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Articles submitted for consideration should be in Hebrew or in English, and will undergo peer review. Manuscripts should be sent, as MS Word files, to: asherben@bgu.ac.il

Articles for the next issue should be submitted by March 1, 2022.

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English articles in this issue were edited by Sara Tropper.
Hebrew articles in this issue were edited by Avi Vengrover.

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of

Alexander (Alex) Goren

1940-2021

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Foreword

It is with great pride that we present the third issue of the annual journal, *Jewish Thought*, sponsored by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought, at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. This issue focuses on the topic of asceticism in Judaism and the Abrahamic religions. It consists of 14 articles – 6 in Hebrew and 8 in English. Many of the contributions are based on lectures on this topic given at the international workshop, "Ascetic Trends in the Abrahamic Religions in the 13th Century," that took place in November 2019, and was sponsored by the Israel Science Foundation, Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought and Center for the Study of Relations Between Jews, Christians , Muslims. The workshop was organized by Prof. Oded Yisraeli from the Goldstein-Goren Department of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University, and Prof. Avriel Bar-Levav from the Department of History, Philosophy and Jewish Studies at the Open University, both of whom were invited to be guest editors of this issue. We would like to thank the Center for the Study of Relations between Jews, Christians, Muslims at the Open University for its generous support in the publication of this issue

As in the case of the journal's first two issues, *Faith and Heresy* and *Esotericism*, which can be accessed at the following link: https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/humsos/goldsteingoren/Pages/Journal.aspx, most of the articles in this issue were written by established scholars, while some were written by young scholars who are at the beginning of their scholarly career. All articles that were submitted, whether from conference participants or not, underwent a rigorous selection process involving at least two reviewers.

Several months ago, we were all saddened to learn of the passing away of Alex Goren. Among his many significant contributions to Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Alex assisted his father Avram in the establishment of the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought. After the death of Avram, Alex, with the aid of his siblings, assumed responsibility for overseeing the activities of the center and lending invaluable assistance in times of crises. He will be missed by all of us. To his memory we devote this issue.

The editors

Sexual Desire in the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 6-36) and the New Testament Exhortation to Sexual Abstinence

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Abstract

This article claims that according to the Book of the Watchers in 1 Enoch, the sin of the angels is not only in copulating with the daughters of men, but also in bringing sexual desire to the world. Sex had already existed beforehand, but without sexual desire. This conception, which has parallels in the Qumran Scrolls as well as in the Pseudepigrapha, influenced Christian tradition. In the NT letters, the sin of the angels comes up several times, invariably in a sexual context, and Christian believers are presented as new angels who are called to put this sin to death. But the most explicit comparison of Christians to angels is provided by the synoptic Gospels: 'For in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven' (Matthew 22:30 and par.). The development of this Christian ideal is backgrounded by the tradition of the angels' sin in Enoch: instead of the fallen angels who left heaven and brought sexual desire to the world, the new angels will utterly abstain from sex and sexual desire, and dwell in heaven forever. Thus, sexual abstinence is conceived as a means to eschatological redemption.

Introduction

The Book of the Watchers (BW) is the first of five major sections which comprise the apocalyptic book of 1 Enoch.[1] Based on the biblical tradition about the fallen angels and their intercourse with women (Gen 6: 1-4), it describes the revolt by the heavenly watchers that leads to the evil and corruption of all men on earth and predicts their doom by God's judgment.

1 The five sections are: The Book of the Watchers (1-36); The Book of Parables (37-71); The Book of Luminaries (72-82); The Dream Visions (83-90); The Epistle of Enoch (92-105).

The affinity between 1 Enoch and early Christian thought is well known. As George W.E. Nickelsburg writes: "Because the early church arose in the circles of apocalyptic Judaism, the Enochic texts and traditions were known and significantly influenced early Christian thought. Sometimes the knowledge of specific text was direct; in other cases, the influence was indirect."[2]

In this article, I argue that the description of Christian believers as angels in heaven in the New Testament positions them as a replacement of the angels who sinned in the Book of the Watchers. Instead of the fallen angels who left heaven and brought sexual desire to the world, the new angels will utterly abstain from sex and sexual desire and will dwell in heaven forever.

The Fallen Angels and Sexual Desire in the Book of the Watchers

It is no coincidence that, although the Book of the Watchers describes human procreation and childbirth prior to the descent of the angels, it makes no mention of sexual desire in this context: "And when the sons of men had multiplied, in those days beautiful (ὡραῖαι) and comely (καλαί) daughters were born to them" (BW 6:1). That procreation is disconnected from sexual desire until the descent of the angels is also evident in the BW's description of the end-time. Using the Urzeit-Endzeit typology, it reflects the age preceding the angels' sin and descent as a prototype for eschatological events of the End. Accordingly, after the destruction of all the passions, humans will be able to procreate without sexual desire: "And now all the righteous will escape, and they will live until they beget thousands, and all the days of their youth and their old age will be completed in peace" (BW 10:17).

The story embarks from the premise that while the sexual act is natural to flesh-and-blood life on earth and essential for perpetuating

2 G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *1Enoch 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 82-83; E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), I, 9; A.Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 122-129; 147-159; M. Barker, *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and its Influence on Christianity* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2005).

human existence, its practice requires no sexual desire. The view that sex is strictly for procreation rather than pleasure was widely held throughout the Greco-Roman world. Thus, according to Plutarch (c.46-120 CE), men should refrain from "sowing seed from which they are unwilling to have any offspring."[3] And Ocellus Lucanus (5th century BCE) expounds:

> In the first place, indeed, this must be admitted that we should not be connected with women for the sake of pleasure, but for the sake of begetting children. For those powers and instruments and appetites, which are subservient to copulation, were imparted to men by Divinity, not for the sake of voluptuousness, but for the sake of the perpetual duration of the human race.[4]

This notion also finds expression in other pseudepigraphic writings close to the BW: God "perceived that she [Rachel] wanted to lie with Jacob for the sake of children and not for sexual gratification" (*T. Iss.* 2:3); "the person who is pure with love does not look on a woman for the purpose of having sexual relations" (*T. Benj.* 8:2).

The currency of this perception is evidenced by Jewish as well as Christian writers. Philo views sexual relations as justified only when there is hope for legitimate offspring: "the end we seek in wedlock is not pleasure but the begetting of lawful children" (*Jos.* 4.3).[5] Josephus reports that the "Essenes [or rather one group of Essenes] have no intercourse with them [women] during pregnancy, thus showing that their motive in marrying is not self-indulgence but the procreation of children" (*War.* 2: 161).[6] And Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215CE) writes:

> A man who marries for the sake of begetting children must practice continence so that it is not desire he feels for his wife, whom he ought to love, and that he may beget children with a chaste and controlled will. For we have learnt not to "have thought for the flesh to fulfill its desires." We are to "walk

3 Plutarch, *Mor.*144B (*Plutarch's Moralia,* LCL, II, 887-888).

4 Ocellus Lucanus, *Nature of the Universe*, ch. 4 (trans. T. Taylor, London: printed by R. Taylor, 1831, 21-22).

5 Philo's commentary in *Abr.*137 and *Sec. Leg.* 3.20 (113), and see further R.A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 94-95.

6 Wisd. 3:13; for more, see D.C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 199-200.

> honorably as in the way," that is in Christ and in the enlightened conduct of the Lord's way, "not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and lasciviousness, not in strife and envy."[7]

This idyllic state on earth dissipated upon the descent of the angels and their union with daughters of men. The angels saw them and "desired them" (ἐπεθύμησαν; ἐπιθυμέω [6:2; 15:4]). The text uses the verb ἐπιθυμέω, which in this context means "to have sexual interest in someone, to desire."[8] The noun derived from this verb is ἐπιθυμία, which pseudepigraphic literature and Christianity associate with sexual promiscuity and fleshly desires (ἐπιθυμία σαρκός),[9] in their negative sense. Desire resonates powerfully throughout the description of the angels, and all the verbs for their union with women emphasize the sexual aspect of this desire. While in heaven, they saw the beautiful women and "desired them" (6:2); whereupon "they began to go into them" (ἤρξαντο εἰσπορεύεσθαι 7:1) and "defile" themselves (μιαίνεσθαι 7:1; 15:3), and "have lain with them" (συνεκοιμήθησαν 9:8; 15:3). [10] It is noteworthy that all these verbs first come up in the story in connection with the angels' intercourse, not

7 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 3.7.58 (ed. and trans. Henry Chadwick, *The Library of Christian Classics: Volume II, Alexandrian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 40-92; idem, *Stromata*, 3.6.46; 3.11.71; 3.12.79; *Paed.* 2.83, 91,93,95; Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 29.1; Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians*, 33; Athenag, *Leg.* 33; Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.*7.133-37; A.W. Heth, "Unmarried 'For the Sake of the Kingdom' (Matthew 19:12) in the Early Church," *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (1987): 70; D.C. Allison, "Divorce, Celibacy and Joseph (Matthew 1.18-25 and 19.1-12)," *JSNT* 49 (1993): 7-8; Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet*, 99-100; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 355.

8 F.W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 372; W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press and Cambridge University Press, 1957), 293.

9 *GLAE*, 19:3; *Test.Reub.*4:10; 5:6; 7:4; *Test.Jud.*14:3; 16:1; *Test.Jos.* 4:6; 7:8; 9:1; and in the NT: Matt 5:28; Gal 5:16, 24; Eph 2:3; 1 Pet 2:11; 2 Pet 2:10, 2:18; 1 John 2:16; Rom 7:7,8; 13:14; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:5.

10 εἰσπορεύω - to go into, enter; μιαίνω.– to stain, to defile, sully; συγκοιμάομαι – to sleep with, lie with another. D. Dimant, *"The Fallen Angels," in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic Books Related to Them* (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1974) (Hebrew), 33-44.

before, presumably because, in the eyes of the BW tradition, sexual desire had hitherto been nonexistent.

The fact that the BW places particular emphasis on the sexual aspect of the angels' act and its attending sexual desire, as against the conventional mode of procreation before the angels' fall, lends support to my assumption that it conveys something new.

Likewise instructive on the angels' introduction of sexual desire to the world is the description of the angels' sin in the Animal Apocalypse, which was acquainted with and based on the BW.[11] Until the descent of the angels, human procreation is described without any mention of sexual desire: Adam and Eve, likened to cattle, gave birth to two sons, Cain and Abel; Cain, in turn, begat many bulls; the birth of Seth was followed by the birth of many cattle and black cows; and from the white cattle issuing from Seth came forth similar offspring – "one followed the other, being many" (85: 3-10), in an uninterrupted line. However, on the descent of the angels, sexual desire makes its first appearance, as the angels are likened to sexually charged horses: "And I looked at them and I saw and behold they all let out their privates like horses, and they began to mount upon the heifers of the bulls. And they all became pregnant and bore elephants and camels and asses" (86:4. Trans. Tiller, 235) [...] "And when I saw in the vision, behold, then one of those four of those who had come forth threw (something) from heaven, and they gathered and took all the large stars, whose privates were like the privates of horses" (88:3. Trans. Tiller, 251). In symbolic terms, the horse's phallus stands for sexuality, promiscuity, and prostitution.[12]

That the angels introduced the world to sexual pleasure is made explicit by what they taught the women. About the band of angels

11 On the affinity between AA (83-90) and BW (6-36) see R.H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch or 1Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), lii, 179-180, who points "to a close connection between the two Sections either in identity of authorship, or in the acquaintance of one of the authors with the work of the other" (179). He prefers the latter alternative: "similarities in phraseology and idea prove that one of the authors had the work of the other before him. Of the two Sections, there is no room for doubt that 83-90 is the later"; Nickelsburg, "Apocalyptic and Myth in 1Enoch 6-11," *JBL* 96 (1977): 393; Reed, *Fallen Angels and History of Judaism and Christianity: the Reception of Enochic Literature*, 80-83.

12 For this image, see Jer 5:8 "lusty stallions" and Ezek 23:20 "whose members were like those of asses and whose issue was like that of horses." See P.A. Tiller, *A Commentary on the Animal Apocalypse of I Enoch* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar Press, 1993), 240.

headed by Shemihaza, we are told: "And they began to go into them and to defile themselves through them, and to teach them sorcery and charms and to reveal to them the cutting of roots and plants" (7:1). And Asael taught them about silver, how "to fashion it for bracelets and ornaments for women. And he showed them concerning antimony and eye paint and all manner of precious stones and dyes. And the sons of men made them for themselves and for their daughters, and they transgressed and led astray the holy ones. And there was much godlessness (ἀσέβεια) upon the earth and they made their ways obsolete" (8:1-2).

It was the angels that taught women about materials useful for their beautification: silver, gold, and precious stones for jewelry and ornaments; minerals for eye paint; and dyes for colored garments. Namely, they edified the women on what may potentially tempt men and intensify sexual pleasure.[13] The inference is that such edification had hitherto been nonexistent in the earthly world, and was therefore an innovation introduced and necessarily taught by the angels.[14]

Likewise indicative that the angels introduced sexual desire to the world is the description of their offspring. They are the "children

13 Eye paint is mentioned by biblical authors only in connection with women of ill repute: Nickelsburg, *1Enoch 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 190,194. Sorcery is likewise associated with prostitution: Nah 3:4; 2 Kgs 9:22. E.J.C. Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and the Day of the End*: *Zecharia, the Book of Watchers and Apocalyptic* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 179, refers to L. Blau, *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen*, Strassburg I E 1898, 18, 21-2, 24, 51-2, who dwells on the connection between sorcery and adultery. Other examples are Mart. Isa. 2:4 and Epiphanius, *Haer.* I, 3. Colored garments of women "בגדי צבעונין" and pieces of jewelry which entice men to commit sin also appear in late Talmudic literature in a midrash on Šemḥazai and Aza'el: *Yal. Šim.* 6.44; *Ber. Rabbati,* ed. Albeck, 31; R. Martini, *Pugio Fidei* (Leipzig, 1687), 938. See also *m. Zabim* 2, 2; *Yeb.* 76a; *Ab. Z.* 20ab. According to Milik, the existing information about this midrash does not allow to trace its origin beyond the 11th century: J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch, Aramaic Fragments of Qumran, Cave Four* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 321-331; S. Spiegel, "Noah, Daniel and Job," *Louis Ginzburg Jubilee Volume* (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), 352.

