soul in Baḥya's Writings

The key to understanding the role of fasting in Baḥya's mystical system is his unique anthropology including the role he assigns to the animalistic soul (*nefesh ha-behemit*), i.e., the material soul, and its relation to the fleshly body and other human components. While certain passages may be rendered in a classic Neoplatonic fashion, in which the soul and body are entirely detached from one another, there are many other passages that offer a much more complicated theory of the body and soul, in which these components are presented as one organism — placed on a single spectrum as one organic body with different parts, thus allowing them to permeate one another.

that on this point Baḥya differs from Nahmanides. See Yisraeli, *Intellectual Biography*, 273. For Baḥya's tendency to weaken the sexual symbolism of the sources he processed into his writings, see Gottlieb, *Baḥya*, 20-21, 171.

First, let us examine the more Neoplatonic understanding, in which Baḥya (inspired by Jonah Gerondi) writes:

“For the wise the path of life leads upward (*orah ḥayyim le-malah le-maskil*), in order to avoid Sheol below” (Prov. 15:24) [...] The wise (*ha-maskil*), who knows that there is a “supernal [i.e., eschatological] path of life” (*orah ḥayyim le-ma‘lah*) does not exert himself at all concerning the body in this world, only if he must [...] for he knows that the supernal world is his permanent residence (*dirat qeva*) and this world is but a temporary residence (*dirat ‘ara’i*).¹⁰ [...] So the verse is understood [as stating], “The supernal path of life to the wise,” [i.e.,] it speaks to the wise and says to him, “You the wise, know that you have a ‘supernal path of life,’ and for the sake of this ‘avoid the Sheol of below.’” Meaning, you should withdraw from corporeal desires, so that you may merit the path of life that is supernal. [...] And why is the terminology of path (*orah*) mentioned and not “way” (*derekh*)? For it is from the term guest (*o’re’ah*), for man in this world is as a “a stranger in the land, like a traveler (*o’re’ah*) who stops only for the night” (Jer. 14:8). Just as a traveler enters an inn and knows that he will travel the following day and his stay there is temporary and he will yearn to return to his place and land of birth, so too the wise thinks of himself as a stranger and traveler in this world and knows and apprehends that there is a supernal manner of life and his soul yearns to return to its roots that is the source of life¹¹ [...] and it is known that the death of the body is the cause of the life of the soul. Therefore, the soul is called *ḥayyah* (i.e., vital) [...] For it is only possible for the soul to

- 10 This parable appears in various versions in the writings of R. Jonah, but the specific language of “temporary residence” (*dirat ‘ara’i*, cf. *Sukkah* 2a) appears only in *Sha‘arei Teshuvah*, 2:19, Vilna 1927, fol. 12a-b. Cf. *Mishlei im Perush Rabbenu Yonah me-Gironi*, ed. Yair Avidan (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2015), 127 and n. 46 (where Gerondi referred to the broad explanation of the matter in his *She‘arim*).
- 11 The return of the soul to its root is mentioned in the same context in Gerondi's *Sha‘arei Teshuvah*, *ibid.* See also: *Derashot ve-Perushei Rabbenu Jonah al ha-Torah*, ed. Shmuel Yerushalmi (Jerusalem: H. Vagshal Publishing, 1980), 81, 321-322; *Sha‘arei ha-Avodah le-ha-Ḥasid Rabbenu Yona Gironi z”l*, ed. Benjamin Joshua Zilber (Bnei Brak, 1967), 35. On the attribution of *Sha‘arei ha-Avodah* to R. Yonah, see the summary of opinions by Ben-Sasson, “Transgressions and Punishments,” 65, n. 5.

attain the degree of the supernal man (*ha-adam ha-'elyon*) through the death of the body.¹²

In this passage, we find that mystical transformation is conditioned upon the detachment of the soul from the body and its desires, leading eventually to eschatological eternal life. The mild forms of ascetical life — the narrowing of the mundane life — brings about elaborate understanding of the spiritual and divine realms. The narrowing of mundane life is accompanied by the expansion of the possibilities of life in the spiritual and metaphysical realms and by a newfound emphasis on the existence provided by these realms. The body is to be denied in order that the soul may ascend beyond the body and return to its supernal root, thus fully self-actualizing as the “supernal man.”¹³ The soul is “*ḥayyah*,” a living being, originating in the divine from the “source of life.” The soul, the true essence of the human being, is merely a guest in this world; in order to reach the advanced state of perfection — eschatological perfection — the individual is to behave accordingly: as a guest or a foreigner in this world.¹⁴

An interesting elaboration of the above can be found in Bahya's later work *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, which presents the Neoplatonic metaphor of the ephemeral dwelling of the soul as a “captured guest,” “imprisoned in a dungeon and she craves to ascend, to conjoin with the supreme noetic substances.”¹⁵ In the Neoplatonic schema of

12 Bahya, *Be'ur*, Gen. 23:1, 200.

13 For a similar approach to the body (as flesh), see Bahya ben Asher, *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “*simḥah*,” in *Kitvei Rabbenu Bahya*, ed. Hayyim Dov Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1970), 273.

14 On the *Tzadik* as a foreigner in this world, see Bahya's opening to the weekly Torah portion *Va-Yeshev*, *Be'ur*, Gen. 37, 304, where the term “temporary residence” (*dirat ara'i*) is repeated (see above, n. 10); *Be'ur*, Gen. 47:8, 366. Cf. Bahya ibn Paquda's discussion in *Hovot ha'Levavot* 6:5, mentioned in the following note.

15 *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “*evel (bet)*,” 52. It seems that here, Bahya's exact source is closer to the material printed as *Derashot ve-Perushei Rabbenu Jonah*, 321-322. For medieval adaptations of the Platonic image of the intellectual soul as a “prisoner” in this world, see Ayala Eliyahu, “Ibn al-Sid al-Batalyawsi and his Place in Medieval Muslim and Jewish Thought” (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2020), vol. 1, 109; *The Microcosm of Joseph Ibn Saddiq*, Hebrew text ed. Saul Horovitz, English trans. Jacob Haberman (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 148 [=76-77 in the Hebrew section]; Bahya ibn Paquda, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, trans. Menahem

spiritual transformation, mild forms of asceticism were to play a key role in the process of liberating the soul from the body. In this context, while referring to the body, Baḥya limits its activity to the bare necessities for human functioning and those operations that serve the halakhic path and the performance of the commandments, primarily the act of reproduction.¹⁶ A different and more complex approach to asceticism is to be found in the following discussion, in which he discusses in detail aspects of halakhically mandated ritual fasting:

The main cause of subduing the animalistic soul (*ha-nefesh ha-behemit*) is fasting (*ta'anit*), for naturally man when he is lacking bread, the moment that he needs it, his [physical] strength is destroyed, and when he will fast and afflict the animalistic faculty (*ha-ko'ah ha-behemit*) it will tire, and its material (*homer*) will be diluted.¹⁷ Simultaneously, the light of the intellect (*or ha-*

Mansoor (Oxford and Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004 [reprint of London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973]), 6:5, 311; 9:3, 409; Abraham Bar Hayya, *The Meditation of the Sad Soul*, trans. Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 74; R. Moses de León, *Sefer Mishkan ha-Edut*, ed. Avishai Bar-Asher (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2013); R. Shem Tov ben Yosef ibn Falaquera, *Sefer haMa'alot*, ed. Ludwig Venetianer (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1894), 67; *The Tahkemoni of Judah Al-Harizi*, trans. Victor Emanuel Reichert (Jerusalem: R. H. Cohen's Press, 1965), vol. 1, 222. The image was also used to describe the liberation of the intellect from the prison of imagination, e.g., Abraham Abulafia, *Or ha-Sekhel*, ed. Amnon Gross (Jerusalem, 2001), 111-112.

16 E.g., Baḥya's sayings regarding the degree of contentment in his *Be'ur*, Gen. 28:20, 250-252. There, as he himself testified, he incorporated the words of Baḥya ibn Paquda. See *Duties of the Heart*, 9:5-6, and further: Sokol, *Judaism Examined*, 87-92. For a similar remark in relation to eating, cf. *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 493. Ibn Paquda's asceticism has been the focus of several studies; see the bibliography collected by Howard Kreisel, "Asceticism in the Thought of R. Baḥya ibn Paquda and Maimonides," *Daat* 21 (1988): VII, n. 3.

17 It seems that Baḥya is drawing on a similar approach to that found in a teaching of Abraham bar Ḥiyya's (1070-1136 or 1145) *Sefer Higayon ha-Nefesh*. This possibility was first mentioned by Bar-Asher, "Penance and Fasting," 304, n. 58. Cf. *Meditation of the Sad Soul*, 72-73. Beyond the conceptual similarities, terms such as "medalel" to describe the body during fasting may strengthen the hypothesis regarding Baḥya's use of Bar Ḥiyya. Either way, however, Baḥya formulated here quite freely, probably integrating several different sources; see further notes 16, 20. On the other hand, we did not find Baḥya's words in *Kad ha-Qemaḥ* s.v. "ta'anit," parallel to Zohar II:185b, which was mentioned by Bar-Asher in this context. For further remarks on the relationship between Baḥya and Bar Ḥiyya, see our discussion below. It is worth noting that in Shem

sekhel)¹⁸ will shine upon him and direct him to the truth and his worship will be desired and his prayer welcomed. Therefore, the Torah commands a day of judgement of souls to be afflicted (*le-hit'anut*), and this is the Day of Atonement, for food and drink are the cause of the harshness (*le-gasot*) of nature and the enlargement of the heart (*godel ha-lev*) [i.e., pride] [...] and since this is a unique day for the atonement of sins (*avonot*) and laws of life (*dine nefashot*) [criminal law], it is not proper for man to engage with a matter that is able to prevent him from this atonement and [negatively] determine his soul. Therefore, we were commanded to afflict the soul on this sacred day. [...] And it is known that the affliction of the soul is a principle (*iqar*), not the affliction of the body [...] You should not afflict your body with fasting and affliction, this is as it was stated: “And not to ignore your own flesh” (Is. 58:7), for it is forbidden to ignore your flesh and to perpetually afflict it, for the primary intention is affliction of the soul. [...] And this is the primary intention of the Torah, with prayers, fasts, and righteousness, everything is to

Tov ibn Shaprut's summary/adaptation of Bahya's *Kad ha-Qemah – Meni'a ha-Kad*, he incorporated a paragraph from Zohar Ḥadash, Midrash ha-Ne'lam on Ruth, 80a, cf. Pritzker edition, vol. VI, translation and commentary by Joel Hecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 120-121. However, for Ibn Shaprut the intellectual soul is identical with the intellect, unlike Bahya, who identifies it with the divine soul (see below, n. 20); it is apparently also different from the function of the term 'heart' as an altar in the Zoharic homily he quoted. See Ms. New York, JTS 2357 (Hallberstam 446), fol. 65a. On Ibn Shaprut *Meni'a haKad*, see Dov Schwartz, “Kitzur Kad haQemah me'et Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut,” *AJS Review* 17 (1992): 1-18 (Hebrew section). For a list of entries from Ibn Shaprut's *Meni'a haKad* printed in various studies, see Dov Schwartz, *Interpretation, Preaching and Rationalism: Writings of Rabbi Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut* (Tel Aviv: Idra Press, 2017), 20-21 (Hebrew). On another case in which Ibn Shaprut interpreted Bahya's words about the divine soul according to his rationalistic tendency, see Norman E. Frimer and Dov Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1992), 94 (Hebrew). Another source that apparently includes an adaptation of Bahya's words here is the book “Refu'at ha-Nefesh,” by the kabbalist and halakhic figure active in North Africa R. Yosef ben Moshe Alashqar. See Elisha Nachmany, “The Philosophical, Kabbalistic and Astrological Doctrine of Rabbi Yosef Al-askar” (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2014), 77.