14 See Pseudo Clementine, *Hom.* VIII, XIV: The angels wished to please their mistresses and showed them [...] all things "which are for the adornment and delight of women, are the discoveries of these demons bound in flesh." The effect of Asael's teaching is described as "godlessness" (ἀσέβεια), which can be used of sexual immorality (8:2; e.g., *Test.Reub*. 3:14). See Tigchelaar, *Prophets of Old and the Day of the End*, 179; Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum*, 1.2.1; 2.10.2-3.

of lust" (ὑιοὺς τῆς πορνείας 10:9),[15] from whom issued "spirits of lust" (τὰ πνεύματα τῶν κιβδήλων 10:15 according to the Greek^{pan}), or "evil spirits" (ጦናፍስተ እኩያነ 15:8-9 according to the Ethiopic version).[16]

In explaining the birth of giant offspring, scholarship usually refers to their origins combining "spirits and flesh" (15:10). Angels properly dwell in heaven, and humans properly dwell on earth, but the nature of the giants is mixed.[17] However, the birth of giants may also be accounted to sexual desire. The union between the angels and women, which was triggered by sexual desire, did not beget "beautiful (ὡραῖαι) and comely (καλαί) daughters", as did humans before (6:1), nor "thousand"' who are to end their lives peacefully, as in the description of the end-time (10:17). Rather, it produced giants, whose spirits continue to spread sexual desire and subject the world to ruin and corruption "until the day of the consummation of the great judgment, when the great age will be consummated. It will be consummated all at once" (16:1).[18]

Significantly, then, the angels introduced the world to sexual desire and taught the daughters of men how to enjoy sex and use it promiscuously. For the author of this text, the angels' teaching was the principal cause of distress in the world.[19]

15 In the Greek version of Enoch 9:10, the giants are bastards μαζήρεοι, namely offspring of an illicit marriage. D.W. Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Piest: The Problem of Family Purity in 1 Enoch 6-16," *HUCA* 50 (1979): 118-119; L.T. Stuckenbruck, "The Origins of Evil in Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition: The Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4 in the Second and Third Centuries B.C.E.," in *The Fall of the Angels*, ed. C. Auffarth and L. Stuckenbruck (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 101.

16 M. Knibb, *Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon 1978), 1: 59; 2: 101. The Greek sync reads "They will be evil spirits, the evil spirits which have come out from *the bodies of their flesh,*" stressing the affinity between evil and the physical aspect of these spirits.

17 Reed, *Fallen Angels and History of Judaism and Christianity*, 46; Nickelsburg, *1Enoch 1*, 272-273; A.T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (WOUNT 2.198; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 153.

18 1En. 15:2-16:1; 10:11; see also Jub. 20:5 where judgment of the Giants appears in connection with "judgments of Sodomites" and "their fornication and impurity"; M.J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1Enoch 1-36, 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 46.

19 Mollenberg, "A Study of the Roles of Shemihaza and Asael in 1Enoch 6-11," *JJS* 35 (1984): 137.

1. The Fallen Angels and Sexual Desire in the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Qumran literature lends additional support to the link between the angels' fall with sexual desire, notably the Damascus Document, which brings in the fallen angels as exemplars of "lascivious eyes," who acted upon their sexual lust:

> And now, sons, listen to me and I shall open your eyes so that you can see and understand the deeds of God, so that you can choose what he is pleased with and repudiate what he hates, so that you can walk perfectly on all his paths and not allow yourselves to be attracted by the thoughts of a guilty inclination and lascivious eyes. For many have gone astray due to these; brave heroes stumbled on account of them, from ancient times until now. For having walked in the stubbornness of their hearts the Watchers of heaven fell' (CD, II, 14-18).[20]

The scrolls, moreover, use "bastards" as designation for spirits ("the spirits of the bastards"), which can be identified with the spirits of the giants in the BW.[21] Similarly, they link them with defilement and fleshliness, as opposed to divine laws in the heart: "And through my mouth he startles [all the spirits of] the bastards, to subjugate [all] impure [sin]ners. For in the innards of my flesh is the foundation of [... and in] my body wars. The laws of God are in my heart [...]" (4Q511, 48, 2-5). "[... those who inspire him fear, all the spirits of the b]astards and the spirit of uncleanness" (4Q444, 2, 4), "and in the judgment [...] the bastards to condemn the flesh as guilty" (1QH^{a} 24, 2-3).

Also instructive on sexual desire in connection with the angels and their actions, as well as its novelty, is the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGenar), which provides the closest parallel to Noah's nativity story in 1Enoch 106-107.[22] Its account of the fallen angels, as in the BW, focuses on their sexual sins, causing Lamech to be concerned over the angelic appearance of his son and confront his wife Bitenosh on the matter. In a scene (lines 1-18) unparalleled in 1Enoch, she denies

20 English translation by F. Garćia Martinez and E.J.C. Tigchelhaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 1, p. 553.

21 P. S. Alexander, "The Demonology of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years. A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. P.W. Flint and J.C. VanderKam (Leiden: Brill, 1999), II: 337.

22 On how these two texts interrelate see Nickelsburg, *1Enoch,* 541-542.

sexual contact with an angel, and proceeds to persuade Lamech that she conceived from him. In so doing, she reminds him of the sexual pleasure attending their intercourse, invoking it as a newly experienced dimension. Significantly, then, the story's underlying assumption is that sexual pleasure does not accompany every intercourse, only this particular one, which occurred after the angels' descent to earth: "Oh my brother and lord. Remember my sexual pleasure [...] in the heat of intercourse, and the gasping of my breath in my breast [...] O my lord and brother! [Remember] my sexual pleasure. I swear to you by the Great Holy One, by the King of the heavens [...] that this seed comes from you, that this pregnancy comes from you" (1QapGenar, II, 9-15).[23]

2. The Knowledge of Sexual Desire is among the Mysteries the Angels Revealed to Humans

The angels are charged with revealing to humans "mysteries,"[24] namely secrets they brought from heaven: "You see what Asael has done, who has taught all iniquity upon the earth, and has revealed the eternal mysteries (τὰ μυστήρια) that are in heaven which the sons of men were striving to learn" (9:6). And to Raphael, God says: "Heal the earth which the watchers have ruined, and announce the healing of the earth, that I shall heal its wounds and that the children of men shall not altogether perish on account of the mystery (ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ) which the watchers have disclosed and taught the children of man" (10:7).

23 Translation by Garćia Martinez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scroll Study Edition*, vol. 1, 29. P.W. van der Horst ("Bitenosh's Orgasm (1QapGen 2:9-15)," *JSJ* 43 (2012): 626-627; and I. Fröhlich ("Medicine and Magic in Genesis Apocryphon: Ideas on Human Conception and its Hinderances," *RevQ* 25 (2011): 186-189), suggest that Bitenosh's "sexual pleasure" refers to her orgasm, an event during which she emitted her own seed into her womb where it mingled with Lamech's seed to form the beginning embryo and that this interpretation exhibits an acquaintance of the Genesis Apocryphon's author with Greek theories of double seed embryogenesis. According to this theory, both male and female partners contribute to procreation with their seeds. This interpretation doesn't take into consideration two things: the novelty and the uniqueness of this special "sexual pleasure," which could be remembered by both of them and its relation to the sinful angels.

24 μυστήριον = רזא here used collectively. There was more than one "secret." M. Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1Enoch* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 155.

What are the eternal "mysteries" that humans strove to learn, that the angels brought from heaven, and that, once revealed, served to augment evil on earth? The inference here is that these "mysteries" encompass all the forbidden knowledge the angels taught humans, which elsewhere the text makes specific – metal working and ornamentation (8:1-2); magical skills such as sorcery and pharmacology (7:1; 8:3), and divination from cosmological phenomena (8:3) – with the added clause: "And they all began to reveal mysteries to their wives and to their children" (8:3). Mysteries, in this sense – namely, secret knowledge hitherto found in heaven and made available to humans on earth via the angels – may well extend to sexual desire. Suggestive of this is verse 16:3:

> You were in heaven, and no mystery was revealed to you; but a stolen mystery you learned; and this you made known to the women in your harness of heart; and through this mystery the women and men are multiplying evils worthless upon the earth.[25]

From this verse, it transpires that this is a secret shared by men and women alike, and through it they will corrupt the earth. Of all the teachings of the angels, only sexual activity is common to men and women.[26]

The tradition whereby sexual knowledge resides in heaven may derive from the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, most particularly the episode concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil (2:9). According to the biblical text, man was forbidden to eat of the tree "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (2:17), whereas the serpent informs Eve: "You will not die; for God knows that when you

25 Trans. Nickelsburg, 1 Enoch 1, 267; see also A.T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6.1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (WOUNT 2.198; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 21: "worthless mystery" (16.3).

26 In the Greek version (16:3), we are told that the mystery brought by the angels from heaven "was from God." Nickelsburg (*1Enoch 1*, 267, 269) dismisses this phrase as "nonsense in the present context" and "evidently a corruption of μυστήριον ἐξουθενημένον (a worthless or despised mystery)." But the idea that sexual knowledge is a mystery residing in heaven with God is not so improbable and may derive from the identity of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:9). For ancient belief that sexual knowledge resides with God, see Gilgamesh Epic, I, iv, 29,34; Jas. 1:13. The phrase τὸ μυστερίον τοῦ θεοῦ: 1 Cor 4:1; 14:2; Rev 10:7.

eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:4-5). Scholars are divided over the meaning of this "knowledge." Some read it as sexual knowledge, on the grounds that upon eating the fruit of this tree, Adam and Eve discover they are naked and cover their genitalia (3:7). In terms of language, there is support for this interpretation, because the verb "to know" is sometimes a biblical usage for sexual intercourse (Genesis 4:1; 19:8).[27] Some reject this interpretation, arguing that the Genesis tradition has Adam and Eve involved in sexual activity prior to eating from the fruit of the tree. Accordingly, the knowledge within the tree of knowledge should not be understood sexually, but otherwise.[28]

Either way, it is clear that the pseudepigraphic tradition – as expressed in the Book of Adam and Eve – reads the story in a sexual context.[29]

3. The Angels' Sin and the Pseudepigraphic Tradition of Adam and Eve

The pseudepigraphic tradition about Adam and Eve has close ties with the BW story about the fallen angels, suggesting that both traditions may have drawn on common sources.[30]

Both traditions treat the split in heaven between two groups of angels – those who disobeyed God and their good and pure counterparts. In the BW, the disobedient angels, grouped around Shemihaza and Asael (Azazel), desire to unite with daughters of men and descend to earth. In the Life of Adam and Eve, on the other hand, these are angels headed by the devil, who refuse to worship Adam

27 See also 1QSa, 1, 9-11: "He shall not [approach] to a woman to know her through carnal intercourse until he is fully twe[nt]y years old, when he knows [good] and evil"; see Ibn Ezra, to Genesis 3: 5-6; L.F. Hartman, "Sin in Paradise," *CBQ* 20 (1958): 37-38.

28 These are among others based on Rashi's commentary to Gen 4:1 "Now the man knew his wife Eve"; Hartman, "Sin in Paradise," 36-37; For more on the matter, see D.P. Wright, "Holiness, Sex, and Death in the Garden of Eden," *Biblica* 77 (1996): 305-329.

29 For this reading in Christian sources: Clement*, Stromatta,* XII, 3, 81-82*;* Irenaeus, *Libri Quinque Adversus Haereses,* 3, 28, 8. See E. Pagels, *Adam Eve and the Serpent,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 27-28.

30 Suter ("Fallen Angels," 132) has dwelt on the affinity between the BW story of the angels' descent and the biblical account of Adam and Eve but has not dealt with the pseudepigraphic tradition of Adam and Eve.

after his creation in God's image.[31] In both stories, the fallen angels are forbidden to re-enter their dwelling in heaven as a result of their sin. In both traditions, heading the group of lapsed angels is the devil or his symbolic counterpart.[32] And in both traditions, human beings cause the sin of the angels and their expulsion. But most striking is their similar standpoint on sexual desire – that it has its origins in heaven, that it is a "mystery," that it is the source of corruption and evil in the world.

In the Greek Life of Adam and Eve (GLAE), Adam and Eve live apart – he with the male animals, she with the female animals – and their encounter takes place only after Eve eats from the fruit. The serpent, acting on behalf of the devil for the motive of banishing Adam from the Garden, persuades Eve to eat of the tree: "Fear not; for at the very time you eat your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil. But since God knew this, that you would be like him, he begrudged you and said, 'Do not eat of it'" (GLAE 18: 3). According to Eve's story, after securing her oath to give from the tree to Adam, the serpent climbs the tree and sprinkles his evil poison on the fruit which he gave her to eat. This poison, the text points out, "is

31 The story about refusal of the devil and his angels to worship Adam and their expulsion from Eden comes primarily from the Latin Life of Adam and Eve (12-16) but is also alluded to in the GLAE. See R. Nir, "The Struggle between the 'Image of God' and Satan in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve," *SJT 3* (2008): 327-339.

32 1En 10:4-6 and the image of Mastema, in the parallel tradition in Jubilee 10; D.R. Schultz, "The Origin of Sin in Irenaeus and Jewish Pseudepigraphical Literature," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 32 (1978): 174-175; D. Dimant, "1Enoch 6-11: A Methodological Perspective," in P.J. Achtemeier, ed., *SBLSP* 18 (2 vols.: Missoula, Mont. Scholar Press, 1978), I:327; P.J. Kreeft, *Angels and Demons: What Do We Really Know about Them?* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), esp. 53, 111, 116-18. For more, see M.D. Basil, "When Did Angels Become Demons?" *JBL* 129 (2010): 657, n.1, who argues that "angels became demons only from the beginning of the second century and only then at the hands of Christians" (657), and that "nowhere in the Enochic material are the fallen angels (or those 'Watchers' who sin) themselves said to be demons or even evil spirits" (667). Affinity also exists between the angels in the BW and Adam and Eve themselves, who before eating the prohibited fruit, were like angels in heaven: They had no sex, didn't procreate and could enjoy eternal life. Like the angels they also sinned and were expelled from heaven. On the similarity of Adam to an angel: 2En. 30:11; D.E. Aune, *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity* (NovTSup 28; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 40, 218.

his covetousness (ἐπιθιμία). For covetousness is the origin of every sin" (19:3).

This story reaffirms the sexual meaning of the "knowledge" within the forbidden tree. On eating the fruit, Eve immediately becomes aware of her nudity: "and I knew I was naked of the righteousness (τῆς δικαιοσύνης) with which I had been clothed" (20:1). Before she calls Adam and persuades him to eat of the fruit, she covers her nudity in recognition of the sexual dimension of her naked body (20:3). As in the BW, this sexual knowledge is described as a "mystery." Thus, after her eyes are opened and she discovers her nakedness, Eve calls out, "Adam, Adam, where are you? Rise, come to me and I will show you a great mystery μέγα μυστήριον" (GLAE, 21:1), and persuades him to eat of the fruit.

Sexual knowledge, then, is the "great mystery." And Adam and Eve's sin, like the angels' sin, is associated with sexual desire (ἐπιθιμία), which, in both stories, first appears in connection with sin and is perceived as the source of evil in the world.

Both stories are etiological narratives which were developed in the pseudepigraphic tradition to explain the source of evil in the world,[33] whether through the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden or the sin of the angels' descent and union with daughters of men. The two explanations sexualize the source of evil, relating it to sexual desire that, until the sin, was nonexistent on earth and is a product of either the devil or his representatives that was exported from heaven. Both stories interpret and expand biblical traditions but infuse their contents with new themes.