18 On Bahya's usage of this term in a different context, see our discussion below on “joy (*simḥa*).” See also ibn Falaquera, *Sefer ha-Ma'alot*, 20, n. 17.

subdue the animalistic soul and to follow after the intellectual soul in the service of God.¹⁹

Baḥya's discussion includes several elements, but we would like to focus on two: the framing of the ascetic practice of fasting as concentrated on the soul and not the body, and the repeated references to the Torah. It should be noted that immediately preceding the passage quoted above, Baḥya referred to the three faculties of the human soul according to the known Neoplatonic division: the vegetative faculty, the animalistic faculty, and the intellectual faculty (*ko'ah ha-maskil*). Adapting both Bar Ḥiyya and Nahmanides, he identified the intellectual soul with the divine soul (*neshamah*).²⁰ Furthermore, it is important to notice the difference between the material soul and the fleshly body. The strengthening of the soul here — the temporary empowerment of the intellectual soul — allows the mystic to perform an act of mental concentration that accompanies the performance of specific commandments and in particular mystical-theurgical prayer. The soul has material layers that can and should be diluted. Fasting is not aimed at the body or its

19 *Kad ha-Qemah*, s.v. "ta'anit," 441-443.

20 *Kad ha-Qemah*, s.v. "ta'anit," 440-441. For a parallel discussion, see Baḥya's commentary on Genesis 2:7, 63, which, as previously noted (by Chavel, who was preceded by Haim Breit in his *'sapahat ha-shemen'* - notes on *Kad ha-Qemah* [Lamberg, 1892], vol. 2, fol. 103b, n. 5), is partially based on Nahmanides's commentary on this verse. However, from Baḥya's identification of the intellectual soul with the *neshamah*, a closeness is revealed precisely to the wording of this identification in Bar Ḥiyya (which, in turn, is consistent with the reasonable possibility that Bar Ḥiyya also formed the basis of the above quotation). See *Mediation of the Sad Soul*, 62. Cf. *Sefer Megillat ha-Megalle von Abraham bar Chija*, ed. Adolf Poznanski and Julius Guttmann (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1924), 69 (Hebrew); Jakob Guttmann, "Ueber Abraham bar Chijja's 'Buch der Enthüllung'," *MGWJ* 47 (1903): 465, n. 1. However, the perception and wording of the *Neshama* as a substantial emanated divine power, in which Baḥya followed Nahmanides, is not the same as that of Bar Ḥiyya, although quite a few similar aspects can be identified (these go beyond the limits of the present study). On Baḥya's perception of the *neshamah*, see for now Adam Afterman and Idan Pinto, "Apotheosis and Mystical Transformation in the Kabbalah of Baḥya ben Asher," *Tarbiz* 87: 470. See also the important hermeneutical difficulty raised by Lipshitz regarding Baḥya's adaptation of another discussion of Bar Ḥiyya, in which Baḥya (unlike Bar Ḥiyya) determines the inability of the intellectual soul to be eliminated whatsoever: Abraham Lipshitz, *Studies on R. Baḥya ben Asher ibn Ḥalawa's Commentary on the Torah* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2000), 262.

flesh; rather, it is meant to subdue the animalistic faculty of the soul and dilute its material substance. Baḥya's repeated references to the Torah, as found in statements such as 'The Torah commands' and 'The primary intention of the Torah,' emphasize the nomian character of this ascetic practice.²¹ Baḥya conceptualizes the actualization of the intellectual soul through the subduing of the animalistic soul as a Jewish practice dictated by the Torah and Jewish law. This is further emphasized in Baḥya's passage concerning the Day of Atonement, in which he writes:

When man fasts then his heart will be subdued and broken and the potency of the flesh will be thinned and weakened, and the intellectual soul will overcome it and this is the Torah's intention, "Afflict your souls" (Lev. 16:29) [...] afflicting through [denial] of food and drink,²² *since the potencies of the body are connected with the potencies of the soul* and, therefore, man must afflict his soul with fasting, meaning his soul that desires [i.e., the animalistic soul].²³

The focus on the materiality of the soul — not on the body — is what distinguishes the halakhic forms of ascetic practices from non-effective and sterile practices.

The Path of Idolaters

The corporeality of the soul intertwined with the body is the focus of ritual fasting. In this sense, Baḥya contrasted Jewish and non-Jewish asceticism in the following statement:

The path of idolaters (*derekh ha-umot*) who baptize (*she-tovlin*) their bodies and show everyone that they are pure and mortify themselves through hunger and purify that which is outward (*nigleh*) and within their heart it is dirty and ugly [...] However, the intention of the Torah is that man should first cleanse himself inwardly [...] After he has immersed his heart within his

21 Cf. *Kad ha-Qemah*, s.v. "ha-khna'ah," 132. And see Ibn Paquda, *Duties of the Heart*, 9:5, 405.

22 According to BT *Yoma* 74b.

23 *Kad ha-Qemah*, s.v. "kippurim (bet)," 223-224. Emphasis added.

inwardness (*she-ṭaval libo be-penimiyuto*) and has performed all types of purification and has cleansed it of sin, then he is to outwardly (*be-nigleh*) perform purification, such as fasting and the immersion of the body [in a ritual body of water].²⁴

While non-Jews outwardly perform their purification, the Jew is to work from the inside toward the outside, first working on their material soul; only then is the body to be purified. Baḥya notes that the commandment of fasting functions in two ways: it is designed to work on both the body and the soul, but the primary aim and purpose of the commandment is the cleansing of the soul. It is only after the animalistic soul is diluted that the mild effect on the body is achieved. In contrast to certain non-Jewish rituals in which it is the body and not the heart that is to be baptized, Baḥya internalizes the ritual by focusing on the initial immersion of the heart.²⁵ Only once the internal aspect of the individual has been cleansed can he then perform rituals of cleansing and purification in an external and public manner with his body.

The discussion in which he compares the ascetic rituals of the Torah against the rituals of “the nations” deserves further notice. The term “nations” (*umot*) is used by Baḥya to refer to Christianity and Islam, depending on the context.²⁶ In one of these discussions,

24 *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “maṭar,” 252.

25 For a comprehensive study of this process in Judaism, see Ron Margolin, *Inner Religion in Jewish Sources: A Phenomenology of Inner Religious Life and its Manifestation from the Bible to Hasidic Texts*, trans. Edward Levin (Boston: Academic Studies Press), esp. 123-129.

26 Hanne Trautner-Kromann has shown that in Chavel’s English translation of *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, several polemic discussions referring to the other nations, in particular Christianity, were omitted. See Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics Against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100-1500* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr P. Siebeck, 1993), 139. For a critique of the author’s thesis, see Marc Saperstein, “[Review of] Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics Against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100-1500, by Hanne Trauter-Kromann,” *Shofar* 13/2 (1995): 106-109. Ironically, in his Hebrew edition of *Kad ha-Qemaḥ* (where the discussions were present in full), Chavel himself commented on the traces of medieval censorship concerning the same polemical passages that are absent from his English translation. See Chavel’s notes in *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “*ge’ulah (alef)*,” 118, nn. 69-70; Baḥya, *Be’ur*, Deuteronomy 30:7, 439, n. 65. For medieval censorship of this section, see, e.g., Ms. Rome, Bibliographic Centre in honor of Tullia Zevi (UCEI)

Muslims are linked to rituals of purification in a manner that resonates with the discussion above:

And he further promised us that we would have revenge on the nations who persecuted us [...] And these are the two nations among whom we live oppressed (*meshu'abadim*) — Edom and Ishmael [i.e., Christianity and Islam] [...] And of these Isaiah says [66.17]: *Those who sanctify and purify themselves to enter the groves... Those who sanctify themselves* are Edom, who regularly shake their fingers in both directions, and *those who purify themselves* are the Ishmaelites, for it is their habit always to wash their hands and feet and their whole body, but not their heart, which is the most important thing.²⁷

Most likely Bahya was referencing the Christian *signum crucis* and the Muslim *Wuḏū* (considered a minor ablution as opposed to *Ghusl*).²⁸ In his eyes, both rituals are external gestures that are not related to the essence of the human person, and are therefore inferior to the Jewish ritual of purification through fasting, which is aimed at the internal spiritual organ of the heart.²⁹ Ironically, criticism of the Muslim ablution ceremonies — in contrast to spiritual and internal purification and the internalization of the fasting — reflects the

Pi 1, fol. 41a; Ms. Moscow, Guenzburg 41, fol. 39a. However, the discussion has been printed in its entirety since the early editions. For an extended parallel of the discussion, see Bahya, *Be'ur*, Deuteronomy 30:7, 439-440. There were some who also censored the Torah commentary in print. E.g., the discussion appears in Naples 1492, Pesaro 1514, and Amsterdam 1726, but was then censored in Warsaw 1853.

27 Bahya ben Asher, *Kad ha-Qemah*, s.v. “*ge'ulah (alef)*,” 118. Translation based on Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 141. Cf. Chavel, *Encyclopedia*, 151-152, where most of the above text is missing.

28 Performing *Wuḏū* includes a clear physical aspect; however, from the beginning of its formation it is accompanied by a duty of intention (*niyyah*). See A. Kevin Reinhart, “Impurity/No Danger,” *History of Religions* 30 (1990): 12. On the special status of *niyyah* (intention) in purification rituals, see Paul R. Powers, *Intent in Islamic Law: Motive and Meaning in Medieval Sunni Fiqh* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006), 51-55.

29 An interesting parallel to Bahya's comparison to Christian and Muslim practices of purification can be found in a discussion by the Castilian kabbalist Moshe de Leon. See Bar Asher, “Penance and Fasting,” 307-308 (Hebrew). See also Moshe Hallamish, *Idioms Collection and Selected Studies* (Tel Aviv: Idra Press, 2021), 101, n. 68.

earlier influence of spiritual Islamic trends that were adopted by earlier Jewish authors, in particular Baḥya ibn Paqudah in his celebrated *Al-Hidāya ilā Fara 'id al-Qulūb* (known as “Duties of the Heart”), often quoted by Baḥya ben Asher.³⁰

Ritualistic Meals and Instrumental Corporeality in Baḥya’s Writings

Since, as we have stated, Baḥya’s system is (almost) entirely organized and structured according to halakhah and the lifecycle it dictates, fasting is only an aspect of religious devotion. A diametrically opposed ritual—feasting—drew much of Baḥya’s attention in several key discussions. Baḥya wrote extensively concerning the command to feast on mandated occasions. He also wrote extensively about various forms of spiritual, mystical, and eschatological forms of consumption, as will be discussed below. Here we are interested in his understanding of the role of eating, which sheds more light on the complex anthropology and transformation—the reversal or inversion—that occurs within the individual. While the advanced stages of apothotic perfection include the consumption of the divine light, we will examine the earlier stages, in which the individual is to partake in ritual feasting to induce the initial steps of spiritual transformation. The commandment to consume earthly nutrition during specific ritualized occasions is related to the loosening of the ties between the animalistic soul and the body. While in the advanced forms of feasting, not to be discussed here, the soul feasts directly upon the spiritual and divine realms, in the previous stages of this

30 On Ibn Paquda’s inner religiosity and its sources, see in detail Amos Goldreich, “Possible Arabic Sources of the Distinction between ‘Duties of the Heart’ and ‘Duties of the Limbs,’” in *Studies in Hebrew and Arabic in Memory of Dov Eron [=Te’uda 6]*, ed. A. Dotan (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1988), 179–208; Omer Michaelis, “Fashioning the ‘Inner’ (Bāṭin) in Baḥya ibn Paquda’s Duties of the Hearts,” *Harvard Theological Review* (forthcoming). See also Kenter’s interesting proposal regarding Baḥya ben Asher’s usage of the term “bread”: “For Baḥya, the table serves as a spiritual battleground at which one wages a holy war and effects forgiveness of sin. He plays on the pun between *leḥem*, “bread” or food in general, and the Hebrew noun for war, *milḥamah* and the verb “to wage war,” *laḥam* [*Shulḥan shel Arba’*, 460]. Directed internally against one’s animal desires these holy wars strikingly parallel the idea in Islam of the greater *jihad*” (Barry Allen Kenter, “Table for One or Shulḥan Ihu ‘Iqra: The Medieval Jewish Table” [PhD diss., JTS NY, 2014], 149).

transformation the balance between the soul and the body shifts toward the ascendancy of the soul over the body. Like fasting on specific occasions, ritualistic feasting of material food is a component of the regulation of eating. Corporeal eating is aimed at awakening joy in the soul, which — when combined with the correct intention — can lead to the mystical state of the indwelling of the holy spirit.

In his commentary on the Torah, Baḥya examines the transformative potential of ritual feasting as part of his commentary on two biblical feasts: Isaac's feast before his death (Gen. 27:4) and Jethro's feast celebrating his conversion (Ex. 18:12), which served as ideals for halakhically-mandated celebratory meals. Baḥya discusses the *se'udat mišvah* (a commanded meal), a traditional meal that accompanies the performance of specific commandments or on scheduled occasions such as the Sabbath and festivals.³¹ Both discussions are partially based upon a rather lengthy quote from Solomon b. Aderet's commentary on talmudic aggadot (BT Baba Batra 74b) in which he offers a commentary on Genesis 1:23.³² Baḥya quoted

31 For a review of *se'udot mitzvah* in Judaism and some of the customs associated with them, see Joel Hecker and Barry Dov Walfish, s.v. "Meal Customs [VI. Judaism]," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. C.M. Furey et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020), vol. 18, 227-230.

32 Additional evidence of special interest in this specific part of Rashba's commentary was preserved in a copy of this section solely in Ms. Paris, BNF Hebr. 416, fols. 171a-176b. On Rashba's commentary on talmudic aggadot, see Joseph Perles, *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth* (Breslau: Verlag der Schletter'schen Buchhandlung [H. Skutsch], 1863), 54-57, 24*-56*; Gustav Karpeles, *Geschichte der Jüdischen Literatur*, vol. II (Berlin: Verlag von M. Poppelauer, 1909), 38; Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky, "Yedaiah Hapenini and His Commentary on Aggadah," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann*, ed. R. Loewe and S. Stein (Alabama: University of Alabama Press [in association with the Institute of Jewish Studies, London], 1980), 72 (Hebrew section); Marc Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis: A Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Aggadah* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), according to index, 288, s.v. "Solomon ibn Aderet (Rashba): *Hiddushim* (Novellae) on Talmudic aggadot"; Carmi Horowitz, "Kabbalah and Philosophy in Rashba's Commentary to the Aggadah," *Daat* 18 (1987): 15-25 (Hebrew); idem, "Aggadic Interpretation in the Derashot of Rabbi Joshua Ibn Shu'eib," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 5 (1986): 31, n. 70 (Hebrew); Benjamin Ish-Shalom, "Tannin, Leviathan, Naḥash — on the Meaning of a Legendary Motif," *Daat* 19 (1987): 88-92; Abraham Elqayam, "Between Referentialism and Performativism: Two Approaches in Understanding the Kabbalistic Symbol," *Daat* 24 (1990): 21-22, n. 54; Dov Schwartz, "Rationalism and Conservatism," *Daat* 32/33 (1994):

from his teacher with minor – yet meaningful – changes, which we shall address.³³ In his first discussion Bahya quoted a portion of his teacher’s commentary without significant alterations:

My great teacher Rabbi Solomon [b. Aderet], may the merciful one safeguard him,³⁴ explained that the subject of this midrash: the meal for the righteous in the world to come, should not be distanced from the simple meaning of the words that our sages received in midrashim and aggadot [...] And the ultimate intention (*takhlit ha-kavvanah*) in this meal is not that of food and drink alone, to fill the stomach and satisfy the body and throat, for this is not the matter of the world to come. Rather, it is known that *through the cause (sibat) of food and drink the potencies of the body will be aroused, and through the arousal of the corporeal potencies, the potencies of the soul will be aroused toward any matter that he will concentrate (she-yekhaven) upon and be able to draw down [its essence] and direct it.* For food and drink are great causes of joy (*le-simhat*

144, 154-156, 170-172; Jacob Elbaum, *Medieval Perspectives on Aggadah and Midrash* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2000), 182-192 (Hebrew); Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Talmudic Commentary in Europe and North Africa: Literary History, Part Two: 1200-1400* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), 61-64 (Hebrew); *Hidushei haRashba al haSha”s / Perushei haHaggadot*, ed. Aryeh Leib Feldman (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2008), 5-21; David Horwitz, “The Role of Philosophy and Kabbalah in the Works of Rashba” (MA thesis, Yeshiva University, 1986), 73-81, 89-101; Harvey J. Hames, “It Takes Three to Tango: Ramon Llull, Solomon ibn Adret and Alfonso of Valladolid Debate the Trinity,” *Medieval Encounters* 15 (2009): 211, n. 10, 213, n. 12. Cf. Yair Lorberbaum, “R. Shlomo ibn Adret’s Treatise against the Christians: A Reevaluation,” *Zion* LXXXIV (2019): 62, n. 16, 64, n. 24. Recently, Yair Lorberbaum published a series of new studies on ibn Aderet, dedicated mainly to the status of the commandments in his worldview, as part of a comprehensive forthcoming study on his character and writings.

33 On the relationship between Bahya and Rashba, see Jacob Reifmann, “Toledot Rabbenu Bahya [with comments to notes by Yehuda Leib Fishman Maimon],” in *Aluma: Ma’asaf haAguda leMada’ei haYahadut*, ed. B. M. Levin (Jerusalem, 1936), 70, 82-83, nn. 37-39; Gottlieb, *Bahya*, 215; Efraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, ed. Joseph Hacker (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1976), 260, 572; Herbert Millen, “Bahya ben Asher: The Exegetical and Ethical Components of His Writings” (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 1974), 21, 34-38.

34 On the blessing of the living here and the hypotheses related to the question of dating Bahya’s Torah commentary, see Reifmann, idem, 83-82, n. 38. Cf. Béla Bernstein, *Die Schriffterklärung des Bachja b. Asher ibn Chalawa und ihre Quellen* (Berlin, 1891), 28, nn.11-12; Chavel’s introduction to his edition of Bahya, *Be’ur*, vol. 1, 9-8; Gottlieb, *Bahya*, 168, n. 4.

ha-lev) and distancing sadness and worry, and, as is known, with the multiplication of joy the intellectual faculty, which is in the soul (*ba-nefesh*), will be strengthened and it will be more prepared to *apprehend the intelligibles*,³⁵ and as the matter with Elisha: “Get me a musician” (II Kings 3:15). And our sages expounded: “The *Shekhinah* does not rest upon laziness or sadness, but only upon something joyful.” And like the tasty dish (*maṭ’amim*) that Isaac requested [Gen. 27:4] and the intent was clarified “so that my soul may bless you” (*tevarekhekha nafshi*), he did not say “so that I may bless you” (*avarekhekha*). Like the matter of Aaron’s and all of the elders of Israel’s feast with Moses’s father-in-law [Yitro] before God [Ex. 18:12] and such as the matter of Samuel’s feast, as it is written: “a band of prophets prophesizing in front of him” (I Sam. 19:20).³⁶

In the quote from Ibn Aderet, two key features that are relevant to his understanding of eschatological eating and ritual feasting emerge. The first is that the food eaten by the righteous affects and stimulates the body, consequently stimulating the soul, which then allows for the intense concentration of human thought and the contemplation of “intelligibles.” The second is the ability to concentrate the powers of the soul, presumably through the powers of thought, on any specific matter while eating. It is plausible that this procedure may include an element of drawing down the overflow associated with the specific object of contemplation.³⁷ The mental activity enhanced by

35 This concept was developed by Rashba later in remarks which do not appear in Bahya’s parallel. See Rashba, *Perushei haHaggadot*, 93: “For the ultimate intention [concerning the festive meals] of enjoying the food and gathering of people to eat and drink together is only to draw the heart and direct the thought to the knowing of the intelligibles.”

36 Bahya, *Be’ur*, Gen. 1:21, 39. Cf. Rashba, *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, 91-93. Cf. also the anonymous commentary on the Pentateuch in Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Opp. 341 (Neubauer 1920), fols. 2b, 3b. On this text, see Moshe Idel, *Abraham Abulafia’s Esotericism*, ed. R. Haliva (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020), 339-340, n. 152.

37 It is also possible, although not specified explicitly, that this discussion may also be referring to traditions developed in early kabbalah and in the circle of Nahmanides’s students, in which certain foods were linked to their “roots” in the godhead. Thus, while eating the physical food, one was required, through mental contemplation, to cleave and draw the essence of the corresponding

eating is inferred from the manner in which Isaac asked Esau to prepare him a meal so that he may become a conduit for spiritual blessing through the activity of his soul. In other words, the blessing was not due to Esau's culinary preparation; rather, by eating the food, Isaac would be blessed with the ability to draw divine blessings downward. Bahya correlated the drawing-down of blessing from the supernal realm with the descent of the overflow that enables prophecy.

It seems that, for Ibn Aderet, the intellectual soul mediates the drawing of the spiritual influx to the human engaged in eating, or possibly to the object of contemplation. In the rest of his commentary, Bahya continued to discuss the verse from Genesis 27:4, but expanded it beyond Ibn Aderet's conceptualization:³⁸

“Then prepare a tasty dish for me ... so that my soul may bless you” [Gen. 27:4]. Isaac's intention in requesting the tasty dish was not for the delight of the body and taste (*hush ha-ṭa'am*), but rather in order for his soul to be joyful and delighted, for *through the strengthening of the potencies of the body the potencies of the soul are aroused*. And through the joy of the soul, the holy spirit will initiate (*tiḥul*), as our sages said: “The *Shekhinah* does not rest upon laziness or sadness, but only upon something joyful.” As it is stated: “As the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him” [II Kings 3:15]. *For this reason, the soul is mentioned every time with the blessing*. And he said, “so that my soul may bless you” [Gen. 27:4], “so that your soul may bless me” [Gen. 27:19], “so that my soul may bless you” [Gen. 27:25]. *And for what did he request tasty dishes to gladden the soul and not a violin to be played as the*

spiritual root of the specific food eaten. See Moshe Idel, “Keta Iyyuni le R. Asher ben Meshulam me-Lunyl,” *Kiryat Sefer* 50 (1975): 149-153; idem, “Sarid me-Perush R. Asher ben Meshulam me-Lunyl, la-Berachot,” *Kobez al Yad* 11 [21] (1985): 77-88; idem, “*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, and B. Kahana (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2004), 356 (Hebrew); Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), 293-295 (Hebrew).

38 Aryeh Leib Feldman has already noticed that Rashba's words here served as a source that was adopted and developed later by Bahya in his commentary on Isaac's feast. See Rashba, *Perushei haHaggadot*, 15, 92, n. 21. For adaptations of Bahya in later sources such as Menahem Ziyoni and Elijah ben Solomon Abraham ha-Kohen, see idem, 91, n. 12.

prophets practiced, for the future of his blessing was for corporeal matters: “Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth; abundance of new grain and wine” [Gen. 27:28]. And therefore, he wanted that the cause of joy be from the same type of matter with which he wanted to bless him. Behold, this is an example of what our sages stated: “For what reason did the Torah say: Pour water [onto the Temple altar] on the festival [of Sukkot]? so that the rains of the year, will be blessed for you. They brought the omer [offering] before me on Passover so that the grain in the fields will be blessed for you. They brought [the offering of] the two loaves before me on Shavuot so that the fruits of a tree will be blessed for you. All is measure for measure (middah kenegged middah), that the blessing will take effect through its same kind...³⁹

The effect of the meal is the strengthening of bodily potencies, which subsequently empower spiritual potencies. This spiritual empowerment leads to the indwelling of the holy spirit, which results in the empowering of the intellectual soul and concentration of the mind.⁴⁰ The indwelling of the holy spirit is not a form of mild inspiration, but rather constitutes the indwelling of the divine overflow in the human person. This infusion marks the reintegration of the individual into the Godhead, at least to an initial degree, allowing them to become a vessel for the divine indwelling.