The tradition in the Book of Adam and Eve may therefore reaffirm not just the central role of sexual desire in the angels' sin but also its perception as a consequence of the angels' fall and the cause of evil on earth. Indeed, these two writings are dated to disparate

33 P.D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11," *JBL* 96 (1977): 218; R. Bauckham, "The Fall of the Angels as the Source of Philosophy in Hermias and Clement of Alexandria," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985): 314; D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 249-251; M. Delcor, "Le Myth de la chute des anges et de l'origine des géants comme explication du mal dans le monde dans l'apocalyptique juive histoire des traditions," *RHR* 190 (1976): 3-53. Irenaeus (*A.H.* 1, 1, 15, 6 [1, 8, 17]) fuses the two traditions, making the devil and his angels involved in Adam's expulsion from Eden to explain the source of evil. Schultz, "The Origin of Sin in Irenaeus and Jewish Pseudepigraphical Literature," 182-184.

periods. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility that both drew on the same ideological stream flowing from the pseudepigraphic tradition.[34]

4. The Tendency to Subdue the Angels' Sin

Sexual desire, envisioned as the source of evil in the world, is present elsewhere in the Pseudepigrapha. However, the tendency to hold the angels accountable for its birth and teaching to humans becomes increasingly subdued.

The Book of Jubilees presents two traditions alongside each other. One, according to which the angels were sent to earth by God in order to "teach the sons of man, and perform judgment and uprightness upon the earth" (trans. Wintermute in OTP. 4:15; 5:6), omits altogether the sexual aspect of the angels' actions, nor are these actions conducive to corrupting the world. This is in line with the Genesis tradition (6:1-4).[35] The other has Enoch testifying about "the watchers, the ones who sinned with the daughters of men because they began to mingle themselves with the daughters of men so that they might be polluted" (4:22) and God "was very angry. He commanded that they be uprooted from all their dominion" (5:6). And Enoch subsequently says: "For on account of these three the Flood came upon the earth. For (it was) because of the fornication which the

34 On the date of *GLAE*, see M. de Jonge and J. Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997, 77), who date the Greek version of the *Life of Adam and Eve* between 100 and 600 CE, and prefer to situate it between the 2nd and 4th centuries. The prevalent view assigns a much earlier date to the composition: D.A. Bertrand (*La vie grecque d'Adam et Eve,* (Recherches Intertestamentaires 1; Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1987, 31-32) dates the work between 100 BCE-50 CE; M.D. Johnson, ("Life of Adam and Eve," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* II, ed. H. Charlesworth [New York: Doubleday, 1985], 275), dates the original work between 100 BCE-200 CE, apparently towards the end of the 1st century CE; A. M. Denis (*Introduction aux pseudépigraphes grecs d'Ancien Testament* [SVTP 1; Leiden: Brill, 1970] 6) dates it between 11 BCE-70 CE; M. D. Eldridge (*Dying Adam with his Multiethnic Family* [Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2001] 20-30) dates it between 100 BCE-200 CE. For Christian identity of the composition, see R.Nir, "The Aromatic Fragrances of Paradise in the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* and the Christian Origin of the Composition," *NT* 46 (2004): 20-45.

35 On how the Jubilees tradition follows Genesis, see J.T.A.G.M. van Ruiten, "The Interpretation of the Flood Story in the Book of Jubilees," in *Interpretations of the Flood*, ed. F. García Martinez and G.P. Luttikhizen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 66-85.

Watchers, apart from the mandate of their authority, fornicated with the daughters of men and took for themselves wives from all whom they chose and made a beginning of impurity" (7:21). This tradition is influenced by the BW and retains the sexual aspect of the angels' sin, but, whereas the BW's sin originates in heaven, in Jubilees it originates on earth. On this divergence between the BW and Jubilees, Annette Yoshiko writes:

> Jubilees, however, progressively absolves the Watchers from blame. By depicting their intentions as good and their descent as divinely mandated, Jubilees characterizes these angels not as evil so much as weak and thus disobedient [...] (90) Recasts angelic descent so as to downplay the Watchers' role in the corruption of humankind, to assert human responsibility, and to demote the fallen angels from supernatural corruptors to fallible creatures, whose sins and punishments are comparable to those of humans (95).[36]

The tendency to subdue the angels' sin and impose the blame on humans finds expression in *T. Reuben* (5:6-7), where the blame falls almost entirely on the women:

> Accordingly, my children, flee from sexual promiscuity and order your wives and daughters not to adorn their heads and their appearances so as to deceive men's sound minds. For every woman who schemes in these ways is destined for eternal punishment. For it was thus that they charmed the watchers, who were before the flood. As they continued looking at the women, they were filled with desire for them and perpetrated the act in their mined. Then they were transformed into human males, and while the women were cohabitating with their husbands they appeared to them. Since the women's minds were filled with lust for these apparitions, they gave birth to Giants.

36 Reed, *Fallen Angels and History of Judaism and Christianity*, 90, 95; J.J. Collins, "The Origin of Evil in Apocalyptic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Congress Volume: Paris 1992* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 28; according to van Ruiten ("The Interpretation of the Flood Story in the Book of Jubilees," 82): "possibly the writer of 1Enoch 6-11 and the writer of Jub. 5:4-12 have taken material from the same tradition, but they reconstruct it each in their own way."

> For the Watchers were disclosed to them as being high as the heavens (*T. Reub*. 5:4-6. Trans. Kee in OTP.).

We conclude this discussion with the question: Why does the BW not state explicitly that the angels are accountable for introducing sexual desire to the world? The answer may lie in the attempt to obscure the notion that sexual desire and knowledge of its existence had their origins in heaven. If my analysis is correct, the BW presents a revolutionary stand on the source of sexual desire. As previously noted, the Pseudepigrapha, and later also Christianity,[37] subscribe to a negative view of sexual desire, as analogous to fornication and corruption. As such, its origins were ascribed to the animal world and the passions of earthly humans, in stark contrast to the holy, pure, and passionless heavenly world. The fact that the angels are the first to desire sexual intercourse with daughters of men, and are responsible for revealing to humans the mystery of sexual desire, paints a picture completely different from the widely accepted one. And in the BW, unlike the GLAE, there is no evil ploy of the serpent who, as an agent of the devil, casts desire into the fruit of the forbidden tree. Rather, it is a large group of angels from heaven that took divine secrets and transmitted them to all humankind. The attempt to blur this conception is behind the ever-increasing tendency to downplay the role of the angels in revealing sexual desire and reassign it to women, as apparent in later sources based on the BW.

The Angels' Sin and the New Testament Ideal of Sexual Abstinence

1. The Sin of the Angels and Sexual Desire in the Letters

In the New Testament, the tradition of the descending angels comes up several times, invariably in relation to sexual desire. In Jude (6-7), as in Watchers, the angels are charged with leaving their dwelling in heaven, on account of which God kept them "in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day." The epistle invokes Sodom and Gomorrah as comparable with the angels' sin of

37 GLAE, 19: 3; T.K. Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 211.

addiction to fornication:[38] "Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." 2 Peter (2:4-10) continues in this vein, making clear the fallen angels' affinity with sexual desire and reusing Sodom and Gomorrah as a reminder.

This affinity between the sinning angels and sexual desire is also hinted at in Colossians and Ephesians. In the letter addressing the Christians in Colossae, we read:[39]

> So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient [the children of disobedience] (Colossians 3:5-6; Ephesians 2:1-3; 5:3-6).

Of note is the phrase "children of disobedience" – τοὺς ὑιοὺς τῆς ἀπειθείας.[40] Defined as those disobedient of God, whose wrath will

38 J. Daryl Charles, "Jude's Use of Pseudepigraphical Source-Material as Part of a Literary Strategy," NTS 37 (1991): 135. For Sodom and Gemorrah as a symbol of sexual sin in the Pseudepigrapha: Test. Naftali 3:4; Test. Benj. 9: 1; Jubilee 16: 5-9, 20: 5-6. J.A. Loader, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Kampen: J.H. Kok Publishing House, 1990), 80-86, 122-124.

39 It is debatable whether Paul wrote Colossians. But even those who reject his authorship, point to the epistle's close affinity with Paul's thought. See A.Y. Collins, "The Reception of Paul's Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Letter to the Colossians," *SEA* 76 (2011): 21-39.

40 The phrase "children of disobedience" occurs in all manuscripts (about 200) of Colossians, except for B Papyrus 46. Some claim it was originally not included in the epistle, and entered under the influence of Ephesians. Some English translations omit it – RSV, NEB/ REB, NIV, others include it – GNB, NJB, NRSV. See arguments for its inclusion: J.D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Mish.: Eerdmans, 1996), 210; N.T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 135, n. 1; T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 281-282; M. Barth, and H.

come upon them, they are allied with a list of sins which are all sexual sins: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed.

Who are "the children of disobedience"? This designation is usually interpreted as applying to pagan idolaters, to whom Jews ascribed sexual sins.[41] I, however, suggest that this designation alludes to the fallen angels. In the New Testament, the word ἀπειθεία means disobedience (Romans 11:30, 32) and may refer to the angels in Watchers, who disobeyed God, left heaven, their spiritual dwelling, and copulated with the daughters of men, bringing sexual desire to the world. Consequently, God's wrath came upon them, and they were sentenced to life imprisonment.[42]

As against the children of disobedience, both letters posit the Christian believers who are urged to put to death the earthly organs conducive to this sexual desire.[43] They are called "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved" (Colossians 3:12) or saints (Ephesians 1:1, 4, 15, 18; 4:18).[44] The term "holy ones" is already applied to angels in the Hebrew Bible and 2nd Temple literature.[45] In Watchers, it applies to the sinless angels, who are called "holy" or "holy of heaven" or "holy of spirit" (15:4).[46] But it is notably the New Testament that links the title

Blanke *Colossians* (New Haven and London: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1994), 405. B.M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (Stuttgart: Deusche Bibelgesellschaft/German Bible Society, 1994), 557.

41 Such an interpretation may infer from Colossians 3:7 (and parallel in Ephesians 4:17-19), or from Ephesians 5:5. M. Barth and H. Blanke *Colossians*, 405; E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

42 C. Bigg, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 329.

43 Cf. Rom 8:13; Gal 5:24.

44 The holy ἁγίοι are Christians: Matt 27:52; Acts 9: 13, 32, 41; 26:10; Rom 1:7, 8:27, 12:13, 16:2, 15; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1, 2; 16:15; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 5:27; Philip 1:1; Col 1:2, 26; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; the saints in Jerusalem: Rom 15:25, 26; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:4, 9:12; the holy at Qumran: 1QH 3.21-23; 4.24f.; 6.13; 11.10-12; 1QS 11.7f.; 1QSa 2.3-11; 1QSb4.25. Christians are also the elect ἐκλέκτοι: Matt 22:14; Rom 5:33; Col 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; Rev 17:14. See Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 77.

45 Deut 33:3; Hos 12:1; Zech 14:5; Ps 17:3-4; 89:6, 8; Pro 9:3; Job 5:1, 15:15. See A. Roffe, *The Belief in Angels in Israel in the Light of Biblical Tradition* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2012), 39, 44-46; Tobit 11:14; 12:15.

46 F.W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. ἅγιος, pp. 10-11.

holy with angels.[47] Christians, as holy ones, are the new angels called to remove the angelic sin. Instead of the fallen angels, who left their heavenly dwelling, the holy chosen ones, as stated in these epistles, will dwell in heaven and share in the destiny of the angels (Colossians 1:4; Ephesians 2:4-6). As Lohse puts it, "So the host of those chosen by God is joined to the angels and they are likewise 'holy ones.' As God's possession, they are holy ones who will receive the heavenly inheritance."[48]

2. The Angel's Sin and the Ideal of Sexual Abstinence

As we see, the BW's conjunction of sexual desire and the angels' sin suggests a potential soil for grounding the eventual image of Christians as new angels in heaven at the end of times – an image provided also in the Synoptic Gospels by Jesus himself. In a discussion with the Sadducees on the raising up of the dead, he says:

> The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.[49] But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection (Luke 20:34-36). [50]

What Jesus says is clearly expressive of the angelic image of Christian believers and should be read in the light of virginity and sexual abstinence idealized throughout the NT.[51] In these verses, 'the people

47 Mk 8: 38; Lk 9: 26; Ac 10: 22; 1 Th 3:13; 2 Th 1: 10; Col 1: 12; Rv 14:10. See also 1QM 7:6, 10:11.

48 Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 36; C. Rowland, "Apocalyptic Visions and the Exaltation of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians," *JSNT* 19 (1983): 78.

49 In the Codex Bezae (D), "marry and given in marriage" is preceded by "are begotten and beget (γενῶνται καὶ γεννῶσιν)." See Ton H.C. Van Eijk, "Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality," in *Epektasis, Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean*, ed. Daniélou, J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 215.

50 For a shorter version, see Mark 12:25; Matthew 22:30.

51 G. Carton "Comme des anges dans le ciel," *BVC* 28 (1959): 46-52. D.C. Olson, "'Those Who Have Not Defiled Themselves with Women': Revelation 14:4 and the Book of Enoch," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 503; D.C. Olson, *Enoch: A New Translation: The*

of this age' are distinguished from those of the next age. Whereas those inhabiting this world are mortals, who must necessarily marry and have sex to perpetuate human existence, those worthy of inheriting the next world do not marry because they are immortal and gain eternal life.[52] These are the Christian believers whose faith in Christ as "Son of God" entitles them to resurrection. Like him, they become "God's children."[53] And like him, they will lead a life of celibacy.[54] They are likened to angels in heaven, who are neither male

Ethiopic Book of Enoch, or 1Enoch, Translated with Annotations and Cross-References (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2004), 46; D.C. Olson, "1Enoch," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. J.D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 912; A.Y. Collins, "Women's History and the Book of Revelation," *SBL SP* 26 (1987): 89; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, AB, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 1305-1306; Aune, *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity*, 195-219. This image already appears in pseudepigraphic literature which describes the righteous as angels in the end of times: 2 Baruch 51:5, 10: "[...] in the heights of that world shall they dwell [i.e. in Paradise, cf. 51:11], and they shall be made like unto angels, and be made equal to the stars, and they shall be changed into every form they desire, from beauty into loveliness, and from light into the splendor of glory." See J.H. Charlesworth, "The Portrayal of the Righteous as an Angel," *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism: Profiles and Paradigms*, SBLSCS 12; ed. J.J. Collins and G.W.E. Nickelsberg (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 135-136. The believer imaged as angel is equally current at Qumran: 1QSb 4:25: "May you be like an angel of the face in the holy residence for the glory of the God of the Hosts"; 1QS 11:8.

52 The phrase "people of this age" occurs in the NT only in Luke 20:34 and 16:8. In the latter verse it comes in a comparison with "sons of light." This means that Luke saw humanity divided into two spheres of faith in the present world: C.H.T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke –Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (WUNT 2.94; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 82**.** The expression 'marrying and given in marriage' belongs to Q (Luke 17:27; Matt 24:37-39) and is clearly eschatological. "Marrying and giving in marriage will characterize those who are not ready for the Parousia, while (presumably) it will not characterize those who are ready for that impending event [...]." See Aune, *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early*, *Christianity*, 205.