A possible source for Baḥya’s interpretation may be found in Nahmanides’s commentary on Isaac’s feast:

As for Isaac saying that he would bless Esau after he had prepared the tasty dishes for him, that was not a reward or a recompense

39 Baḥya, *Be’ur*, Gen. 27:4, 233-234.

40 Cf. the analogical description of the theurgical effect of the sacrifices on the divine potencies: *Shulhan shel Arba’*, 492; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity: Ritualization of the Priestly ‘Torah of Beast and Fowl’ (Lev. 11:46) in Rabbinic Judaism and Medieval Kabbalah,” *AJS* 24 (1999): 250-251, 257. On biblical ritualistic meals and the institution of sacrifice as an event of encounter between man and God in ancient Judaism, Hellenism, and Christianity, see Andrea Beth Lieber, “God Incorporated: Feasting on the Divine Presence in Ancient Judaism” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1988), 62-66, 74-93; idem, “Jewish and Christian Heavenly Meal Traditions,” in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. A.D. DeConick (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 313-339.

for the food. [...] Perhaps Isaac discerned in himself (*she-hayah yode'a be-nafsho*) that following the meal his soul would be delighted and joyous, and then the holy spirit (*ru'ah ha-qodesh*) would come upon him, [as was the case with Elisha the prophet, who said], “Now then, get me a musician.’ As the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him” [II Kings. 3:15].⁴¹

Nahmanides interprets Isaac’s request as a means for receiving the holy spirit. The requested food is intended to induce the delightfulness and joy of the soul that guarantees the indwelling of the holy spirit.⁴² To return to Bahya’s quotation of his teacher Ibn Aderet, we notice that Ibn Aderet’s statement — “Through the cause (*sibat*) of food and drink the potencies of the body will be aroused, and through the arousal of the corporeal potencies, the potencies of the soul will be aroused” — is parallel to a similar expression used by Bahya in his commentary to the Torah: “with the strengthening of the bodily potencies the potencies of the soul will be aroused.” However, there is an important difference, as Ibn Aderet did not refer to the mystical embodiment of the holy spirit as a result of the mystical empowerment of the human potencies. For Ibn Aderet, the desired result is the empowerment of the intellectual soul and the contemplation of intelligibles, which seemingly refers to the channeling of blessing to the object of contemplation.⁴³ This is further expanded by Bahya, possibly following Nahmanides, who developed a typology that links between substances that induce happiness, such as music, and the objects of the contemplative blessing, leading to the indwelling of the holy spirit. In other words, the specific type of happiness is induced by specific types of consumed substances: music draws down prophecy, water draws down rain, the *omer* offering draws down an abundant harvest.

In Bahya’s writings, we see how the contemplative ideal of Ibn Aderet was transformed into a more mystical practice of drawing the holy spirit, in which the supernal blessing manifested in accordance

41 Based on Ramban (*Nahmanides*) *Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1971), Gen. 25:34, vol. 1, 323.

42 See Adam Afterman, ‘The Mystical Dynamics of the Holy Spirit in Moses Nahmanides’s Writings’ (in preparation).

43 See Ibn Shu’eib’s comment in the name of his master: Rabbi Joshua Ibn Shu’eib, *Sefer Derashot al ha-Torah*, facsimile of the Cracow edition (1573), with an introduction by Shraga Abramson (Jerusalem: Makor Publishing, 1969), fol. 10b.

with the devotee's intention. Ibn Aderet lists several more biblical feasts that demonstrate how these meals served the contemplation of the heart, including Jethro's feast in celebration of his conversion. In Baḥya's commentary, it is evident that he is following Ibn Aderet in his commentary on Exodus 18:12, which states: "And Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to partake of the meal before God with Moses's father-in-law." Baḥya comments:

This meal was made in honor of Jethro's conversion with circumcision and immersion in water,⁴⁴ as is the law of the convert, who comes under the cover of the wings of *Shekhinah* [*m. Kritut* 9:1]. Undoubtedly, that this meal for Aaron and the seventy elders and the tasty dish (*se'udat ha-maṭ'amim*) for Isaac our forefather, they have the same intent (*kavvanat aḥat la-hem*), in order for joy to come into the eating person's soul (*be-nefesh ha-okhel*) and the holy spirit will rest upon him, for the potencies of the soul (*koḥot ha-nefesh*) are connected to the potencies of the body (*koḥot ha-guf*), and through the arousal of the potencies of the body, then the potencies of the soul are strengthened toward whichever topic the eater intends, and this is the subject of the harp of the prophets that comes to arouse the spirit from on high to be on them (II Kings 3:15).⁴⁵

The body and soul need to be strengthened in order for the holy spirit to dwell and for the mind to be able to function with special concentration. In this passage, Baḥya further develops his understanding of the empowerment of the human potencies—the physical and the spiritual — and the embodiment of the holy spirit. It is notable that in this passage Baḥya does not explicitly connect the consumed substance with the resultant blessing, but rather emphasizes the reception of the holy spirit as the ultimate end—regardless of whether the individual partakes in a meal or enjoys music — in contrast to the details he provided in his commentary on Isaac's feast. This mysticism of the holy spirit — not evident in the writings of his teacher Ibn Aderet — presumably originated in the

44 Which, according to Jewish tradition, occurred at this point.

45 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Ex. 18:12, 164.

writings of Nahmanides.⁴⁶ Jethro's celebratory meal upon the occasion of his conversion, described as coming under the wings of the *Shekhinah*, may be understood as him embodying the holy spirit.

The link between the physical and the spiritual potencies is essential for understanding both fasting and feasting and their role in the path to perfection. Although the two practices could be considered as separate and even contradictory, the fact that the same psychophysical dynamics are at play, and that Bahya chooses to use a similar expression while analyzing both, might suggest they are interconnected and perhaps even complementary. If one accepts the assumption that Bahya deliberately linked the two as part of an overall mechanism of transformation, in which seemingly opposing practices operate in a synchronized and similar way, then the question arises: what exactly is their relationship, do they complement each other, and is there an internal hierarchy between them? In two respects, fasting and feasting may complement each other in the process of transformation leading to perfection: (1) both act directly on the interface between body and mind, as articulated in the formula "for the potencies of the body/soul are connected to the potencies of the soul/body," and (2) both are components that are organically integrated in the halakhic lifeform. Yet in his discussion about fasting, Bahya emphasizes that the fasting affects the soul's potencies first and only consequently the potencies of the body. The avoidance from drinking and eating during the fast is aimed at the animalistic soul, and so the halakhic practice is aimed at overturning this soul, up to a point in which the intellectual soul overcomes the animalistic one. In contrast, in Bahya's commentary on Isaac's meal, he uses the phrase in a slightly different manner, possibly because he is indicating a different stage in the path of transformation. In this case, the consumption of foods and other substances elevate and stimulate the intellectual soul, which leads to the channeling of supernal blessing, the indwelling of the holy spirit, and the inducing of joy. It is possible that Bahya chose to use this phrase and swap its order — in case of the fast, body with soul; while in the case of the

46 See Adam Afterman, "From Prophetic Inspiration to Mystical Integration: The Holy Spirit in Medieval Jewish Thought," in *God's Own Mouthpieces: Prophecy and Reason in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. H. Schulz (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr P. Siebeck, forthcoming).

feast, soul with body – in order to hint at the difference between these two devices and effects.⁴⁷

It seems that the fasting affects the human potencies in a preliminary stage, in which the animistic soul is weakened to allow the gradual shift in the relation between the two souls, while the feasting inevitably has more potential for the realization of the intellectual soul, assuming it already is relatively free from the negative effects of the animalistic soul. Ostensibly, the feasting operates at a slightly more advanced stage in the transformation process, when the intellectual soul is already empowered to the extent that it is no longer dominated by the animalistic soul. In Bahya's system, eating is a key feature of the advanced stages of spiritual transformation, which lead eventually to the eschatological eating of spiritual and divine food.⁴⁸ The feaster does not experience a physical joy, but rather a joy of the spirit – the empowered mind concentrates and channels the divine blessing into their physical and mental faculties and even into the surrounding participants of the festive meal.

While Bahya adopted from his teacher the understanding of such a feast as an opportunity to enhance the mind, he added a critical mystical component of channeling the divine blessing – the holy spirit – upon the individual:

It is only appropriate for the righteous person to direct his thought when he is eating to the corporeal meal (*ha-mazon ha-gufani*) by which he will sustain his body for the moment is in order that his soul will see its potencies and activate them. Thereby, it will attain the eschatological feast (*ha-mazon ha-nešhi*)

47 For consistency in the order of these wordings, see *Kad ha-Qemah*, s.v. “*kippurim (bet)*,” (Atonement [b]), Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Hunt. 103 (Neubauer 1284), fol. 120a; Ms. Vatican, Bibliothecae Apostolicae 274, fol. 52b; Ms. London, Montefiore Library 505 (Halberstam 334), fol. 87a; Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Hunt. Don. 19 (Neubauer 1283), fol. 80b; Ms. Paris, BNF 187, fol. 143b. And so is the wording of Bahya's commentary on Jethro's feast of conversion (Ex. 18:12), Ms. Vatican, Bibliothecae Apostolicae 171, fol. 429b (on the margins); Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Mich. 316 (Neubauer 275), fol. 137b.

48 The matter of mystical feasting on divine foods is highly developed in Bahya's thought, but it is beyond the scope of this study. Here, we have focused on his understanding of feasting on earthly food.

and be sustained forever. [...] ⁴⁹ as the organs of the body, which are the faculties (*keli*) of the soul, would receive power and strength in the feast and the soul would be aroused with its potencies in them, embolden them in this thought, and make it possible for the holy spirit to descend upon it [the body] at the time of eating. When he elevated that thought, his body is clothed in the thought of his soul, and the two of them are one for the *Shekhinah* to dwell in between them. This was the intent of Moses and the elders of Israel during Jethro's feast [Ex. 18:12] and, likewise, Isaac, our father, in the tasty foods for which he asked [Gen. 27:4]. And in all the rest of the places that we find feasts for righteous people — this was the purpose to which they were intended. ⁵⁰

The mental concentration during the feast is to be aimed at the realization of the spiritual potencies, leading eventually to eschatological feasting of the divine. The telos of “real eating” (*akhilah vada'it*) provides proper guidance for feasting in this world of physical delights. ⁵¹ The foods strengthen the spirit, which is then capable of receiving the indwelling divine spirit. The indwelling of the holy spirit is possible because the feast leads to the empowerment of the mind, which in turn leads to the clothing of the mind within the body. In other words, the intellectual component is rearranged in its relation to the body, which is clothed anew. Thus, through an inverse of the dynamic between body and soul, in which “the two of them are one,” the holy spirit may become embodied by the individual. It seems that the indwelling of the holy spirit, which—as it should be noted—is related again to the *Shekhinah* in this context, is within the

49 On “real eating” (*akhilah vada'it*), mentioned here by Bahya in relation to the “leaders of the Israelites” (*ašilei benei yisra'el*) (Ex. 24:11), see Gottlieb, *Bahya*, 43-44; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “‘Real Eating’: A Medieval Spanish Jewish View of Gastronomic Authenticity,” in *Authenticity in the Kitchen: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food & Cookery 2005*, ed. R. Hoskings (Totnes, UK: Prospect Books, 2006), 119-131; Adam Afterman, “On Mystical Eating in Early Kabbalah,” *DAAT* 90 (forthcoming).

50 *Shulhan shel Arba'*, 495-496.