53 Jesus "Son of God": Luke 1:35; 3:22; 9: 35; 10:22; 22:70. The phrase "God's children" may allude to their description as angels. It is a biblical term for angels in Gen 6:2; Job 1:6, namely בני אלוהים, and thus translated in many Greek copies of Genesis. LXX ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ J.C. VanderKam, "1Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Literature," in *Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 60, n. 183. However, "children of God" may also allude to being like Jesus, the ultimate "Son of God."

54 C.H.T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke –Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology*, 87.

nor female (Galatians 3:28), and do not engage in sex and procreation. This angelic vision also implies that they have no sexual desire.

The image of Christian believers as heavenly angels becomes understandable in light of the BW tradition of the angels' sin. As against the angels who sinned on account of sexual desire, had intercourse with daughters of men, and followed "the defiling desires of the flesh" (2 Peter 2:9-10), the new angels completely abstain from sex. Instead of the fallen angels, who left heaven and were consequently assigned to confinement beneath the earth for seventy generations until judgment day and their final consummation,[55] come new angels – the sinless Christian believers who live forever in heaven. Instead of the sexual desire introduced by the angels, who thereby inaugurated the age of sin and corruption in the world, the new angels will inaugurate the eschatological age of the End, which will be bereft of sex and sexual desire. Instead of "God's children" who sinned and are to perish, come the true 'children of God,' who confess Jesus to be the "Son of God" and are to be eternal and immortal like angels. Accordingly, the End – until which the fallen angels were kept imprisoned in the valleys of the earth (1Enoch 10:12-13) – has already dawned and will be followed by the resurrection of Christian believers who are to be like pure angels in heaven.

These verses give expression to the ideal of virginity, sexual abstinence, and restraint of the sexual drive as a central value of Christian theology and a means to eschatological salvation.[56] On how they influenced Christian life, Davis and Allison write:

> The impact of Mt. 22.30 par. upon early Christianity was considerable. Largely under its influence the Christian life was popularly conceived to be an imitation of the angels. In particular, the exhortation to asceticism was often supported by appeal to the model of the angels; and virginity especially was espoused as in accordance with the angelic standard.[57]

55 1En. 10:11-15; 14:5-6; 19:1-2.

56 On the connection between the ideal of virginity and sexual abstinence and eschatology, see Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet*, 175-216: "Enthusiastic eschatology and the self-discipline of abstinence, including sexual continence, have often gone together," 196.

57 Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 3 volumes (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 1997),

Though an ideal associated with eschatological future life after the resurrection, as implied by the sayings in Matthew and Mark, believers could also interpret virginity and abstention from marriage as applicable now, in their present earthly life, whether on the understanding that Christians already live in the eschatological age, namely in between Christ's resurrection and the Parousia,[58] or their will to hasten the coming of this age. Such an interpretation is implied by Luke. For him, unlike Matthew and Mark, abstention from marriage is not consequent to the resurrection, but rather belongs to the present – earthly life – as a sign marking those worthy of resurrection and afterlife. This meaning is made clearer in the Old Syriac translation of the passage: "Those who have become worthy to receive that world and that resurrection from the dead, do not marry, nor can they die, for they have been made equal with angels, (and being) the sons of the resurrection (they are) like the sons of God."[59]

III:229-230; Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet*, 178. Cyprian, *De Hab. Virg*. 22; Ephraem, *De Paradiso* 7; *Hymn on Faith* 10.9; Ambrose, *Exhort.Virg*. 4.19; Clement of Alexandria, *Ecl*. 57; Jerome, *Ep.* 108, 23; Gregory of Nyssa, *Vit. Macrina*; idem, *Hom. on Cant*. 3,4,11,15; Apophtegmata Patrum, in PG 65 (John the Dwarf 2); Hesychios, *On Watchfulness* 200-1; Clement, *Stromata* 3:48: 1f.; bk. 3, ch. 6.45.3 and parallels; bk. 3, ch. 6.49.3; bk. 3, ch. 9.63. 2. C. Osiek and D.L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997)152-153. Van Eijk, "Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality," 214-216.

58 What can be called "a realized eschatology": Van Eijk, "Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality," 216.

59 S. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1973): 6; Heth, "Unmarried 'For the Sake of the Kingdom' (Matthew 19:12) in the Early Church," 87-88; W.R.G. Loader, "Attitudes towards Sexuality in Qumran and Related Literature – and the New Testament," *NTS* 54 (2008): 354; Aune (*The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity*, 205): "in Luke 20:34-36, the Evangelist views abstinence from marriage and sexual intercourse as characteristic of believers who as 'sons of that age/world' refrain from the entanglements of marriage because of the nearness of the Parousia." R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 303; Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet*, 189; Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts*, 216-219; C.H.T. Fletcher-Louis, "Luke – Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology" (*WUNT* 2.94; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 80-88; W. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2004, 19; W.R.G. Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 436; Van Eijk, "Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality," 215. For a similar reading of this verse in Marcion and the

By adopting the Encratite way of life, Christians could experience their present life as already part of the resurrection and the new Äon. Thus, virginity came to be perceived as realizing the glory of the world to come in the present day.[60] Accordingly, atonement for the sin of the angels, who introduced ἐπιθιμία to the world and taught humans about sexuality and promiscuity, was available to each and every individual who, already in the immediate life, before the coming of the End, could decide to embrace celibacy, renounce sexual relations, and become an angel on earth – one among the "*angelorum candidati*," as Tertullian called them.[61] And Methodius likewise describes virginity 'as walking on earth with her head touching the heavens.'[62]

The angelic image of the Christian believer as expressive of the ideal of sexual abstinence and virginity, which would be fully realized

Marcionites see Aune, *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity*, 22, 195-219; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 355; T.M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 174.

60 Van Eijk, "Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality," 215; P. Nagel, *Die Motivierung der Askese in der alten Kirche und der Ursprung der Monchtums*, TU 95 (Berlin: Akademe, 1966), 35-36; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, III:2; K. Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 217; H.T. Feltcher-Louis Crispin, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 82-83.

61 Tertullian, *De Oratione*, 3; Clement of Alexandria alludes to Christians becoming angels (Frg. 2). Fletcher-Louis (*Luke – Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology*, 87-88).

62 Methodius, Symposium, I, I, in H. Musurilo, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity*, ACW 27 (New York: Newman Press, 1958), 42. The Gospel call to sexual abstinence also comes up in Matt 19:12. I.G, Smith "Celibacy," *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* (ed. W. Smith and S. Cheetham; New York: Hartford: The J.B. Publishing Co., 1968), I:323-27**;** Olson, "Those Who Have Not Defiled Themselves with Women," 503; D.C. Allison, "Eunuchs Because of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 19:12)," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* 8 (1984): 2-5; D.C. Allison, "Divorce, Celibacy and Joseph (Matthew 1.18-25 and 19.1-12)," *JSNT* 49 (1993): 3-10; D.C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 175-176; Heth, "Unmarried 'For the Sake of the Kingdom' (Matthew 19:12) in the Early Church," 82; Contra: Q. Quesnell, "Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 19, 12)," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 335-358. Paul also preached virginity and sexual abstinence as the ideal lifestyle for Christians in Corinthians: 1 Cor 7:1; 7:7, and describes himself as a virgin 7:8, 25. Although he doesn't use the angelic image for Christians, he was familiar with the tradition of the angels' sin as might be seen from 1Cor 11:10. Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 447-490.

at the End in the heavenly world, in the Garden of Eden, is clearly evident in Revelation:

> Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste παρθένοι; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless (14:1-5).

The hundred and forty-four thousand redeemed are the Christians following Jesus, the virgins who renounced sexual life on earth and are as angels in heaven. These virgins stand in stark opposition to the BW fallen angels. Unlike the sinning angels who had sex with daughters of men, the angels of Revelation are to remain virginal forever. Adela Yarbo Collins rightly reads these verses as part of the call to Christians of both sexes to practice sexual abstinence.[63]

63 A. Yarbo Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 129; Loader, "Attitudes towards Sexuality in Qumran and Related Literature – and the New Testament," 342: "It may also have influenced the depiction of the 144.000 of Rev. 14.4 as those who, unlike the Watchers, had not defiled themselves with women, but had apparently already in this life chosen the celibate life of angels." See also R.H. Charles (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920, 2. 8-9), who regards the last line of v 3 and the first line of v 4 as an interpolation by a "monkish" interpolator "convinced that the highest type of the Christian life was the celibate, naturally identified the 144.000, who form the 'first fruit' (or best portion of the Christian Church), with the celibates" (9): Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), 267-268**;** Smith "Celibacy," *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities* I:323; Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet*, 194**.** R. Zimmermann, "Die Virginitatsmetaphet von Apk. 14, 4-5 in Horizont von Befleckung. Loskauf und Erstlingsfrucht," *NovT* 45 (2003): 59.

Likewise, W. Loader understands the image of the hundred and forty-four thousand as referring to those who had espoused the call to celibacy:

> They are the first fruits in the sense of being those who already in this life lived the way they would live in the age to come, eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:12) [...] The 144.000 in sustaining celibacy, would have achieved what the angels did not. Now they will be joined by the multitude living celibate lives in the holy place [...] This then coheres with understanding the age to come as without sexual activity along the lines of Mark 12:25.[64]

The ideal of virginity attains its ultimate fulfillment only in the ideal and perfect world established after Jesus' return, on the consummation of the present world and resurrection of the believers. This world is to be the new Garden of Eden, replacing its predecessor, from which Adam and Eve were expelled and which the fallen angels left at their own will. Into this Eden will enter the Christian believers who, by adopting virginity or chastity, take on the image of pure angels and thereby atone for the sin of the fallen ones. Like the first Eden, which in the Christian context was without sex, the anticipated perfect Eden will be bereft of sex.[65]

64 Loader, *The New Testament on Sexuality*, 480.

65 Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians,* 366. For the Christian notion that Adam and Eve had no sex before the Fall, see E.A. Clark, *Heresy, Asceticism, Adam, and Eve: Interpretations of Exegesis* (Lewistone, NY: Edwin Mellen Pr. 1988), 99-133. The ideal of virginity and sexual abstinence associated with the angelic image of believers assumes an increasingly prominent place in Christian literature of the second century: The Acts of Paul and Thecla, 5-6 (J.K. Elliott, The Apocryphal New Testament, 365); Tertullian, *De Orat*. 3; Cyprianus, *De Hab.Virg*. 22; Augustin, *Enchiridion*, 29: *City of God*, 22.1. This process fits in with the popularity of Enoch in general, and the BW in particular, in 2nd and 3rd century Christianity, see R. Bauckham, "The Fall of the Angels as the Source of Philosophy in Hermias and Clement of Alexandria," 316; Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, III:27, 229-230. In her book *Fallen Angels and History of Judaism and Christianity*, Reed attempts to prove that the angels' sin becomes central in Christianity only in the 2nd and 3rd centuries among apologists, such as Justin Martyr. This is presumably why she underscores the tradition about the angels in the Gospels and does not at all treat it in affinity with the story of the descent of the angels; U. Bianchi, "The Religio-Historical Relevance of Luke 20:34-36,"

Conclusion

The Book of the Watchers implies that sexual desire – the source of evil in this world – was brought to earth from heaven, and was revealed and taught to humans by the fallen angels. This radical departure from the conventional point of view, which associates sexual desire with earthly passions and the animal world, has its roots in the biblical story of Adam and Eve, but draws primarily on the interpretation this story acquired in the pseudepigraphic Adam and Eve tradition.

How the BW conceives of the fallen angels is fundamental to the ideal of virginity and sexual abstinence that developed within early Christianity. Accordingly, Christian believers came to replace the fallen angels. Instead of the corrupted angels, who left heaven in pursuit of sexual desire and procreation, there appear new angels. Righteous and pure, they embrace a life of sexual abstinence as a means to hasten "the age to come," "the resurrection from the dead," and the final defeat of the sexual inclination. In this new age, the Christian believers will be like angels in heaven – without sex and procreation.

The references to the tradition of the descending angels in the letters, but especially Jesus' logion in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:25; Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:34-36) and its affinities with the BW, point to early Christianity's close acquaintance with this 1Enoch text, and sheds light on one of the channels through which apocalyptic literature influenced the New Testament theology.[66]

in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions, Festschrift for Q. Quispel*, ed. R. Van de Broek and M.J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill 1981), 32-33. In Talmudic literature, a similar idea is found in *b. Ber.* 17a: "In the world to come there is no [...] propagation"; *Midr. Ps.* on Ps.145:7: There will be no intercourse in the age to come because the presence of the Shekinah will be constant. And see Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 177, who relates this tradition to the sentiment in the rabbinic source.

66 On more affinities between the synoptic Gospels and 1Enoch, see D.C. Sim, "Matthew 22.13a and 1Enoch 10.4a: A Case of Literary Dependence," *JSNT* 47 (1992): 3-19; A.E. Richter, *Enoch and the Gospel of Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publication, 2012).

Karaite Mourning of Zion as an Ascetic Movement

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Abstract

Karaite Judaism developed in an Islamic environment in which there were Muslim movements which preached asceticism (*zuhd*) as a religious value, perhaps in reaction to the temporal successes of early Islam. Their practice of asceticism included abstention in the areas of dress, food, drink, property, and sexual relations, in the hope of preparing the soul for the world to come in which the body would disintegrate and only the soul would remain. Among Rabbanite Jews, there were those who advocated an internal variety of *zuhd*, a sort of radical alienation from society, as a process of spiritual discipline. In the Land of Israel during the Golden Age of Karaism (end of the ninth-eleventh centuries), Karaites adopted ascetic practices (other than sexual abstinence), not in order to prepare the soul but as a way of bringing the Messiah. Those who adopted this ascetic way of life were referred to as the "Mourners of Zion." There may have been Rabbanite Mourners (rabbinic literature mentions mourning customs in light of the destruction of the Temple), but the vast majority of the Mourners of Zion movement in the Land of Israel were Karaites. Since Karaite asceticism was mainly political, namely in the service of hastening redemption, one can assume that the Karaites would have been happy to leave behind their mourning customs if the messiah had come and rebuilt the Temple.

In addition to asceticism for political purposes, there were Karaites who believed that one should adopt such practices without a direct connection to the mourning of Zion. The outstanding representative of this position was Salmon ben Yeruhim, who argued in his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* that King Solomon taught asceticism for spiritual purposes and not just for political ones. In addition, Salmon claimed that in certain Psalms, King David described his own ascetic lifestyle. Since David and Solomon were not mourning for the Temple, their asceticism had no relation to its destruction and one should adopt their practices without regard for any political considerations. After the destruction of the Karaite community in the Land of Israel during the First Crusade, the Karaite center moved to Byzantium, where mourning was not perceived as an attractive lifestyle. The last known Karaite identified with the Mourners of Zion was the Byzantine Judah Hadassi the Mourner in the middle of the twelfth century. Until this very day, Karaites refrain from eating meat in Jerusalem as a way of remembering the Mourners of Zion movement.

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A

Karaism emerged in the ninth century in the Islamicate world, a world in which a number of Muslim believers were propagating the importance of asceticism as a religious value. Their denial of bodily pleasures, *zuhd* in Arabic, most likely a reaction to the material success of early Islam, was part of a material and spiritual asceticism intended to facilitate a closer association with the divine. It consisted of renunciation of, or indifference to, the physical world and was characterized by physical privation in the realms of clothing, foodstuffs, sleep, property, and sexual relations. Denial of bodily desires in this world was intended to prepare the way to life in the next world, where the soul would exist without the body. A number of Jewish thinkers were influenced by the notion of asceticism, but generally they did not adopt practices characterized by extreme external renunciation of the body. The most notable medieval Jewish supporter of asceticism was Bahya ibn Paquda (eleventh century), who advocated an inner asceticism, one in which the worshipper outwardly remained part of society but inwardly was radically alienated from it. This type of asceticism was the penultimate stage in the spiritual regimen of the believer before achieving pure love of God.[1]

In contrast to the inward asceticism advocated by a number of Rabbanite Jews, the austere lifestyle adopted by many Karaite Jews closely resembled the renunciation of physical pleasures of the Islamic *zuhd* movement. The late tenth-century Karaite missionary Sahl ben Mazliah described Karaite routines as follows:

1 Anan ben David, in the eighth century, is usually credited incorrectly with the founding of Karaism, and he adopted certain ascetic practices as well. Karaism, itself, emerged in the ninth century; see Moshe Gil, "The Origins of the Karaites," in Meira Polliack, ed., *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to its History and Literary Sources* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 73-118. On Islamic *zuhd*, see Geneviève Gobillot, "Zuhd," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, et al., consulted online on March 23, 2021 http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.bgu.ac.il/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8201. On Bahya, see Georges Vajda, *La Théologie ascétique de Baḥya ibn Paqŭda* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1947); Allan Lazaroff, "Baḥya's Asceticism against its Rabbinic and Islamic Background," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 21 (1970): 11-38; Nahem Ilan, "Al-Iʿtidāl al-Sharīʿi: Another Examination of the Perception of Asceticism in *The Duties of the Heart* of Baḥya," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 164 (2005): 449-461.

> This is the practice of the Israelites who have sought God's pleasure and secluded themselves from the desires of this world. They have given up eating meat and drinking wine and have clung to the Lord's Torah; they have stood in assiduous watch before the doors of His Temple. Because of the greatness of their grief and the depth of their sighing, they have lost their strength to stand up against all stumbling blocks, and the skin of their bodies has become wrinkled with premature aging... They have abandoned their merchandise and forgotten their families; they have forsaken their native land and left palaces in order to live in reed huts. They have left the cities to go to the mountains and have suffered bitter calumny. They have removed handsome garments to wear sackcloth, sighing and wailing and crying over Zion's disaster and rolling in the dust of ashes.[2]

These Karaites, then, did not eat meat or drink wine; did not look after their health; lived lives of isolation in inadequate housing; did not engage in business; and wore sackcloth.[3]

Although outwardly Karaite asceticism may have looked similar to its Islamic model, its rationale was actually very different. Karaites refrained from bodily pleasures because they were members of the "Mourners of Zion" movement. This trend in Judaism was particularly active in the Land of Israel during the ninth to eleventh centuries, a period known as the Golden Age of Karaism, during which Karaite beliefs and observances were standardized. Just as the circumstances of the emergence of Karaism are unclear, so, too, we do not know who established the penitential movement of Mourners and when exactly it began. We also do not know whether it was restricted to Karaites or included Rabbanite Jews as well. Based on a few positive Rabbinic

2 The Hebrew text is in Simhah Pinsker, *Lickute Kadmoniot* (Vienna, Adalbert della Torre, 1860), vol. 2, 31; a slightly different English translation is in Leon Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 113-114.

3 There is no evidence that Karaites advocated or engaged in celibacy, or even sexual moderation beyond that which the Torah requires. Since, as will be explained, the ascetic life was related to the hope of a speedy advent of the Messiah, there was no reason to try to prevent or limit reproduction. It might be noticed as well that all of the recommended deprivations were carried out in the public sphere (restrictions on food, housing, clothing and livelihood); see James T. Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology, Opposition to Philosophy: The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Salmon ben Yeroham on Qohelet (Ecclesiastes)*; (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 124-125.

references to the Mourners, it would appear that it was not solely a Karaite movement. Furthermore, there were also Karaites during this period who were not Mourners, especially those living outside the Land of Israel. Nevertheless, Golden Age Karaism in the Land of Israel and Mourning of Zion were closely identified.[4]

B

In contrast to the spiritual aspects of Muslim *zuhd*, as adopted by some Rabbanite Jews as well, the motivation behind Karaite asceticism as part of Mourning of Zion was first and foremost political. It was one aspect of a strategy to hasten the coming of the Messiah who would rebuild Jerusalem. Those Karaites who participated in this lifestyle, which included the regular recital of special lamenting liturgies, were convinced that this was the way to end the exile. In the Golden Age, many Karaites personally took the first step in negating the exile by leaving their own diasporas, mostly Iraq and Iran, and moving to the Land of Israel. It was there that they observed the ascetic practices described by Sahl ben Mazliah, as well as composing the aforementioned dirges.

Mourning for the Temple was not, of course, a Karaite invention. The Talmud, Baba Batra 60b, records a number of mourning practices for the Temple.[5]

> Our Rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel became ascetics (*perushim*, also the Hebrew for Pharisees), binding themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine. R. Joshua (a Tanna in the first half century after the destruction) got into conversation with them and said to them: "My sons, why do you not eat meat nor drink wine?" They replied: "Shall we eat meat which used to be brought as an offering on the altar, but now is no longer? Shall we drink wine which used to be poured as a libation on the altar,

4 See Yoram Erder, *The Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls. On the History of an Alternative to Rabbinic Judaism* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017); Moshe Zucker, "Reactions to the Karaite Mourners of Zion Movement in Rabbinic Literature," in *Sefer ha-yovel le-Rabbi Chanoch Albeck* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1963), 378-401 (Hebrew).

5 The identification of the authorities mentioned here does not imply a commitment to the historicity of the account.

> but now is no longer?" He said to them: "If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the meal offerings have ceased." They said: "[That is so, and] we can manage with fruit." But he said: "We should not eat fruit either, because there is no longer an offering of first-fruits." They said: "Then we can manage with other fruits." But, he said: "We should not drink water, because there is no longer any ceremony of the pouring of water." They were quiet, namely they had no answer for him. He said to them: "My sons, come and listen to me. Not to mourn at all is impossible, because the decree has already been decreed. To mourn overmuch is also impossible, because we do not impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure." The sages therefore have ordained thus. A man may stucco his house, but he should leave a little bare. A man can prepare a full-course banquet, but he should leave out an item or two. A woman can put on all her ornaments, but leave off one or two. For so it says, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I remember you not, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5-6). What is meant by my chief joy? R. Isaac (the name of a number of sages) said: "This is symbolized by the burnt ashes which we place on the head of a bridegroom." R. Papa asked Abaye (in the fourth century): "Where should they be placed?" [He replied]: "Just where the phylactery is worn, as it says (Isaiah 61:3), 'To provide for the Mourners of Zion (*aveilei ẓion*), to give them a garland [*pe'eir*, understood by the rabbis as the phylacteries] for ashes [*eifeir*].'" It has been taught: R. Ishmael ben Elisha (also soon after the destruction) said: "Since the day of the destruction of the Temple we should by rights bind ourselves not to eat meat nor drink wine, only we do not lay a hardship on the community unless the majority can endure it."

We see that abstaining from meat and wine was a natural reaction to the destruction of the Temple; Rabbanites outgrew that natural reaction, but many Karaites advocated it. Unlike the Rabbanites, the Karaites believed that the majority of their community could endure the hardships to be laid upon them.[6] Basing themselves on the verse

6 One of the theories of Karaite origins is that the movement arose in order to protest the harsh stringencies of rabbinic law. Karaite adoption of ascetic

in Isaiah, cited in the Talmud, which predicted the eventual vindication of those who grieve the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish lamenters called themselves Mourners of Zion.

The first known ideologue of the Karaite return to Zion and their mourning for it was Daniel al-Qumisi, from Damghan, a city in the district of Qumis, province of Tabaristan, in northeastern Iran. Al-Qumisi moved to Jerusalem around 875 and bemoaned the situation in the Holy City thus:

> He has burned His sanctuary; He has left His Holy Place and His Temple, the dwelling of His Holy of Holies, to be trampled under the feet of the unclean ones, the uncircumcised... He has abolished His priests and their sacrifices... Our festivals have turned into days of mourning, all our songs have become dirges, and our holidays are full of sorrow and sighs... Our sun has set in daylight, as if it were nighttime, and our midday is as if it were darkness.

Al-Qumisi's solution to this unhappy situation was to advocate immigration to the Land of Israel and the adoption of an ascetic lifestyle. He did this despite diasporic opposition to such a move:

> Know, then, that the scoundrels who are among Israel say one to another: "It is not our duty to go to Jerusalem until He shall gather us together, just as He dispersed us." These are the words of those who would draw the wrath of the Lord and who are bereft of sense. Even if the Lord had not decreed the commandment for us to come to Jerusalem, from the lands of dispersion, in mournful and bitter tears, would we not know with our own understanding that the objects of wrath should come to the gate of the one who is angry, to make supplication? ... This is even more so since the Lord has commanded the people of the Exile to come to Jerusalem, to stand within it at all times before

practices, in addition to its advocacy of strictness in many ritual areas (e.g., no illumination or heating in homes on the Sabbath), would seem to militate against the assumption that Karaism came to lighten the burden of rabbinic Jewish law; see Raphael Mahler, *Ha-Qara'im* (Merhavia: Sifriyyat Hapoalim, 1949); Martin A. Cohen, "Anan Ben David and Karaite Origins," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 68 (1978): 129-145; 224-234.

> Him, mourning, fasting, weeping, wailing, and wearing sackcloth and bitterness both day and night.

Al-Qumisi scolds his fellow Jews for using the danger of travel to the Land of Israel as an excuse for not coming (after all, he himself had made the long journey from Iran), since even members of other religions were constantly making pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Al-Qumisi, however, has a plan to overcome Diaspora Jewry's hesitance to return to Jerusalem in order to pray for its redemption.

> If you will not come because you are running quickly after your own merchandise, then send from each city five men, along with support for them, so that we may form one sizable community to supplicate our God at all times upon the hills of Jerusalem.[7]

Since Karaites understood that their form of Judaism is based on Scripture, they looked for biblical precedents for their ascetic practices. Much energy was expended on legal discussions concerning the permissibility of eating meat in the absence of the Temple, since many pre-Karaite sectarians, such as Anan ben David and Mishawayh al-Ukbari, as well as early Karaites, such as Benjamin al-Nahavendi and Daniel al-Qumisi, understood that the eating of non-sacrificial meat (*besar ta'avah*) was permitted only when there is an altar on which sacrifices are offered. Until Noah built an altar after the flood, humanity was not allowed to eat animals, and the altars of the Patriarchs were also understood as a method of permitting the eating of meat. Thus, in the absence of the Temple and its sacrificial altar, eschewing meat was not only a function of mourning but also a result of legal impediments to animal slaughter. Similar arguments were made concerning the drinking of wine, which was also said to be permitted only when the Temple stood.[8]

7 These three citations are taken from Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 35-36, 38. The entire epistle which includes Qumisi's call for immigration to Israel and repentance is found with translation in Leon Nemoy, "The Pseudo-Qūmisīan Sermon to the Karaites," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 43 (1976): 49–105 (most scholars do not share Nemoy's skepticism about his authorship of the letter). Details of Qumisi's life have been reconstructed by Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Fragments of Daniel al-Qumisi's Commentary on the Book of Daniel as a Historical Source," *Henoch* 13 (1991): 259-282.

8 See Erder, *Mourners of Zion*, 211-283; Moshe Firrouz, "Studies in Eshkol Hakofer of Judah Hadassi" (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University, 2018), 116-145 (Hebrew).

In addition to the legal issues involved in the ingestion of wine and meat, many Karaites understood these prohibitions as part and parcel of their mourning rites. In order to give scriptural justification for ascetic practices as a sign of mourning, Karaite Mourners looked for biblical precedents. Hence, some Karaites took their ascetic inspiration from the mourning practices of Daniel, who, according to the book that bears his name, lived before the rebuilding of the Temple: fasting, sackcloth and ashes (9:3); and refraining from rich food, meat, and wine as well as the use of lotions (10:2-3).[9] Other proof texts are provided by the prophet Amos, although he lived before the destructions of both the northern and southern kingdoms. He upbraids his listeners for their wanton habits, including eating meat and drinking wine, saying that these practices will lead to exile (chapter 6). If this was the case before the destructions and exile, then, certainly afterwards, one should refrain from meat and wine.[10] The connection between the mourning customs and the destruction of the Temple would seem to indicate that if the Temple were rebuilt, Jews would again be allowed to eat meat and drink wine.[11] This is a far cry

Much of our information about the early schismatics is derived from the work of Yaqub al-Qirqisani, who lived in the first half of the tenth century in Baghdad, in the same place and at the same time as the Karaites' great nemesis, Rav Saadia Gaon (882-942). Although Qirqisani explains the origins of the reasons for forbidding meat in the absence of the Temple, he seems to refute these reasons, leading to the probable conclusion that he, himself, did not forbid the eating of meat. Curiously, in his encyclopedic *Book of Lights and Watchtowers*, Qirqisani does not mention his contemporaries in the Land of Israel, the Mourners of Zion, even though he gives copious accounts of Karaite practices with which he disagreed.

9 See D.S. Margoliouth, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel by Jephet ibn Ali and Karaite* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 90-91, 104-105 (Arabic); 44, 52-53 (English); Daniel Frank, *Search Scripture Well. Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of the Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 201.

10 Judah Hadassi, *Eshkol ha-kofer*, alphabet 237. Hadassi's text until alphabet 100 is available in Daniel J. Lasker, Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis, and David Sklare, *Theological Encounters at a Crossroads: A Preliminary Edition of Judah Hadassi's Eshkol ha-kofer, First Commandment, and Studies of the Book's Judaeo-Arabic and Byzantine Contexts* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019); subsequent citations are taken from the forthcoming full edition of the book, which can be consulted meanwhile in the Gözleve, 1847, edition and in a number of reprints of that edition.

11 See Yoram Erder, "Remnants of Qumranic Lore in Two Laws of the Karaite Benjamin al-Nihāwandī concerning Desired Meat," *Zion* 63 (1998): 12-13; 35-36 (Hebrew); idem, "The Negation of the Exile in the Messianic Doctrine of the Karaite Mourners of Zion," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 68 (1997): 138; Hadassi, *Eshkol ha-kofer*, alphabets 233-234.

from Islamic *zuhd* in which asceticism is intended to prepare one for life after death and is not dependent on political events in this world.