51 On this act as part of the ritual of reciting words of Torah on the table, as an interpretation of *Mishnah Avot* 3:3, see: Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “The Ritualization of Scripture in Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher's Eating Manual *Shulhan Shel Arba'*,” *World Congress of Jewish Studies* 13 (2001): 4-10; Kenter, “Table,” 157-158.

intermediate point between the spiritualized body and the corporeally strengthened soul. The creation of this space allows the *Shekhinah* to dwell within the transformed individual.

The elaborate description reflects the prescriptive nature of the manual *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, in which Baḥya guides the general reader on how to dine in a halakhic context.⁵² While he hints at eschatological feasting, i.e., “real eating,” his main emphasis is on the sublimation of the bodily act — eating corporeal food — by harnessing the forces of the body and mind for the concentration of thought and directing it toward the eternal, spiritual, mental food. Thus, Baḥya concluded, eating is transformed into a “perfect act of worship.”⁵³ By comparing his exploration of the biblical narratives of feasting, which determined that this action could draw the holy spirit into the vessels of the biblical figure’s bodies and souls, with his corresponding discussion in *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, we see that this activity—and the entailed spiritual transformation — was possible for the contemporary diner as well.

52 On this feature of “*Shulḥan shel Arba'*” against the background of contemporary Christian and Islamic eating manuals, see the interesting observation of Brumberg-Kraus: “Meat-Eating,” 230, n. 7, 259.

53 *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 497. For various influential sources who have addressed Baḥya’s words, see Elijah ben Solomon Abraham ha-Kohen, *Midrash Talpiyyot* (Izmir, 1736), fol. 38b; Isaiah Horowitz, *Shenei Luchot ha-berit*, ed. Meyer Katz (Haifa: Mifal HaShela HaShalem – Machon Yad Ramah, 2018), 581. Also, see Louis Jacobs, “Eating as an Act of Worship in Hasidic Thought,” in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. S. Stein and R. Loewe (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 159-160; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “‘Torah on the Table’: A Sensual Morality,” in *Food and Morality: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2007*, ed. Susan R. Friedland (Devon, UK: Prospect Books, 2008), 51; Kenter, “Table,” 146. A similar approach is found in Ibn Shu'eib, *Sefer Derashot*, fol. 41a (Sermon for the first day of Passover), trans. Carmi Horowitz, *The Jewish Sermon in 14th Century Spain: The Derashot of R. Joshua Ibn Shu'eib* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 55-56: “When we do the *mizvot*, the soul derives great pleasure and at that moment even physical things, i.e., eating and drinking and other pleasures, become spiritual [*hozrim ruhaniyim*] and part of the worship of God.” See further: Horowitz, “Asceticism,” 31 and n. 16.

Joy (*Simḥah*) and the Bodily Performance of Commandments

Baḥya emphasizes on numerous occasions the importance of spiritual, in contrast to physical, joy as an integral component of the halakhic performance.⁵⁴ Admittedly, however, Baḥya enjoins the individual to moderate even permitted joy, experienced during the performance of a halakhically mandated act, since in the mundane realm even the righteous are not certain of the purity of their joy, and it is possible that the spiritually induced joy will be contaminated by a bodily one.⁵⁵ Baḥya highlights the vital role of joy in his explanation of the biblical verse “Because you would not serve the Lord your God in joy” (Deut. 28:47), writing:

[God] punished them when his worship was not [undertaken] with joy. This joy is a biblical commandment (*miṣvah min ha-torah*), it is commanded upon man for it constitutes complete worship of God, may he be blessed, [which] is more important than the commandment [itself]. However, we have found that the joy is forbidden by law in the Torah. This is joy in corporeal delights (*ta'anugei*) and their desires, for man is accustomed (*ragil*) to sin through them.⁵⁶

Joy is not merely a peripheral element of divine worship, but rather constitutes the essential element of such practice: “...more important than the commandment [itself].” However, it is important to distinguish between the joy aroused toward God and the joy found in corporeal delights—the latter of which carries an erotic connotation.

54 On joy in Baḥya's writings, see Azriel Shochat, “On Joy in Hassidism,” *Zion* 16 (1951): 20 (Hebrew); Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 159-160; Moshe Hallamish, “Al ha-Simḥah ha-Datit,” in *The Meaning of Life*, ed. A. Kasher (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad – Sifriat Poalim Publishing House, 1999), 223-224, 234, n. 11 (Hebrew).

55 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Deuteronomy 16:15, 346. Also, see Shochat, “On Joy in Hassidism,” 30, where he terms this type of joy “ascetic piety.” This emphasis on fear combined with joy is expressed by Baḥya mainly in relation to drinking wine, which is prescribed as an essential ingredient of a commanded feast, but at the same time may lead to debauchery and is therefore deserving of caution. For parallel discussions, see *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “*simḥah*,” 273; *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 471-472.

56 *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “*simḥah*,” 270-271.

While the former is praiseworthy and constitutes the proper worship of God, the latter leads the individual to sin.

Within the Jewish tradition, a particular time of joy is the eighth day of the festival of *Sukkot*: *Shemini Ašeret*. Baḥya integrates the inherent joy of that day with the festive, ceremonial meal that accompanies it. He writes:

One is obligated to rejoice on the eighth day of the festival [i.e. *Sukkot*] [...] This joy of the festival is not so that man will lock the doors behind him to his home and eat and drink all types of delicacies alone with his wife and children. For this is not the joy of [performing a] commandment, but rather the joy of [filling] his belly. [...] For the primary aspect of joy is that man eat and drink and feed at his table the wretched poor. [...] For the primary aspect of joy is only when there is an aspect of serving God, may he be blessed.⁵⁷

As in Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of *Yom Tov* 6:18, spiritual joy is not experienced in an act of selfish corporeal fulfillment; only in an altruistic act of corporeally satiating others does one experience the spiritual joy of fulfilling a commandment. From Baḥya's other discussions concerning festive eating, it is apparent that this meal is accompanied by Torah study as well.⁵⁸ As discussed above, the more advanced states of drawing the divine into the human are linked to the spiritual joy of partaking in the festive meal.⁵⁹ Just as certain substances stimulate the individual's intellectual potencies so that the

57 *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. "ašeret," 295.

58 See: *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 474; Baḥya ben Asher, *Be'ur Pirqei Avot*, in *Kitvei Rabbenu Baḥya*, ed. Hayyim Dov Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1970), 575. On the Torah as food for the soul, see Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Ex. 16:33, 151. On the meaning of "words of Torah at the table" in *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, see: Brumberg-Kraus, "Ritualization of Scripture," 1-17.

59 Cf. Fishbane, *Exegetical Imagination*, 160: "In articulating his ascetic ideal, Baḥye goes so far as to say that 'It is impossible for a person to experience the [true] joy of the soul [*she-yismaḥ be-simḥat ha-nefesh*] until he afflicts [...] his body' [*Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. "*simḥah*," 273]. This extreme position goes beyond merely limiting one's joy in this world. Indeed, it directly contradicts the Talmudic dictum examined earlier, which explicitly states that the *Shekhinah* will not descend to one who is in a state of sadness ('*atzvut*), but only to one in a state of joy (BT *Shabbat* 30b)." However, it seems that Baḥya's perception of joy emphasizes that the holy spirit or *Shekhinah* descends into the psychic vessels of the individual in accordance with the desired mental nature of joy.

mind will be empowered and invested with the holy spirit, so too certain visual stimuli may evoke memories that effect the same outcome.⁶⁰ Consider, for example, his important interpretation of lighting a candle, which often either accompanies some devotional act or is a devotional in itself:

It is known that the soul (*neshamah*) benefits when the candles are lit and she goes in the splendor of majesty and joy. And she disseminates and expands within the pleasure of the light, for she is a piece of quarried light in the light of the intellect (*or ha-sekhel*).⁶¹ For this reason, she is drawn after the light of her kind—

60 On the role of visualization of memories as a technique of inducing *devequt*, see Adam Afterman, *Devequt: Mystical Intimacy in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2011), 91-92 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, “Memento Dei’: Remarks on Remembering in Judaism,” in *Convegno internazionale il senso della memoria: Roma, 23-25 ottobre 2002* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 2003), 170-172.

61 Cf. *The Crown of Kingship* (“*Keter Malkhuth*”) of Solomon ibn Gabirol, with commentary by Israel Levin (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2005), 276: “And you called its name soul (*neshamah*)/The flame of reason (*esh ha-sekhel*) you have made its form” (translation based on Aaron W. Hughes, “Poetry,” in *Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Its Literary Forms*, ed. Hughes and J.T. Robinson [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019], 224). The use of the term “Light of the Intellect” (*or ha-sekhel*) to indicate the *sefirah* of *Binah* is typical of the writings of R. Ezra of Gerona (following Gabirol) and especially Azriel of Gerona. See Gershom Scholem, “Traces of Gabirol in the Kabbalah,” in *Studies in the Kabbalah (I)*, ed. J. ben Shlomo and M. Idel, 28, 58-57 (Hebrew); *Perush ha-Aggadot le-Rabbi ‘Azriel*, ed. Isaiah Tishby (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1945), 76, n. 6 (Hebrew); Oded Porat, *Kabbalistic Works by R. Azriel of Girona* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2019), 144 (Hebrew). Gottlieb emphasizes the absence of this term in most of the cases in which Bahya adapted Azriel: Gottlieb, *Bahya*, 20. This term is also mentioned in a context close to the above discussion of Bahya, in the “secret of the *menorah*,” attributed to R. Ya’akov ha-Kohen. There, however, it does not appear in connection with the place of the quarrying of the soul or the *sefirah* of *Binah*. See Daniel Abrams, “‘The Book of Illumination’ of R. Jacob ben Jacob HaKohen: A Synoptic edition from various manuscripts” (PhD diss., New York University, 1993), 373. See further R. Joseph Gikatilla, *Ginat Egoz* (Jerusalem: Yeshivat HaHaim VeHashalom, 1989), 180, 187, 262-263; Gershom Scholem, *Kitvei Yad be-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Hevra LeHotza’at Sefarim al-yad HaUniversita Halvrit, 1930), 58 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, “Me-‘Or Ganuz’ Le-‘Or Torah’: Perek be-Phenomenologia shel ha-Mistica ha-Yehudit,” in *Migvan De’ot ve-Hashkafot Al ha-Or*, ed. Aharon Zion (Jerusalem, 2002), 24, n. 3.

even though it [the candle's light] is a corporeal light and the soul is a simple, transparent spiritual light.⁶²

Similar to food and music, the physical light stimulates the soul due to its resonance with the soul's true nature—light. The term “light of the intellect” is employed to depict the actual substance of the soul, whereas, in the previously discussed passage concerning fasting, it was used to refer to the divine substance that descends and envelops the intellectual soul as a result of the transformative process in which the animalistic soul is subjugated to the will of the intellect.⁶³ The joy experienced through halakhic observance is a key component in the empowerment of the spiritual faculties within the individual, who is transformed to embody the holy spirit. In fact, “happiness is the addition of receiving of the holy spirit in joy.”⁶⁴ Joy, therefore, serves both as a means and a desired end of the spiritual path depicted by Baḥya in the chapter on joy in his *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*—a path that ultimately leads to a life in the holy spirit.⁶⁵

62 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Ex. 25:31, 282. Baḥya's words about the pleasure of the soul in lighting the candle were incorporated by Rabbi Yosef Haim of Baghdad (known as “Ben Ish Chai”) as part of his interpretation of the custom of lighting a candle during the *Shivah* at the deceased's home. See *Torah le-Shemah ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom, 2013), §520, 581. Also see Baḥya, idem, Num. 8:2, 43-45; Ex., introduction to weekly Torah portion of *Tetzaveh*, 293. On lighting candles in the synagogue and during *Hanukkah*, see *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “bet kenneset,” 89-90; s.v. “Ner Ḥanukah,” 267.

63 *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “ta’anit,” 442. For the full discussion, see above near n. 18. It should be noted that the indwelling of light or spirit is often correlated to the act of prayer.