Karaite asceticism, then, should generally be distinguished from that of the Islamic *zuhd* movement, with its external renunciation of physical pleasures, and that of Jewish Rabbanism, with its internal alienation from the physical world, since both forms of asceticism were for the benefit of the individual worshipper in the context of personal spiritual life. Karaite asceticism was to achieve political goals, the bringing of the Messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple, after which it could be abandoned. Nevertheless, one should be careful not to draw too sharp a distinction between spiritual and political asceticism in Karaism.

C

The most important Karaite expositor of personal asceticism was Salmon ben Yeruhim (mid-tenth century). In his commentary on Lamentations, Salmon advocates an ascetic lifestyle as a sign of mourning for the Temple, a typical move by a Karaite Mourner of Zion. He criticizes those Jews in the exile who do not eschew meat and wine in light of the destruction of the Temple, namely the non-Mourners, especially among the Rabbanites. Salmon also produces a series of dirges to be recited as part of the rituals of mourning intended to bring about an end to the exile.[12]

Yet, Salmon's advocacy of asceticism goes beyond the political agenda of the Mourners of Zion. This is most clear in his commentary on Ecclesiastes, where Salmon writes that the purpose of King Solomon in this book is to inculcate five principles. These include the

12 See Jessica Andruss, "Exegesis, Homily, and Historical Reflection in the Arabic Commentary on Lamentations by Salmon ben Yeruhim, Tenth-Century Karaite of Jerusalem" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2015); the Judaeo-Arabic text of this commentary was published by Mohammed Abdul-Latif Abdul-Karim, "Commentary of Salmon ben Yeruham on Lamentations" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1976); and an edition of chapter one was published by Salomon Feuerstein, *Der Commentar des Karaërs Salmon ben Jerucham zu den Klaglierdern* (Cracow: Verlag des Verfassers, 1898). The commentary is the focus of Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Poetic Works and Lamentations of Qaraite 'Mourners of Zion'—Structure and Contents," in *Knesset Ezra: Literature and Life in the Synagogue; Studies Presented to Ezra Fleischer*, ed. S. Elizur et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1994), 191-234; and Lawrence Marwick, "Studies in Salmon ben Yeruham," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 34 (1944): 313-20; 475-80.

fact that humans are not created by God for this world, that one should renounce the lower material world and its pleasures, and that true reward and punishment are otherworldly.[13]

In the course of the commentary, Salmon explains numerous verses in Ecclesiastes as expressions of these principles. Thus, Eccl. 1:2, "vanity of vanities" (translated by Salmon as "dust of dust") is explained as follows:

> The sage, peace be with him, intended in this dictum to teach the people of the world that all things of this world and what people occupy themselves with in terms of toil and work and building and planting and amassing of numerous supplies and property – all of it is dust and of no value; not a thing in it persists for man. And since it is dust, one ought to renounce it and turn oneself to something other than it, to that which should be sought after... The things of this world are at the utmost of what is dust, of no value, lacking persistence; there should be no desire for it, for it will become as if it never was.[14]

Likewise, Eccl. 1:3 ("What profit has a person in all his work") is interpreted to mean that the prophets were content with eating little, dressing in rags, and living off alms.[15] In subsequent passages, Salmon understands Ecclesiastes as teaching that individuals should reduce their engagement with the world to the minimal needs for survival while engaging in good works, acts of purification and cleanliness, and sexual chastity.[16] In his descriptions of asceticism, Salmon employs *zuhd* terminology, such as trust in God (*ittikāl*), but he backs away from advocacy of extreme asceticism, preferring instead a middle way in terms of behavior while maintaining one's contempt for the world.[17]

13 Robinson, *Asceticism*, 110-111. Salmon was not the only Judaeo-Arabic writer to make a connection between Ecclesiastes and *zuhd*. See Saadia, *Sefer ha-nivḥar ba-'emunot uva-de'ot*, ed. Yosef Kafih (Jerusalem: Sura, 1970), 10:3-4, pp. 290-295; Isaac ibn Giyyāth (1038-1089), *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* in Yosef Kafih, ed., *Ḥamesh Megillot* (Jerusalem: Ha-Aguda Le-Hatzalat Gnzei Teiman, 5722), 161-296 (entitled *Kitāb al-zuhd*/Book of Asceticism, attributed incorrectly to Saadia).

14 Robinson, *Asceticism*, 112-113; 184-185.

15 Ibid., 114; 186-191.

16 Ibid., 123-124; 302-305; sexual chastity refers to refraining from forbidden sexual practices, e.g., adultery, and not to celibacy.

17 Ibid., 113; 119-125; 127-130.

According to Salmon, King David was also a promoter of asceticism in the Book of Psalms, and he served as a model for the present-day Mourners. For instance, in his commentary on Ps 69:12 ("I made sackcloth my garment; I became a byword among them"), Salmon understands that David was an object of scorn in terms that resonate with the Karaites' own experiences:

> When I wore sackcloth in order to humble myself and break away from yearnings of the world through the hardship of haircloth and abandoning the pleasure of the softness of clothing, I became a byword for them. Even so today, when they (the Rabbanites) assemble for their banquets, their drinking parties, or their other nefarious gatherings, they dress up one of their number in sackcloth, in the manner of a scarecrow and jeer at him, saying: "Behold the image of Jabez! Behold the image of al-Qumisi!"[18]

The Rabbanite mockery of the Mourners of Zion is also foretold by David, whose enemies made him into an object of ridicule, as he became a "favorite topic for those who sit in the city gates" and in "the song of the drunkards" (Ps. 69:13). Since Kings David and Solomon adopted ascetic practice without any connection to mourning for the Temple, their renunciation of the world could not have been a tactic to restore Jerusalem. It would seem, then, that Salmon adopted Islamic *zuhd* ideology and regarded asceticism as a goal in and of itself. If other Karaites would have been happy to eat meat and drink wine when the Temple was rebuilt, this apparently was not the case at least with Salmon. We have no way of knowing how widespread among Karaites was this non-political, spiritual approach to asceticism, but it is likely that Salmon was not the only Karaite adherent of *zuhd*.[19]

18 Lawrence Marwick, *The Arabic Commentary of Salmon ben Yeruham on the Book of Psalms, Chapters 42-72* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1956), 100. Leon Nemoy, in his review of Marwick's edition, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 48 (1957): 59, suggests that Jabez (I Chron. 4:9) is a code word for Anan.

19 Paul Fenton, "Karaism and Sufism," in Polliack, *Karaite Judaism*, 199-212, theorizes a connection between the early Mourners and Sufism, which may have also affected the Karaite spiritual outlook. Yefet ben Eli, the greatest Karaite exegete who lived at the end of the tenth century, also devoted parts of his commentary to Ecclesiastes to advocacy of an ascetic lifestyle; see Robinson, *Asceticism*, 23-24. For a discussion of Salmon's and Yefet's commentaries on Ecclesiastes, see Georges Vajda, *Deux commentaires Karaïtes sur l'Ecclésiaste* (Leiden: Brill, 1971). For Yefet's objection to extreme asceticism, see, e.g., 177-178.

D

Despite the Mourners of Zion's best efforts, the Messiah did not come. By the middle of the eleventh century, however, the movement was still strong. We have a marriage contract from 1028 where the couple pledges to follow the calendar according to observation and not to eat beef or lamb in Jerusalem until the altar of God is established.[20] Nevertheless, there seem to have been some cracks in the Mourners' steadfastness, as we have evidence in the eleventh century of Karaite butcher shops even in Jerusalem.[21] In any event, instead of the Messiah, there arrived in the Land of Israel first the Seljuks in 1071 and then the Crusaders in 1099. The Golden Age of Karaism had already started to wane, but these invasions proved to be the final blow to this period.

Karaites, like other Jews, proved to be resilient in the face of adversity. There were still surviving Karaite communities in Cairo, Damascus, Iraq and Iberia. The next significant Karaite center, however, was in Byzantium. Even when the Mourning of Zion movement was going strong in the Islamicate world in the tenth and eleventh centuries, Karaite immigrants were beginning to settle in Christendom. They were not quite ready to lead an independent religious life, so some of their students travelled from Byzantium to Jerusalem to study in the famous study house there. The most prominent of these students was the mid-eleventh-century Tobias ben Moses, the major figure in a translation project that transmitted the Judaeo-Arabic Karaite legacy of the Golden Age to a Greek-speaking, Hebrew-reading community of Byzantium. Tellingly, when he was in the Land of Israel, Tobias was known as *ha-avel*, the mourner, but when he was back home in Constantinople, he was *ha-ma'atiq*, the translator. If in the mid-eleventh century, when there was still a Jerusalem Karaite community, Tobias seems to have abandoned Mourning when he returned home, it would seem that in twelfth-century Byzantium, Mourners of Zion and their ascetic practices should have been just memories.[22]

20 Firrouz, "Studies," 124.

21 Haggai Ben-Shammai, "The Karaites," in J. Prawer and H. Ben-Shammai, eds., *The History of Jerusalem: The Early Muslim Period 638–1099* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1996), 217.

22 For the early history of Byzantine Karaism, see Zvi Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

The case of Judah Hadassi indicates that the allure of ascetic practices in order to mourn for Zion can remain strong even at a physical distance from the Land of Israel and without the communal aspects of the Mourners of Zion movement. Hadassi was the most prominent Karaite of the twelfth century, and his monumental Hebrew work, *Eshkol ha-kofer* ("Cluster of Henna"), is a repository of the entire corpus of Karaite law, lore, exegesis, polemics, and much more, which predated its mid-twelfth century composition. We do not know much about Hadassi, but he invariably calls himself Judah ben Elijah *ha-Avel* (the mourner), and his legal decisions tend towards the ascetic practices of the Karaite Mourners.[23]

As is typical of his book, Hadassi reviews all the arguments for and against the permission to eat meat when there is no Temple, and he rejects all the arguments that allow eating meat. As a Mourner, Hadassi would have liked to prohibit meat, but as someone who lived in the twelfth century when the Mourning of Zion movement had already run its course, and in Constantinople where the site of the destroyed Temple was at a far distance, he understands that ascetic mourning practices held no mass appeal. He gives detailed instructions as to how to slaughter animals, so obviously Karaites engaged in producing meat for consumption. Hadassi's conclusion seems to be: "Happy is the person who, with full contentment, refrains from any slaughter of animals, until God will gather the dispersed of Israel to Jerusalem. Then all of your slaughters will be acceptable."[24] He seems to eschew the ingestion of fowl and wine as well, even though he discusses the use of wine in various settings and which birds are permitted to be eaten. In short, Judah Hadassi *ha-Avel* was a mourner as an individual; as a community leader, however, he could not impose his personal predilections on his co-religionists, reminiscent of the Rabbinic dictum that we do not lay a hardship on the community unless the majority can endure it. Furthermore, he does not advocate asceticism for reasons of personal piety; his call for the eschewal of meat and wine was for communal, political reasons and, as in the case of a number of Karaite predecessors, was motivated by legal issues concerning the altar.

23 For a partial edition of *Eshkol ha-kofer*, see Lasker, et al., *Theological Encounters*; Hadassi's thought is discussed by idem, *From Judah Hadassi to Elijah Bashyatchi: Studies in Late Medieval Karaite Philosophy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 41-59. For Hadassi's views of Mourning, see Firrouz, "Studies," 116-145.

24 Hadassi, *Eshkol ha-kofer*, Alphabet 233, letter tet.

Hadassi was firmly in the tradition of classical Karaism, not only in terms of Mourners of Zion but also in terms of his extremely negative attitude towards the Rabbanites. By the end of the thirteenth century, the Karaite Aaron ben Joseph, the Physician, known as Aaron the Elder, took a giant step toward Karaite-Rabbanite rapprochement by integrating the writings of Abraham ibn Ezra, Maimonides and other Rabbanite savants into his Karaite theology and exegesis. He relied on the words of a somewhat mysterious Karaite, Nissi ben Noah, who wrote after Hadassi and claimed that most of the Talmud was actually the words of "our ancestors," namely, that it was now acceptable to appropriate Rabbanite teachings. Aaron ben Joseph remained a staunch Karaite, but he was more than willing to consider Rabbanite sources as an important part of his intellectual heritage. Golden Age Mourning of Zion held no attraction for him.[25]

The same is true for Aaron's Byzantine Karaite successors, such as Aaron ben Elijah, known as Aaron the Younger, in the fourteenth century and Elijah Bashyatchi, the final Karaite decisor, in the fifteenth. When Karaites flourished in Eastern Europe in the early modern and modern periods, their sages there were fully immersed in Rabbinic sources. Mourning of Zion seems to have disappeared.[26] And, yet, mourning practices did not die out entirely among Karaites. We have indications from visitors through the centuries that Jerusalem Karaites did not eat meat. Even today, Karaites do not eat meat in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, today's Israeli Karaites give no evidence of other signs of an ascetic lifestyle. Contemporary Israeli Karaites are very proud of their Golden Age ancestors, but they do not imitate their Mourning and the deprivations attending it.

25 Although thirteenth-century Byzantine Karaism moved away from Golden Age theology, exegesis and law, Egyptian Karaites, who continued to be conversant with Judaeo-Arabic, maintained many of the classical Karaite stances, but we do not know their attitude towards ascetic practices. Just as not all the writings of authors in the Golden Age in the Land of Israel, whom we know to have been Mourners, have explicit references to ascetic or grieving practices, so, too, some of the Egyptian Karaites may have adopted mourning practices without making direct references to them. I thank David Sklare for discussing this subject with me.

26 On the Karaite attitudes towards Jerusalem as they relocated further and further away from it, see Lasker, *Studies*, 229-247.

Returning Every Good to the Lord: The Ascetic Exemplarity of Francis of Assisi

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Abstract

According to hagiography, Francis of Assisi (†1226) was not only a charismatic follower of Christ, but also an exemplary ascetic with many followers who were also followers of Christ. In his transition from a worldly way of life to a "practice of strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline" and "austerity in appearance, manner, or attitude" (Merriam-Webster), we discern three basic elements of asceticism: order, openness, and struggle. Francis seeks some form of outer and inner order, without which his practice and his project will not succeed; he maintains an openness toward the Lord and his neighbors, without which his life would remain unordered and meaningless; and he is involved in a continuous and burdensome struggle, without which his goal cannot be fulfilled. Behind his practice of strict self-denial and austerity, as described by his hagiographers, we discern three of spirituality: giving back, goodness, and God. In all three elements of asceticism and in all three elements of spirituality, we see religious exemplarity at work: Francis becomes an exceptional example to the men and women around him.