64 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, opening for the weekly Torah portion of *Beha'alotcha*, 43-44. Cf. the terminology of R. Ezra of Gerona, who refers to the addition of the holy spirit as joy: *Liqqutei Shikheha u-Pe'ah*, Ferrara 1556, fol. 14a (*Perush ha-Aggadot*); *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. Haim Dov Chavel, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1964), 511 (*Perush Shir ha-Shirim*); idem, 530 (*Tarya'g Mišvot*); Yakov M. Travis, “Kabbalistic Foundations of Jewish Spiritual Practice: Rabbi Ezra of Gerona – On the Kabbalistic Meaning of the Mizvot” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2002), 133, 232, 25* (Hebrew appendix). See further Porat, *Azriel of Girona*, 166 (*Sod ha-Qorbanot – Nusah Bet*). On revelations received while in a state of joy, see idem, 205, n. 570; Haviva Pedaya, “‘Possessed by Speech’: Towards an Understanding of the Prophetic-Ecstatic Pattern among Early Kabbalists,” *Tarbiz* 65 (1996): 589-596.

65 For the development of the kabbalistic “moral” literature in this direction, see Koch, *Human Self-Perfection*, 1-45. On the “light of the intellect” and drawing the

“Light” Foods: Some Distinctions Concerning the
Ontological Continuum between Refined Corporeal Foods and
Spiritual Foods

It has been demonstrated how Baḥya situated the partaking of ritual meals as a means to empower the spiritual potencies of the individual. While the food consumed remained corporeal, in contrast to the eschatological “real eating” (*akhila vada’it*), its effects were spiritual. Although Baḥya drew on Ibn Aderet’s commentary concerning the eschatological meal, he applied its principles to this-worldly halakhic feasting and layered upon it a mystical pneumatic element. In a lengthy discussion, in which Baḥya quotes almost verbatim the remainder of Ibn Aderet’s commentary dealing with the refined foods that were created during the six days of creation, Baḥya adapts the commentary in a way that attests to a further dimension of his conceptualization of feasting:

So it appears to be that the feasts of the righteous ones will be of the meat and fish created during the six days of creation for this purpose: the purpose of delight (*’oneg*) [...] And it is possible that such very refined foods (*ha-ma’akhalim zakhe ha-ṭeva’ me’od*) were prepared from the beginning of creation to multiply the intellect in nature,⁶⁶ as it is written, “that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom (*le-haskil*)” [Gen. 3:6]. It is also currently somewhat known the helpful drugs which according to their nature are useful for this. And like the matter that occurred with the manna, which is a corporeal sustenance that was given during biblical times (*be-zeman ha-Torah*) to the nation [of Israel], who were meant to know the truths and contemplate the intelligibles as separate intellects.⁶⁷ It did not have any excess at

holy spirit, see *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “*ašeret*,” 291; Afterman and Pinto, “Apotheosis,” 480; Adam Afterman, “The Rise of the Holy Spirit in Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” *Harvard Theological Review* (forthcoming).

66 Cf. Meir ibn Aldabi, *Shevilei Emunah*, Rive di Trento 1559, fol. 126a.

67 Here Baḥya omits a short passage from ibn Aderet’s commentary, in which he wonders how it is possible that food consumed through the human body can sharpen the intellectual activity in such a sublime way. He later responds to this through the commentary of BT Yoma 75b on Ps. 78:25, quoted below in Baḥya’s version. See David Goodman, “Do Angels Eat?,” *JJS* 37 (1986): 161-162; Lieber, “Heavenly Meal Traditions,” 318.

all to disturb the intellect, as they said, “It was entirely absorbed in the limbs (*evarim*)” [based on *BT Yoma* 75b]. And the sages expounded: “Each man ate a noble’s meal (*leḥem abirim*)” [Ps. 78:25], bread absorbed by the limbs. Already our sages noticed a hint to the sustenance of the righteous ones in the time to come,⁶⁸ in their statement in *BT Ḥagigah* [12b]: “The holy one, blessed be he, grinds manna for the righteous in the firmament.”

At this point in the lengthy quote, Baḥya skips a passage found in Ibn Aderet’s work, which will be cited here:

For we believe that the righteous will enter *‘olam ha-ba* with their bodies, and they shall be there in the manner of Moses at Sinai, or, if you will, in the manner of Elijah or Enoch, of whom they of blessed memory [the rabbis] said that their flesh became a flame of fire. And whenever the functions of the body change from one matter to another, (namely,) to its opposite, in any event, one moment will separate between the first function and the second.⁶⁹

Baḥya continues:

Perhaps the designated feast for the righteous ones will be at the end of the epoch (*ha-zeman*) in which bodily actions are accustomed for food and drink and after it this practice will be nullified, and they will sit with their crowns on their heads and

68 In Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Mich. 316 (Neubauer 275), fol. 10b: “L”H” (= *le-olam ha-ba*; lit. in the World to Come), instead of “le-’atid la-vo” (in the time/future to come). The same is found in Ms. New York, JTS 1012 (Adler 196), fol. 5a. The “le-’atid la-vo” version is consistent with ibn Aderet’s version in print and many of the mss., as well as the early printed editions of Baḥya’s Commentary on the Torah, such as Napoli 1492; Pesaro 1514; Rive di Trento 1559; etc. However, there are mss. of ibn Aderet’s commentary on the Talmud in which the wording is “*ha-‘olam ha-ba*.” E.g., Ms. Jerusalem, National Library 8°6593, fol. 4b; Ms. London, Montefiore Library 77 (Halberstam 74), fol. 30a; Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Mich. 295 (Neubauer 1587), fol. 60b. On ibn Aderet’s conception of the “future to come” (*le-’atid la-vo*) as an indefinite time, see his *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, 31-32, and 91, n. 3. But cf., again, the exchange of these terms, idem, 98, n. 101.

68 The section below is a paraphrase of Nahmanides’s *Sha’ar haGemul*. See Ramban (*Nachmanides*): *Writings and Discourses*, vol. 2, 533-535.

69 Trans. Horowitz, “The Role of Philosophy,” 93.

be refined from the splendor of the *Shekhinah* [BT *Berakhot* 17a]. This meal will be for them like the *Aşeret*,⁷⁰ however, this [the *Aşeret*] will be the pinnacle of the holy time and this [the meal of the time to come] will be the pinnacle of mundane time.⁷¹

This passage includes numerous elements, but of particular importance is the background concerning the Maimonidean controversy of the world to come and the corporeality of the eschatological foods, as already implied by the words of R. Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier quoted in Nahmanides's early letter to the French rabbis — "Before I Answered."⁷² For our purpose here, it is clear that both Ibn Aderet and Baḥya, who quoted him extensively, are following Nahmanides's understanding of the multilayered existence of the human being, their body and soul, and the corresponding multilayered ontology into which the human being gradually integrates.⁷³ This also corresponds to a multilayered

70 On the secret of *Aşeret* (*Inyan ha-Aşeret*), see the related sources collected by R. Haim Cohen, *Torat Ḥayyim*, Livorno 1894, fol. 4a.

71 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Gen. 1:21, 39-40, according to Ibn Aderet, *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, 91-94.

72 See Ramban (*Nachmanides*): *Writings and Discourses*, trans. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1978), vol. 2, 387. On the letter's historical and polemical background, see Nina Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia: History, Community and Messianism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 19-51. On the problems posed by the *Aggadah* for thirteenth-century Jewry, see Saperstein, *Decoding the Rabbis*, 1-20, cf. Jacob Elbaum, "Reviewed Work(s): Decoding the Rabbis: A Thirteenth Century Commentary on the *Aggadah* by Marc Saperstein," *Tarbiz* 52 (1983): 669-679; Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Carrer and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 78-85; Elbaum, *Medieval Perspectives on Aggadah*, 13-41. On Nahmanides's reservations about the corporeal character of these midrashic images in his later essay *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*, see Yisraeli, *Intellectual Biography*, 96, n. 74.

73 On Nahmanides's gradual path of transition from this world to the next as a way of purifying the body and reversing the power relations between body and soul, see Yisraeli, *Intellectual Biography*, 276, 316. On Nahmanides's perception of the "thin" or "purified" body and the continuum between "thin" and "thick" in his ontological system, see idem, 94-95; Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, 314-328; Moshe Halbertal, *Nahmanides: Law and Mysticism*, Trans. Daniel Tabak (New Haven: Yale University Press), 112-130; Jonathan Feldman, "The Power of the Soul Over the Body: Corporeal Transformation and Attitudes Towards the Body in the Thought of Nahmanides" (PhD diss., New York University, 1999), 195-268;

conceptualization of the foods one consumes on the path of perfection: starting with normal food, through more refined — yet still corporeal — manna, the primordial foods from the six days of creation, and, ultimately, divinity itself. Included in this theory is the understanding that even in corporeal foods there are differences to be found between each category, reflected in the basic halakhic distinction concerning dietary restrictions. In other words, some foods are considered coarser than others, while others are considered more refined.

Let us now consider the one paragraph that Baḥya chose to omit in his adaptation of Ibn Aderet's commentary. It is in this paragraph, clearly based on Nahmanides's *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*, in which Ibn Aderet correlated the most spiritualized eating with the ontological apotheosis of Moses, Enoch, and Elijah.⁷⁴ Baḥya may have omitted this passage for two reasons: (1) He may have identified the original source of Ibn Aderet's teaching in Nahmanides; or (2) he understood this paragraph as being theologically problematic. Despite Ibn Aderet's proclivity to allegorize in his commentary on the Talmud, the context of this passage suggests that physical eating may still be an activity even in the very advanced eschatological stage of the world to come.⁷⁵

Afterman, *Devequt*, 321-328 (Hebrew). Following Nahmanides, ibn Aderet perceived the human body as of special importance to the knowledge of the Godhead. See Yair Lorberbaum, "Thy Commandment is Exceeding Broad": R. Shelomo Ibn Adreth and the Formation of Halakhic Religiosity of Mystery and Transcendence," *Jewish Thought 2* (2020): 304-305.

74 It is possible that this omission is only technical—that Baḥya may have used a "partial" version of Ibn Aderet's commentaries on the Talmud or, alternatively, that the paragraph was copied verbatim by Baḥya and then later omitted in manuscript copies and print editions of his commentary on the Torah. However, these options are not supported by any evidence from any of the extant manuscript witnesses and print editions. This conclusion emerges from an examination of all the relevant manuscripts on Feldman's list. See *Perushei ha-Haggadot*, 18-20. Regarding Baḥya, in the few early mss. of his commentary on the Torah, which are not based on print editions, the above paragraph does not appear. E.g., Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Mich. 316 (Neubauer 275), fol. 10b; Ms. New York, JTS 1012 (Adler 196), fol. 5a. In Ms. Vatican, Bibliothecae Apostolicae 171, the entire citation from Ibn Aderet is missing.

75 On Ibn Aderet's deliberation on this issue, see Schwartz, "Rationalism and Conservatism," 170-172; Ish-Shalom, "Tannin," 88-89 and n. 43. See also Ibn Aderet, *Perush ha-Haggadot*, 100. Ibn Aderet's position on this issue also served as a starting point for the discussion by Alashqar, who was also well acquainted with Baḥya's position on the subject. See Nachmany, "Al-askar," 313-318.

In this teaching, Ibn Aderet refrained from explicitly locating the point of transition between the types of bodily existence on the eschatological axis.⁷⁶ For Baḥya, the most spiritual and advanced form of eating—“real eating” (*akhilah vada'it*)—is a form of cleaving to the divine light that sustains the human. In such a state, the soul is the faculty that sustains the human through the consummation of the divine light. In this state, as Baḥya elaborates, the perfected individual has completed the apotheotic transformation, in which the soul becomes the dominant faculty — consuming the divine light and sustaining the body. Later on, Ibn Aderet raises another possibility, which in this case appears in Baḥya’s parallel discussion, according to which the same fine and pure foods that will be eaten by the righteous in the “future to come” will form the meal that reflects the point of transition into the world to come (*‘olam ha-ba*), presumably in the time of resurrection (*zeman ha-teḥiyeh*).⁷⁷ Seemingly, in different passages, Baḥya negotiates his independent understanding of the role of refined physical eating in semi-eschatological and eschatological states. The role of physical, yet refined eating of the body — which has transformed into the translucent body — remains part of human existence even in the time of resurrection, as was the case in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve’s sin.⁷⁸ However, in the eschatological stage of the world of souls (*‘olam ha-neshamot*),⁷⁹ and the world to come, there will not even be refined corporeal eating, rather only spiritual eating through the soul — the consumption of the

76 Baḥya expanded on the types of eschatological eating elsewhere in his writings. See especially Baḥya, *Be’ur*, Deuteronomy 30:15, 444-445; *Be’ur*, Gen. 5:24, 97; *Be’ur*, Gen. 25:9, 218-219; *Be’ur*, Deuteronomy 11:17, 317-318; *Shulḥan shel Arba’*, 457 (intro.), 509-514; *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. “*Ḥatan al ha-Shulḥan*,” 188; Afterman and Pinto, “Apotheosis,” 469-470, 490-491.

77 See Eliyahu haCohen Luantz, *Ma’agalei Tzedek*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Opp. 216 (Neubauer 1832), fol. 12b; Cohen, *Torat Haim*, fol. 4a.

78 See *Shulḥan shel Arba’*, 506-512, esp. 511: “the dead who are resurrected will in time to come return, to take delight in together in both body and soul, and the greater part of the pleasure will be the soul’s, the lesser part the body’s, as it was with Adam before the sin.” These discussions were partially adapted to the text of Job as a running commentary in *Sov’a Semaḥot*, Amsterdam 1768, fols. 8a-11a. On this book, which includes a reproduction of Baḥya’s discourses on providence and eschatology, see Bernstein, *Bachja*, 15-16; Gottlieb, *Studies*, 572; Millen, “Baḥya,” 11.

79 Also, the “bundle of life” (*ṣeror ha-ḥayyim*), as can be deduced from his words in *Shulḥan shel Arba’*, 511.

divine light. It is in the advanced stages leading to it, and in parallel to the existence of Adam and Eve before the fall, that a fine form of physical eating is available in parallel to the consummation of light by the soul.

As discussed above, eating, like fasting, is aimed at the soul. The corporeal consumption of various sustenance empowers the soul. Bahya elaborates concerning the different types of foods and their relevant effects: those that are finer are to be consumed in the advanced stages of the spiritual path. The finer the food, the more subtle its effect on the soul. Unlike the philosophers that considered eschatological eating as a metaphor for noetic contemplation, Bahya — following Nahmanides — considers this real eating (*akhilah vada'it*): the consumption of divine light. However, this transition is a gradual process: even when the soul consumes the light, the body may still sustain itself on refined, subtle foods. Although we have only focused on the understanding of the corporeal eating of physical food, and not eschatological eating, there is an entire range of eating of refined, pure foods that exists between the most concrete form of eating to the most spiritual.⁸⁰ The feasts are considered instrumental in their corporeal aspect, allowing a more powerful or heightened function of the spiritual faculties; as such, Bahya wrote more about the effect of the refined foods.

80 The mention of the foods that are “refined in nature” available in various configurations even in the presence, next to the kinds of food that reflect higher degrees of existence, such as manna or types of transparent eschatological foods, indicates the continuity that exists between them. On this continuity, see Bahya’s use of the phrase “from cause to cause” (*me-sibah aḥar sibah*): *Shulḥan shel Arba’*, 501, apparently corresponding to Ibn Aderet’s discussion quoted above, and cf. R. Ezra of Gerona, *Perush ha-Aggadot*, in *Liqqūtei Shikheḥah u-Pe’ah*, fol. 4a-b (quoted by Azriel, *Perush ha-Aggadot*, 15); This is a fascinating insight, since the interest of certain figures, such as Ibn Aderet and probably Nahmanides (who dealt with medicine—see the evidence recently collected by Yisraeli, *Intellectual Biography*, 28-26) in such foods, is common to the medical or scientific approach of studying human nutrition, typical of Maimonides for example. But for Nahmanides, Ibn Aderet, and Bahya, the study of human nutrition is not distinguished by a categorical line from metaphysics or theology. The foods’ ontological appearances are perceived on the same continuum with more concrete formations of being, such as pure foods, and may in fact be perceived as a particular form of edible divine light.

Fine Foods in Heaven and their Relevance to Our Worldly Meals

As stated above, for these kabbalists the manna was conceived as an especially refined food that nourished the entire body without having any wasteful elements, thus allowing the intellect to operate at its zenith. In contrast, other foods, which were coarser, did not allow for such mental activity. This is the context of ibn Aderet's interest in certain substances and drugs that would potentially facilitate such smooth digestion as to allow elite intellectual faculties to be effective. This distinction is also found in Baḥya's adaptation of Abraham bar Ḥiyya's *Megillat ha-Megalle* in order to explain the elevated existence of Adam before the fall.⁸¹

Adam consumed especially refined corporeal foods, in particular certain greens, fruits, and seeds; through a unique potency, he was able to digest these fine foods efficiently and smoothly without interrupting his contemplation. Baḥya referred to this as the potency of transmutation (*koah ha-memir*), which allowed refined food to be processed perfectly, thus allowing for eternal existence:

The potency of transmutation in the human body was blessed in order that man will have eternal life in body and soul [...] the holy one, blessed be he, perfectly gave his [the individual's] sustenance (*be-mazono*) the potency of transmutation, so that it may replace and renew in his body that which it lacks. [...] This blessing was in the sustenance of Adam before the sin and this potency will in the future be strengthened in man in the future to come [...] for the holy one, blessed be he, will embolden at this time the potency of transmutation that is in man so that it will

81 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Gen. 1:28, 48 (Chavel did not identify the source mentioned by Baḥya; see idem, n. 1). Cf. *Megillat ha-Megalle*, 55-56. The identification of Bar Ḥiyya's discussion within Baḥya was noticed by Guttman, "Abraham bar Chijja's," 453, n. 4. Jakob Guttman worked in collaboration with Adolf Poznanski on the publication of *Megillat ha-Megalle*, which was finally completed by Guttman's son, the scholar Julius Guttman, in Berlin in 1924. For several discussions in which Baḥya referred to Bar Ḥiyya's *Megillat*, mostly based on the forementioned article by Guttman the father, see *Megillat ha-Megalle*, XXV. For further adaptations of bar Ḥiyya in Baḥya's writings, see: *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, Lamberg, Lviv 1880, [vol. 1] fol. 113a (Breit's n. 27); Millen, "Baḥya," 27, nn. 95-97; Lipshitz, *Studies*, 16-17, 19-20, 34-35, 48, 77 n. 5, 260-262, 314-315, 322, 463-464.

replace the food and prepare (*mevashel*) it and there will neither be any waste nor preserves.⁸²

The potency of transmutation explains the existence of Adam prior to the fall, in which the soul was the dominant faculty, but the body still functioned and consumed the fine vegetarian food. The shift in the dynamic between the body and soul that occurred with the fall of Adam marked the eventual death of the body and the degradation of eating.⁸³ The fall of Adam is exemplified in the fallen state of eating and the consumption of meat.

In continuation of the passage quoted from Bar Ḥiyya, Baḥya expands further and refers to the vegetarian diet that was provided to Adam, the fall to carnism after the flood, and the limitations that were introduced in order to regulate the ingesting of meat:

It was decreed upon man that his sustenance will be fruits and seeds, and not flesh of animals (*ba'alei ḥayyim*), for he [God] did not want to permit flesh of a moveable soul (*nefesh ha-tenu'ah*). Why⁸⁴ did he not permit the food of the flesh? For a moveable soul has a bit of a transcendence in it, being similar to an intellectual soul. [...] When the animals (*ba'alei nefesh ha-tenu'ah*) of the antediluvian generation sinned and corrupted (*hesh'hitu*) their path [...] then it was permitted to slaughter (*lishḥot*) and eat [them]. For they exist only for him [human beings]. Even so, he [God] did not give permission for the soul and, therefore, he prohibited the eating of a limb from a living being. For he did not permit the soul only the body. He also prohibited the blood, for it is the substance of the soul [see Deut. 12:23].⁸⁵

82 Baḥya, *ibid.*; *Megillat ha-Megalle*, 56.

83 E.g., Baḥya, *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 510; *idem*, *Be'ur*, Gen. 2:15, 69. On Adam's sin according to Baḥya, see further: Maurizio Mottolese, *La via della Qabbalah: esegesi e mistica nel Commento alla Torah di Rabbi Baḥya ben Aser*, introduction by Moshe Idel (Bologna: Il mulino, 2004), 122-123; Afterman and Pinto, "Apotheosis," esp. 468-471.

84 Henceforth is a paraphrase on Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Gen. 1:29, trans. Chavel, vol. 1, 57. See further Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Does God care what we eat? Jewish Theologies of Food and Reverence for Life," in *Food and Judaism [=Studies in Jewish Civilization 15 (2005)]*, ed. L.J. Greenspoon, R.A. Simkins and G. Shapiro, 121-123.

85 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Gen. 1:28, 49. See also the quote from Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:2, in Baḥya, *idem*, Gen. 3:5, 77.

The primordial vegetarian diet was based upon these especially refined foods that supported enhanced mental concentration and contemplation.⁸⁶ Adam's fall and the subsequent degeneration of human civilization, which reached a nadir in the antediluvian period, also impacted the animal kingdom according to Jewish tradition. This new low point allowed for the consumption of this coarser food, but even this allotment had limitations. For example, the individual was not to consume the parts of the animal associated with the soul (i.e., its blood). These limitations, regulated through the laws of *kashrut*, served as a form of mild asceticism that led eventually to the internal shift in the individual, making room for the indwelling of the holy spirit.⁸⁷ As part of his theory of how various foods impact and affect the intellectual soul, Bahya explained that the eating of meat was

- 86 See in this context the saying brought by R. Judah ben Solomon Canpanton in the name of his teacher, the *Ritba* (R. Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli), according to which Adam was actually allowed to eat from the tree of knowledge as long as the eating was intended to serve his soul and not the pleasure of his body: *Arba'ah Qinyanim*, ed. Moshe Yehudah Blau (Brooklyn: M.Y. Blau, 1997), 28-29; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Judah ben Solomon Canpanton's *Leqah Tov*: Annotated Edition and Introduction," *Kabbalah* 43 (2019): 33, n. 32, 71-73. This ideal eating is described as a "way of sacrifice" and is identified with the verse "the righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul" (Prov. 13:15).
- 87 Bahya interpreted various aspects of the laws of *kashrut*. For his remarks on the subject, mainly from the point of view of *kashrut* as a halakhic means designed to restrain the desires of the animalistic soul and make man a vessel of holiness, see: Bahya, *Be'ur*, Lev. 11:43-44, 464-468. Cf. *Shulhan shel Arba'*, 461, 472; Bahya, *Be'ur*, Ex. 22:30, 238; Ex. 23:19, 242. It should be noted that some of his interpretations (based on his predecessors) regarding this subject, such as the prohibition to eat the limb of a live animal or to mix milk and meat, were quoted in later generations. See David ben Aryeh Leib of Lida, *Sefer Ir Miqlat*, Dyhernfurth 1690, fols. 44b, 15a; Ze'ev Gries, *Conduct Literature (Regimen Vitae): Its History and Place in the Life of Beshtian Hasidism* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989), 82, n. 137. On some of Bahya's sources in this regard, see Elijah Judah Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition: Attitudes and Relationships* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), 216. For an up-to-date review of the various positions regarding the reasons of the *mišvot* associated with eating meat in some of Bahya's contemporaries, see Leore Sachs-Shmueli, "The Rationale of the Negative Commandments by R. Joseph Hamadan: A Critical Edition and Study of Taboo in the Time of the Composition of the Zohar" (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2018), vol. 1, 198-201. And see the following note.