Introduction*

Nine hundred years ago, Francis of Assisi went to Egypt to speak with the sultan Al-Kamil about Christ. For many centuries, this visit has been celebrated by many people all over the world as an early form of interreligious dialogue. No further information has come down to us about the event, and we have no way of knowing the participants' motivations. But Francis surely intended to follow his own advice, found in chapter 16 of his rule, regarding those who go among the Saracenes: "As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature (Tit 3:2; 2 Tim 2:14) for God's sake (1 Pet 2:13)

and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Savior, and be baptized and become Christians."[1] This peaceful approach contrasted sharply with that of the crusaders. Francis brought to the sultan a revolutionary Western practice of poverty, penance, and peace that aimed to transcend the boundaries of egotism, self-righteousness, and possessiveness, and that directed attention to the greater, common good – in this case, the peace and good of God. This episode took place several years after Francis converted, gave all his possessions to the poor, and started to imitate Christ (like many before him, East and West, who adopted an "apostolic lifestyle characterized by total material renunciation, homelessness, and begging"[2]). For the rest of his years, he practiced a way of life without power, prestige, or possessions, surrendering his superiority, pursuing humility and poverty (*minoritas*) in everything, and doing good for the sake of God.

Francis lived radically "without anything of his own" (*sine proprio*),[3] and this life included techniques and disciplines. But in order to understand the poor Francis as a classic ascetic, we have to do two things.[4] The first is to connect Francis to the ascetic tradition

* I would like to thank the organizers of the research workshop "Ascetic Trends in the Abrahamic Religions in the 13th Century" (18-20 November 2019), Oded Yisraeli, Avriel Bar-Levav and Asher Binyamin, for a wonderful conference in Be'er-Sheva and Zichron Ya'akov.

1 *The Earlier Rule* 16 (Regis J. Armstrong, et al., trans., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents 1. The Saint* [New York: New City Press, 1999], 63-86 [74]).

2 Daniel F. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), blurb. See also, for the European Middle Ages, Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

3 *The Earlier Rule* 1 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 63).

4 It is no surprise that there is only a meagre literature on historical Franciscan asceticism. Franciscan spirituality rather revolves around penance, peace, and mercy, which "were to become the watchwords of Franciscan preaching and to inspire concrete actions through which people could make amends for their faults" (André Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi: The Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint*, trans. Michael F. Cusato [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012], 24). When Francis says at the beginning of his Testament that "the Lord

that starts with Antony the Great and other desert fathers who inspired the Western Church. The second is to connect Francis to the hagiographical tradition that starts already before his death and that makes him into an ascetic *pur sang*. I will endeavor to do both in this article; first, however, a few words on Christian asceticism in general and its different theological and spiritual connotations. Ascesis (from the Greek *askesis*) means "practice." The ascetic practices with perseverance and regularly in order to implement and perpetuate certain behaviors and skills.[5] Whereas modern asceticism is not always related to a religious tradition,[6] religious traditions throughout history have had both practitioners and critics of asceticism.[7] The ultimate goal of Christian asceticism is salvation and sanctification, usually associated with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the inner life of the soul and with the incorporation into Christ through perfect devotion and virtue.[8] The person who strives

gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance" (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 124), he means his conversion to "complete surrender to God's will and becoming a "servant of God"" (Vauchez, *Francis of Assisi*, 58). See also Krijn Pansters, *Franciscan Virtue: Spiritual Growth and the Virtues in Franciscan Literature and Instruction of the Thirteenth Century*. Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 161 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 152-157.

5 Corona Bamberg, *Askese: Faszination und Zumutung*. Spuren 2 (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2008), 9. See also: Krijn Pansters, "Vasthoudend en verdienstelijk voortgaan. Een kleine ethiek van de ascese," *Franciscaans Leven* 98 (2015): 64-71.

6 See, e.g., Geoffrey G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1987); Axel Michaels, *Die Kunst des einfachen Lebens: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Askese* (München: C.H. Beck, 2004); Evert Peeters, et al., eds., *Beyond Pleasure: Cultures of Modern Asceticism* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011); Charles A. Riley II, *The Saints of Modern Art: The Ascetic Ideal in Contemporary Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music, Dance, Literature, and Philosophy* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998).

7 See, e.g., Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Oliver Freiberger, ed., *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Much of modern-day criticism is based on Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic* (German: *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift*, 1887).

8 See, e.g., Jan Bergman, et al., "Askese," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 4 (1979): 195-259; Jean Leclecq, et al., "Askese," *Lexikon des Mittelalters* 1 (1980): 1112–1116; Annine E.G. Mantz-Van der Meer, *Op zoek naar loutering: Oorsprong en ontwikkeling van de enkratitische ascese tot in het begin van de dertiende eeuw n. Chr.* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1989); David F. Tinsley, *The Scourge and the Cross: Ascetic*

for these ultimate fruits (or who feels compelled to strive for them) may thus travel, in the words of Pseudo-Dionysius and other theologians, to perfection through stages of purification, illumination, and unification. Other terms found in ascetic and mystical theology and associated with the ascetic process are consolation, consolidation, effort, elevation, interiorization, merit, mortification, progression, temptation, and so forth. These and like notions clarify the process of what the French theologian Adolphe Tanquerey called "practical self-reform."[9]

Like Christian asceticism itself, ascetic terms have become less important and have more or less ceased to be relevant in today's world. There are a number of new interpretations of asceticism, however, that capture core meanings and essential elements of human striving and struggle in relation to modern-day existential problems.[10] One such interpretation is given by the German philosopher and Benedictine sister Corona Bamberg, whose work is especially relevant for two reasons: her conception of ascetism as fascinating but confronting (*Faszination und Zumutung*), and her elemental as well as structural approach. Bamberg developed the following scheme of "twelve ascetic exercises": judging without condemning ("Urteil ohne Richten"), shaping time ("gestaltete Zeit"), preparing the body ("der bereitete Leib"), loving as an art ("lieben als Kunst"), loving onseself without narcissism ("Selbstliebe ohne Narzissmus"), cultivating patience ("mit unerschöpfbarer Geduld"), being attentive ("gesammelte Gegenwart"), surrendering through prayer ("Gebet und Gottes Sieg"), passionate and pure longing ("Leidenschaft ohne Gier"), playing by the rules ("ernstes

Mentalities of the Later Middle Ages. Mediaevalia Groningana New Series 14 (Louvain: Peeters, 2010).

9 Adolphe Tanquerey, *Précis de théologie ascétique et mystique* (Paris: Desclée, 1924), Introduction. A Franciscan parallel is Léon Veuthey, *Itinerarium animae Franciscanum: Commentarium theologico-ascetico-mysticum* (Roma: Basilica SS. XII Apostolorum, 1938).

10 See, e.g., Archbishop Averky (Taushev), *The Struggle for Virtue: Asceticism in a Modern Secular Society* (New York: Holy Trinity Publications, 2014); Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); Margaret R. Miles, *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000); Richard Valantasis, *The Making of the Self: Ancient and Modern Asceticism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008).

Spiel"), dealing with boundaries ("Umgang mit Grenzen"), and preparing for death ("Einübung des Sterbens"). These areas of ascetic activity make asceticism, in the words of Bamberg, "much more than simply caring for oneself. One lets go in order to gain, one finds measure in immeasurable love, one dies in order to live."[11]

Alongside these twelve areas of asceticism, Bamberg also mentions three "structural elements" – exemplary notions that "give life the direction that it cannot find on its own."[12] These are: order ("Ordnung"): "without outer and inner order, life will not succeed;"[13] openness ("Offenheit"): "order without openness disregards life;"[14] en struggle ("Kampf"): "the world is not in order but ultimately it is."[15]

I will now use these three structural elements (order, openness, struggle) as a hermeneutical tool to read two classics of Christian hagiography: Saint Antony the Great and Saint Francis of Assisi.[16] By analyzing the ascetic content of their *vita*, I will subject my own theological interpretation to some ascetic restriction, as these texts should speak for themselves as much as possible.[17] In order to explain how asceticism serves the spiritual life and how ascetic elements function in the context of a certain religious program, one could also read religious rules such as the Rule of Benedict or the Rule of Saint Clare, or theological works such as Thomas Aquinas' treatise on the virtues or David of Augsburg's *Composition of the Interior and Exterior Man according to the Triple states of Beginners, Proficient, and Perfect*.[18] Instead, I would like to draw attention to two

11 Bamberg, *Askese*, blurb (my translation).

12 Bamberg, *Askese*, blurb.

13 Bamberg, *Askese*, 21 ("Ohne äußere und innere Ordnung gibt es kein gelingendes Leben").

14 Bamberg, *Askese*, 26 ("Ordnung ohne Offenheit zielt am Leben vorbei").

15 Bamberg, *Askese*, 30 ("[...] der tiefste Impuls zur Ordnung [kommt] aus dem Glauben, dass die Wirklichkeit letztlich in Ordnung ist [...] Die Welt ist keineswegs in Ordnung").

16 On the religious "classic," see David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 99-153.

17 See, in a different meaning: Nathan G. Jennings, *Theology as Ascetic Act: Disciplining Christian Discourse*. American University Studies. Series 7, Vol. 307 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

18 Raimondo M. Spiazzi, et al., eds., *S. Thomas Aquinitatis Quaestiones disputatae* 1 (Turin: Marietti, 1949); David ab Augusta, *De exterioris et interioris hominis*

of the greatest storytellers of Christianity: Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) and Thomas of Celano (d. 1260). The first wrote the *Life of Saint Antony* around 360;[19] the second wrote the *Life of Saint Francis of Assisi* around 1250.[20] Both accounts present an exemplary way of life as a means to reflect deeds and virtues. Whereas the first work introduces (as one of the first of its kind) many classical elements of Christian asceticism as building blocks of a "desert spirituality," the second work transposes and transforms these elements into a new "mendicant spirituality," a spirituality of beggary characterized by the virtues of "minority," simplicity, and humility. What does this small selection of spiritual texts say about order, openness, and struggle as "the" structure of Christian asceticism? And what, furthermore, about their exemplary quality?[21]

compositione secundum triplicem statum incipientium, proficientium et perfectorum libri tres (Quaracchi: Claras Aquas, 1899).

19 Phillip Schaff & Henry Wace, *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,* Series 2, Vol 4. *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 188-221. See https://sourcebooks.
fordham.edu/basis/vita-antony.asp. (consulted November 21, 2019).

20 Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 169-308. On the purpose of this work, Armstrong observes: "Shortly before the July 1228, canonization and shortly after Pope Gregory IX's decree, Recolentes qualiter, of April 29, 1228, calling for a burial church to be built for Francis in Assisi, Gregory IX conferred upon Thomas the distinguished task of writing a life of the new saint. Thomas, it would seem, was to complement the architectural celebration of Francis with the composition of a new literary monument. Both contributions, requested by Gregory IX within months of each other, were to help preserve the memory of the life and example of the Poverello" (172).

21 See Krijn Pansters, *Spiritual Morality: The Religious Orders and the Virtues, 1050-1300* (Leuven: Unpublished PhD diss., 2019), 224: "The objective will be to relate Linda Zagzebski's "exemplarist moral theory" to him and other primary figures in this movement, like Clare of Assisi and brother Leo, thus giving them their rightful place in a new and original theory that is "based on direct reference to exemplars of goodness." (Zagzebski, 2017). The study of Francis and his companions as main features in exemplarist moral thought will illustrate how 1) "judgments about the identity of paradigmatically good persons" feature in our moral quest (Zagzebski, 2004), and 2) narratives and descriptions of this good person, in whom all theoretical concepts are rooted and whom we observe carefully, are "morally significant" (Zagzebski, 2017). See, therefore: Linda T. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Linda T. Zagzebski, *Exemplarist Moral Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Order

The ascetic life is an ordered life. It is said about the hermits in the time of Saint Antony, for example:

> So their cells were in the mountains (Lk 16:9), like filled with holy bands of men who sang psalms, loved reading, fasted, prayed, rejoiced in the hope of things to come, laboured in alms-giving, and preserved love and harmony one with another. And truly it was possible, as it were, to behold a land set by itself, filled with piety and justice.[22]

Several devout and "just" activities structured the course of the day, allowing the ascetic to spend more time on spiritual needs and only as much as absolutely necessary on physical needs.[23] The most important ordering element in the life of Antony appears to be prayer. Every prayer offers a new beginning, and with each new beginning his devotion and zeal are given a certain regularity and structure:

> He at least gave no thought to the past, but day by day, as if he were at the beginning of his discipline, applied greater pares for advancement, often repeating to himself the saying of Paul: "Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before (Fil 3:13)." He was also mindful of the words spoken by the prophet Elias, "the Lord liveth before whose presence I stand to-day (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:15)." For he observed that in saying "today" the prophet did not compute the time that had gone by: but daily as though ever commencing he eagerly endeavoured to make himself fit to

22 *Antony*, 44 (*Select Writings*, 208).

23 *Antony*, 45 (*Select Writings*, 208): "And he used to say that it behoved a man to give all his time to his soul rather than his body, yet to grant a short space to the body through its necessities; but all the more earnestly to give up the whole remainder to the soul and seek its profit, that it might not be dragged down by the pleasures of the body, but, on the contrary, the body might be in subjection to the soul."

> appear before God, being pure in heart and ever ready to submit to His counsel, and to Him alone.[24]

Daily prayer is part of his self-imposed disciplinary regime, in which he "applied greater pares for advancement" and "struggled the more daily to advance towards those things which were before (Fil 3:13)."[25] Ascetic ordering is thus required for persistent and unwavering progress.[26]

For Francis, too, who was "unbending in his discipline" and "watchful of his guard at every hour" (Is 21:8), order also means daily devotional routine combined with the regular practice of virtue.[27] Especially in the early stages of his spiritual way, this means an almost mechanical alternation between going through the world (action) and withdrawing from it (contemplation). Already as a child, "he retired for a short time from the tumult and business of the world and was anxious to keep Jesus Christ in his inmost self."[28] The man of God, says Thomas of Celano, "was accustomed to enter the cave, while his companion waited outside, and inspired by a new and extraordinary spirit he would pray to his Father in secret (Mat 6:6). He acted in such a way that no one would know what was happening within."[29] The contrast between outside and inside correlates with the fundamental order in the "worldly vs. divine"– scheme, which he perceives and experiences in a radical way:

> Now he wrestles naked with the naked.
> After putting aside all that is of the world (1 Cor 7:33),
> he is mindful only of divine justice.

24 *Antony*, 7 (*Select Writings*, 198).

25 *Antony*, 66 (*Select Writings*, 214).

26 See, e.g., *Antony*, 5 (*Select Writings*, 197): "But he, his mind filled with Christ and the nobility inspired by Him, and considering the spirituality of the soul, quenched the coal of the other's deceit."

27 *Francis*, 16 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 221). See also *Francis*, 17 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 223): "In this way holy simplicity filled them, innocence of life taught them, and purity of heart so possessed them that they were completely ignorant of duplicity of heart. For just as there was in them one faith, so there was one spirit, one will, one charity, continual unity of spirit, harmony in living, cultivation of virtues, agreement of minds, and piety in actions."

28 *Francis*, 3 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 187).

29 *Francis*, 3 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 187).