permitted only as a means intended to serve the intellectual soul *in actu*.⁸⁸

A man must direct his thought (*le-hitkaven*) when eating. This is a great benefit for the purpose of his intention (*kavanato*), that he return [his intention] to the thin (*ha-daqim*) foods, for, according to their thinness, the intellect will be purified, and heart become wise. One should beware coarse (*ha-gasim*) foods, for the potency of the intellect is thickened (*yit'abeh*) by them and its clarity and refinement will be corrupted. [...] for the intellect is sharpened and refined according to the delicateness of the food and its refinement.⁸⁹ [...] It is necessary that you consider that it was proper for man's sustenance to be

- 88 On this conception in Bahya and some of his contemporaries, see in detail: Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating," 227-262. A similar approach appears in Joseph Gikatilla, *Gates of Light*, translated with an introduction by Avi Weinstein, a foreword by Arthur Hertzberg, and a historical introduction by Moshe Idel (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 250-252. And see Ronit Meroz, "Selections from Ephraim Penzner: Luria's Sermon in Jerusalem and the Kavanah in Taking Food," in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism - Lurianic Kabbalah [=Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 10]*, ed. R. Elijor and J. Dan (Jerusalem, 1992), 233 (Hebrew); Brumberg-Kraus, "Does God Care," 124-125; Joel Hecker, *Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 95-97. See also Gikatilla's *Hassagot* on Maimonides Guide of the Perplexed, in: *She'elot lehaHacham Shaul haCohen* (Venice, 1574), 28b. Partially common approaches were also preserved in (1) the anonymous *Iggeret ha-Qodesh: The Holy Letter: A Study in Jewish Sexual Morality*, translated and with an introduction by Seymour J. Cohen (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1993), 120-126. See David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 105-106; Monford Harris, *Marriage as Metaphysics: A Study of the "Iggereth haKodesh,"* *HUCA* 33 (1962): 203; Beumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating," 251, n. 59; Emma Abate, "Postscriptum: dieta e preghiera per favorire il *hibbur*," *Materia Giudaica* 24 (2019): 106; (2) In R. Joseph Angelet, *Kupat Ha-Rochlin*, Ms. Oxford, the Bodleian Libraries, Opp. 228 (Neubauer 1618), fol. 65a; And (3) *Sefer Masoret ha-Berit*, see Gershom Scholem, "Sefer Massoret ha-Berit by Rabbi David ben Abraham ha-Lavan," *Kobez Al Yad* 1 (11) (1936): 37; Meroz, idem, 233, n. 55; Gershom Scholem, "David ben Abraham ha-labhan: ein unbekannter jüdischer Mystiker," in *Occident and Orient: Studies in Honor of Haham Dr. Moses Gaster's 80th Birthday*, ed. B. Schindler in collaboration with A. Marmorstein (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1936), 504-507.
- 89 In the version quoted by Isaiah Horowitz in his *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*, 591, the following sentence is added in parentheses: "Because the food will return to the body of the man who eats and they shall be one flesh (Gen. 2:24)."

vegetation, such as grain and fruit only, not animals (*ba'alei hayyim*), for animals have a moveable soul (*nefesh ha-tenu 'ah*) that is slightly similar in its actions to an intellectual soul [...], thus, Adam was commanded to consume the grain and fruits. [...] However, when all flesh corrupted their ways, and all animals deserved annihilation, and were only saved due to the merit of Noah, [...] then the moveable soul was permitted to be used for *the intellectual soul that serves its maker*. Thus, this is not to demean the moveable soul, rather it is an honor, status, and merit. [...] All who engage in Torah [study] may eat the flesh of livestock and fowl, and all who do not engage in Torah are forbidden from eating livestock and fowl [BT *Pesaḥim* 49b]. This explanation amongst the enlightened is: when we discard [one] soul for [another] soul, this is only a moveable soul that we consummate (*mekhalim*) for the intellectual soul. However, since he is an ignoramus (*am ha-areṣ*),⁹⁰ who does not possess an intellectual soul, then it is certainly forbidden to eat flesh.⁹¹

The refined foods enrich the body and thus intensify the intellectual soul, enabling it to perform in an enhanced manner. It should be noted that this discussion comes immediately after referring to the feasts of which the righteous biblical figures of Isaac and Jethro partook, discussed above.⁹² Thus, the refined foods are meant to be consumed at the ritual feasts aimed at enthroning the intellectual soul and directing its powers to embody the holy spirit. In doing so, it is permissible to consume meat—preferably small, delicate fowl, rather than beef—solely for this noble purpose and under the halakhic restrictions mentioned above. In any case, it seems that the mental pleasures will eventually evolve beyond the carnal delights into a vegetarian ideal: “But unique is the one who fears and delights in the

90 For a history of this term, and on the meaning of its present use by Bahya, see Brumberg-Kraus, “Meat-Eating,” 231-234, 252.

91 *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 496. For a partially parallel discussion, see Bahya, *Pirquei Avot*, 3:17, 588. Apart from the paraphrase of Bahya by Isaiah Horowitz (see above n. 89), the discussion was copied in full by Elijah ha-Kohen, *Midrash Talpiyyot*, fol. 38a-b.

92 See n. 50.

Lord (*yit'aneg al YHVH*) over a dinner of vegetables (*be-aruhāt yereq*).”⁹³ With this statement, he concludes his poetic introduction to the book *Shulḥan shel Arba'*. One may discern both the implicit affinity for the language of Ps. 37:4, connoting the sanctification of the Sabbath (*Qiddush ha-Yom*), and Prov. 15:17, entailing a modest and preferred vegetarian cuisine. The vegetarian diet reflects the mental dimension of the pleasure of eating, ideally linked to the greens, fruits, and seeds which were part of Adam's regimen before the fall.⁹⁴ It is possible that Baḥya is not only glorifying the ideal of ancient vegetarianism, but also implicitly criticizing excessive gorging upon meat, particularly

93 *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 460. We omitted the term “even” from the Brumberg-Kraus translation: “But unique is the one who fears and delights in the Lord *even* over a dinner of vegetables.” Cf. the same wording in idem, “Meat-Eating,” 231; idem, “Does God Care,” 120. However, the word “even” has no equivalent in Baḥya and seems to be an interpretive addition of the translator, probably against the background of Prov. 15:17 and Midrash Proverbs 15:1, which as he noted, was interpreted by Baḥya at length in his *Be'ur*, vol. II, 375-377. Baḥya's form of expression in *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, however, does not indicate that the “dinner of vegetables” is only relatively superior, but rather that it is excellent in itself. On this latter position, see the later detailed article devoted by Brumberg-Kraus to the subject: idem, “‘Better a Meal of Vegetables with Love’: The Symbolic Meaning of Vegetables in Rabbinic and Post-Rabbinic Midrash on Proverbs 15.17,” *JQR* 104 (2014): 46-47, 53-54. As he found, the “Meal of Vegetables” in Prov. 15:1, as in the Midrash on it, was interpreted by Baḥya in contrast to the *ḥamas* that caused Noah's flood, and, therefore, “The simple, small meal of vegetables reminds of us our true selves in right relationship with God, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, before the Flood” (idem, 54, although the use of the relative “even” is repeated here as well). Cf. Kenter, “Table,” 145. On the possible original meaning of “meal of greens” (Prov. 15:17) as a low-status food of the poor, see Brumberg-Kraus, idem, 47-48. However, it seems like Baḥya did not identify the fine vegetarian food with the low-status food of the “village people,” who, unlike the cosmopolitan people, “eat barley and onions, and the rest of the coarse foods” (*Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 476). If the vegetarian meal is indeed to be linked to heavenly foods, then consideration should also be given to the enhancement of the intellectual capacity which Baḥya attributed to such foods. Cf. Rashi on BT Eruvin 56b.

94 Cf. the abstinence from garden vegetables in several Hekhalot texts dealing with food restrictions for the mystic: Ithamar Gruenwald, “Manichaeism and Judaism in Light of the Cologne Mani Codex,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 50 (1983): 36-38, 40, n. 40; Rebecca Macy Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 144-155.

during Sabbath and festival meals. This insight connects to Baḥya's criticism of private feasting at the holiday meals, discussed above.⁹⁵

The intellectual pleasure that accompanies a vegetarian meal, on the Sabbath in particular — a time known for its extended meals—is consistent with some of Baḥya's discussions regarding the language of the abovementioned *Qiddush ha-Yom*:

Because the sanctity of the Sabbath day, the prophet called it a delight (*oneg*), as it is written: "If you call the Sabbath a delight" [Is. 58:13], meaning, a delight of the soul. For the enlightened and fearers of God delight in the matters of the soul and their intellectual soul will delight an intellectual delight (*tit'aden 'idun sekhli*).⁹⁶

The main goal of feasting on the Sabbath is so the soul may delight in intellectual activity. Indeed, in other discussions, Baḥya did not reproach the bodily nature of the extended physical pleasure provided by the meal, but even in those cases, he was careful to emphasize the spiritual nature of its purpose — the pleasure of the intellectual soul.⁹⁷

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed two seemingly opposed mystical practices — fasting and feasting. Within Baḥya's mystical conceptualization of the fulfillment of commandments, we have examined the possibility that fasting and feasting play complementary roles in the path to perfection. Both practices are

95 This is not a direct criticism leveled against certain rabbinic elite, accompanied by the glorification of the ideal of poverty, as we find, e.g., in the *Tiqqunim*. However, this criticism on the part of someone who introduced himself as a student of Ibn Aderet — who undoubtedly represents the elite and not a "secondary" elite — is a recurring tendency in Baḥya's writings and deserves a separate study.

96 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Ex. 20:8, 195. See also Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Ex. 20:8, trans. Chavel, vol. 2, 306, 312.

97 Especially *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. "Shabbat," 391-392 (as Chavel already noticed, a discussion parallel to that of Baḥya is found in Zohar, 2:47a), 397; Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Ex. 20:8, 195; Gottlieb, *Baḥya*, 158. The spiritual nature of pleasure also stands out in light of several discussions where Baḥya uses the term "delight" (*ta'anug*) to describe "real eating": the eating of the divine light. See above, note 49.

designed to affect the link between the potencies of the body and the potencies of the soul, eventually aimed at the empowerment of the intellectual soul and the receiving of the holy spirit. Baḥya used two key models to explain fasting. The first is influenced by a Neoplatonic anthropology in which fasting leads to the cleansing of the soul from its material and animalistic elements, thus leading to its temporary empowerment. The other, more complex theory views fasting as affecting both the potencies of the body and the soul — transforming, not severing, the link between the two. The transformation takes place by diluting the materiality of the soul, followed by the realignment of the animalistic soul and the intellectual soul, thereby creating a space for the indwelling of the holy spirit. The place of halakhah in Baḥya's thought produces a complex interplay between body and soul, corporeality, and spirituality.

This complexity truly comes to the fore in Baḥya's conceptualization of feasting. In his thought, feasting strengthens the corporeal elements, which in turn bolster the spirit, thus allowing for the indwelling of the holy spirit in the human body. The mutual dependency of the body and soul, the fact that they are intertwined and that their potencies are linked and affect each other, is key to the transformation, which involves several steps: the loosening of the soul from the dominance of the body; a gradual shift in the balance between the two; and, ultimately, the reversal in dominance that allows the intellectual soul to become the dominant faculty in the individual. The use of the formula by which he explained the effectiveness of the two apparently opposing practices — fasting and feasting — raises the possibility that Baḥya understands the relationship between the two as complementing each other; he considers eating in a spiritual context more advanced than fasting but depends on the power of fasting to generate the reversal mentioned above, in a path leading eventually to the eschatological eating of divine light. Baḥya's conceptualization of a soul made of layers, the lowest of which is a material layer that is intertwined with the body and generates what he refers to as “desires,” is the focus of his religious practice. It is the blurring of these elements that allows for the individual to ascend beyond their physical restraints and for the holy spirit to dwell in between and within the corporeal bonds of the human being.