> Now he is eager to despise his own life,
> by setting aside all concern for it.
> Thus
> there might be peace for him,
> a poor man on a hemmed-in path,
> and only the wall of the flesh would separate him
> from the vision of God.[30]

In the end, it is love of poverty – finding consolation in indifference towards the world – and not love of asceticism – spiritual progress through ordered practice – which dictates the life of Francis and his brothers: "Only divine consolation delighted them, having put aside all their cares (1 Pet 5:7) about earthly things. They decided and resolved that even if buffeted by tribulations and driven by temptations they would not withdraw from its embrace (Eccl 3:5)."[31]

Openness

Asceticism presupposes self-improvement and self-elevation toward the highest good, but these are preceded by being fully susceptible, a state founded on an otherworldly focus and grounded in a complete openness toward God: "not I but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10), in the words of Antony's biographer Athanasius.[32] Antony, warning against the power of the devil and demons, therefore preaches: "[...] let us be courageous and rejoice always, believing that we are safe. Let us consider in our soul that the Lord is with us (Matt 1:23), who put the evil spirits to flight and broke their power (1 Cor. 2:6). Let us consider and lay to heart that while the Lord is with us, our foes can do us no hurt."[33] This openness toward

30 *Francis*, 6 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 194). See also: *Francis*, 16 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 187): "That is why the uproar outside did not seize his ears, nor could any cry intrude, interrupting the great enterprise he had in hand."

31 *Francis*, 6 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 214).

32 *Antony*, 14 (*Select Writings*, 197): "[...] so that all who truly fight can say, 'not I but the grace of God which was with me.'"

33 *Antony*, 42 (*Select Writings*, 207): "[...] but rather let us be courageous and rejoice always, believing that we are safe. Let us consider in our soul that the Lord is with us, who put the evil spirits to flight and broke their power. Let us consider and lay to heart that while the Lord is with us, our foes can do us no hurt. [...] But if they see us rejoicing in the Lord, contemplating the bliss of the

God – the main elements of which seem to be joy, courage, and trust – may also be translated into more open social relationships that build on sympathy as well as self-reflection, namely, an openness toward one's own shortcomings:

> Wherefore committing the judgment to Him, let us have sympathy one with another. Let us bear each other's burdens (Gal 6:2): but let us examine our own selves and hasten to fill up that in which we are lacking.[34]

Consequently, as joy comes with zeal, consolation comes with mutual faith:

> And again there was joy in the mountains, zeal for improvement and consolation through their mutual faith (Rom 1:12).[35]

Ascetic openness thus includes the kindness and mildness characteristic of a courageous self-improver. This person loves the Word of God and he loves his neighbor. Like Antony, he "subjects himself in sincerity to good men" and "learns thoroughly where each surpasses him in zeal and discipline," observing them, taking knowledge of their virtues, and taking note of their mutual love.[36]

In the same way, the converted Francis opens himself up for God's guidance: "He prayed with all his heart that the eternal and true

future, mindful of the Lord, deeming all things in His hand, and that no evil spirit has any strength against the Christian, nor any power at all over any one – when they behold the soul fortified with these thoughts – they are discomfited and turned backwards."

34 *Antony*, 55 (*Select Writings*, 211).

35 *Antony*, 54 (*Select Writings*, 210).

36 *Antony*, 4 (*Select Writings*, 196): "He subjected himself in sincerity to the good men whom he visited, and learned thoroughly where each surpassed him in zeal and discipline. He observed the graciousness of one; the unceasing prayer of another; he took knowledge of another's freedom from anger and another's loving-kindness; he gave heed to one as he watched, to another as he studied; one he admired for his endurance, another for his fasting and sleeping on the ground; the meekness of one and the long-suffering of another he watched with care, while he took note of the piety towards Christ and the mutual love which animated all."

God guide his way and teach him to do His will (Ps 143:10)."[37] On the one hand, divine answers and signs of God's presence give him great joy: "The Lord showed him what he must do. He was filled with such great joy (Ps 126:2) that [he failed] to restrain himself in the face of his happiness."[38] On the other hand, his joyful openness paves the way for swift action: "The holy father, overflowing with joy (2 Cor 7:4), hastened to implement the words of salvation, and did not delay before he devoutly began to put into effect what he heard."[39] Joyful is his experience of God's grace in prayer:

> Gradually, an indescribable joy and tremendous sweetness began to well up deep in his heart.
> He began to lose himself;
> his feelings were pressed together;
> and that darkness disappeared
> which fear of sin had gathered in his heart.
> Certainty of the forgiveness of all his sins poured in,
> and the assurance of being revived in grace was given to him.
> Then he was caught up above himself and totally engulfed in light,
> and, with his inmost soul opened wide,
> he clearly saw the future.
> As that sweetness and light withdrew,
> renewed in spirit,
> he now seemed to be changed into another man (1 Sam 10:6; Ps 51:12).[40]

The increasingly open-minded Francis finds equal joy in the struggle and harm inflicted upon him: "Throughout these many struggles, he began to exhibit a more joyful appearance. From the injuries inflicted he received a more confident spirit and, now free to go anywhere, he moved about with even greater heart."[41] Francis even exposes himself

37 *Francis*, 3 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 187).
38 *Francis*, 3 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 188).
39 *Francis*, 9 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 202).
40 *Francis*, 11 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 205).
41 *Francis*, 6 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 193).

to insult and wrongdoing, bearing them – like physical ailments – with patience and a peaceful heart.[42]

Struggle

Antony's asceticism, a "difficult discipline" and a "labor of virtue," takes the form of a struggle with the devil, who:

> tried to lead him away from the discipline, whispering to him the remembrance of his wealth, care for his sister, claims of kindred, love of money, love of glory, the various pleasures of the table and the other relaxations of life, and at last the difficulty of virtue and the labour of it.[43]

Then:

> at length putting his trust in the weapons which are 'in the navel of his belly' (Job 40:16) and boasting in them – for they are his first snare for the young – he attacked the young man, disturbing him by night and harassing him by day, so that even the onlookers saw the struggle which was going on between them. The one would suggest foul thoughts and the other counter them with prayers: the one fire him with lush the other, as one who seemed to blush, fortify his body with faith, prayers, and fasting. And the devil, unhappy wight, one night even took upon him the shape of a woman and imitated all her acts simply to beguile Antony.[44]

The devil seduces the saint with several of the classical sins – in this case, the vices of greed and lust. The ascetic ignores the spiritual attacks and, instead, continues steadfastly on the path of prayer and

42 *Francis*, 5 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 191): "But since the patient person is better than the proud, God's servant showed himself deaf to all of them, and neither broken nor changed by any wrong to himself he gave thanks to God for all of them"; *Francis*, 16 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 220): "Yet there was no complaining about this, no grumbling; but with peaceful heart, the soul filled with joy preserved the virtue of patience."

43 *Antony*, 5 (*Select Writings*, 196-197).

44 *Antony*, 5 (*Select Writings*, 197).

abstinence.[45] The Lord now shows himself to be a witness to the struggle, and he speaks in support of the besieged:

> Antony, I was here, but I waited to see thy fight; wherefore since thou hast endured, and hast not been worsted, I will ever be a succour to thee, and will make thy name known everywhere.[46]

In persecution (under the emperor Maximinus), Antony "stood fearlessly, shewing the readiness of us Christians."[47] He also "prayed himself to be a martyr."[48] Apart from the fight with demons and persecutors, there was the contest with other ascetics. In the words of Athanasius to the addressees of his *vita* (namely, "the monks in foreign parts"): "You have entered upon a noble rivalry with the monks of Egypt by your determination either to equal or surpass them in your training in the way of virtue."[49]

Francis also fights with the devil: "He used to struggle hand to hand (Ez 21:24) with the devil who, in those [solitary] places, would not only assault him internally with temptations but also frighten him externally with ruin and undermining." As a brave soldier of Christ, he undertakes a spiritual battle: "After fortifying himself with the sign of the holy cross, he arose"; "He rose, therefore, swift, energetic and eager, carrying the shield of faith (Eph 6:16) for the Lord, and strengthened with the armor of great confidence, he set out for the city [and openly exposed himself to the curses of his persecutors]."[50]

45 *Antony*, 7 (*Select Writings*, 197): "But Antony having learned from the Scriptures that the devices of the devil are many, zealously continued the discipline, reckoning that though the devil had not been able to deceive his heart by bodily pleasure, he would endeavour to ensnare him by other means. For the demon loves sin. Wherefore more and more he repressed the body and kept it in subjection, lest haply having conquered on one side, he should be dragged down on the other."

46 *Antony*, 10 (*Select Writings*, 199).

47 *Antony*, 46 (*Select Writings*, 208).

48 *Antony*, 46 (*Select Writings*, 208).

49 *Antony*, Prol. (*Select Writings*, 195).

50 *Francis*, 27 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 244); *Francis*, 4 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 188): "[...] and when his horse was made ready, he mounted it"; *Francis*, 5 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 191).

Together with his brothers, he also continues the battle against the hostilities of the body:

> Whenever their moderation was upset, as normally happens, by too much food or drink, or if they went over the line of necessity because of weariness from travel, they punished themselves severely with many days of fasting. They strove to restrain the burning of the flesh by such harsh treatment that they did not hesitate to strip themselves on freezing ice, and to cover themselves in blood from gashing their bodies with sharp thorns.[51]

In addition to his struggles with the flesh (his attempt to put his sinful nature to death) and with the self (his zeal for self-deprivation and self-contempt), in later years Francis also struggled with illness: "His body began to be afflicted with different kinds of illness, and more severe than usual. Since he had over many years chastised his body and brought it into subjection (Rom 15:23; 1 Cor 9:27), he suffered infirmities often."[52] This, however, was no longer a real battle but rather a victory, because "repeated submission became spontaneous, as the flesh, yielding each day, reached a place of great virtue, for habit often becomes nature."[53]

Actual Asceticism

Many elements of traditional Christian asceticism no longer resonate with the modern-day zeitgeist. One aspect that has become problematic nowadays, for example, is the idea of prolonged

51 *Francis*, 15 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 220). See also *Francis*, 16 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 221): "For if, as happens, any temptation of the flesh struck him, he would immerse himself in a ditch filled in winter with ice, remaining in it until every seduction of the flesh went away"; *Francis*, 27 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 243): "He made himself insensible to all outside noise, gathering his external senses into his inner being and checking the impetus of his spirit, he emptied himself for God alone."

52 *Francis*, 2,4 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 266). See also *Francis*, 19 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 228): "He often did things in this way both to despise himself fully and to invite others to everlasting honors. [...] A true scorner of himself, he taught others to despise themselves by word and example."

53 *Francis*, 2,4 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 266).

physical seclusion: Antony "descended as into a shrine, and abode within by himself, never going forth nor looking at any one who came;"[54] Francis "went to a place of prayer, as he so often did;"[55] and so forth. So, too, has the idea of prolonged physical deprivation: Antony "more and more repressed the body and kept it in subjection (1Cor 9:27);" he "ate once a day, after sunset, sometimes once in two days, and often even in four"; for the most part he "lay upon the bare ground;"[56] in a similar spirit, Francis "made for himself a tunic showing the image of the cross, so that in it he would drive off every fantasy of the demons. He made it very rough, so that in it he might crucify the flesh with its vices and sins (Gal 5:24)."[57]

Other remarks appear more relevant to today's world: Antony "had the same habit of body as before, and was neither fat, like a man without exercise;"[58] he "was altogether even as being guided by reason, and abiding in a natural state"[59]; and he "marvelled at the quantity [of gold], but passed it by as though he were going over fire."[60] Further traditional ideas of enduring value include "progress in virtue [...] by desire and fixity of purpose"[61]; "to speak no further and to say nothing from my own promptings"[62]; and "to prefer the love of Christ before all that is in the world."[63] These statements are likely to be of worth in a highly individualized society which often calls, paradoxically, for general measures and collective solutions. An actual contemporary asceticism could learn from traditional asceticism, first, that moral and spiritual "improvement" starts with the individual; in this, the ascetic follows Antony, who "confirmed his purpose [...] to keep all his desire and energy for perfecting his

54 *Antony*, 12 (*Select Writings*, 199).

55 *Francis*, 11 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 205). See also *Francis*, 27 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 244): "That is why he often chose solitary places to focus his heart entirely on God. [...] For his safest haven was prayer; not prayer of a fleeting moment, empty and proud, but prayer that was prolonged, full of devotion, peaceful in humility."

56 *Antony*, 7 (*Select Writings*, 197-198).

57 *Francis*, 9 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 202).

58 *Antony*, 14 (*Select Writings*, 200).

59 *Antony*, 14 (*Select Writings*, 200).

60 *Antony*, 12 (*Select Writings*, 199).

61 *Antony*, 7 (*Select Writings*, 198).

62 *Antony*, 39 (*Select Writings*, 206).

63 *Antony*, 14 (*Select Writings*, 200).

discipline." More importantly, second, improvement is made possible through the imitation of more perfect individuals. "After he had seen this man," it is said about Antony, he "imitated him in piety"; and: "henceforth [he] would strive to unite the qualities of each, and was eager to show in himself the virtues of all."[64] As Francis strove to imitate Christ and the apostles, many from the early thirteenth century onward also strove to imitate Francis, of whom it is said:

> How handsome, how splendid!
> How gloriously he appeared (2 Sam 6:22)
> in innocence of life,
> in simplicity of words,
> in purity of heart,
> in love of God,
> in fraternal charity,
> in enthusiastic obedience,
> in agreeable compliance,
> in angelic appearance (Jgs 13:6).
> Friendly in behavior,
> serene in nature,
> affable in speech,
> generous in encouragement,
> faithful in commitment (Prov 11:13),
> prudent in advice,
> efficient in endeavor,
> he was gracious in everything (Est 2:15)!
> Tranquil in mind,
> pleasant in disposition,
> sober in spirit (2 Tim 1:7),
> lifted in contemplation,
> tireless in prayer,
> he was fervent in everything!
> Firm in purpose,
> consistent in virtue,
> persevering in grace,
> he was the same in everything!

64 *Antony*, 3-4 (*Select Writings*, 196).

Swift to forgive (Jas 1:19),
slow to grow angry,
free in nature,
remarkable in memory,
subtle in discussing (Wis 7:22-23),
careful in choices,
he was simple in everything!
Strict with himself,
kind with others,
he was discerning in everything![65]

In this mirror of virtues, in which the saint is portrayed as an ethical-ascetic model, we encounter our three ascetic structural elements of order, openness, and struggle (as suggested by Bamberg). In his watchfulness and prayerfulness, his daily devotional routine, and his regular practice of virtue, this "ascetic" "knows that he is put in an order that does not depend on him" and *orders* himself in his new way of life ("Nur weil sich der Mensch in eine unabhängig von ihm bestehende Ordnung der Dinge gestellt weiß, kann er sich bemühen, sich selbst und sein Leben zu ordnen [...]").[66] In the innocence of his life and in the purity of his heart, "he surrenders a piece of his willfulness" and *opens up* to the people and things around him ("Immer geht es darum, freiwillig ein Stück Eigenmächtigkeit fortzugeben in das Offene und Ungesicherte hinein [...]").[67] Finally, in his strictness toward himself and in the determination of his action, "he breaks thought the vicious circle of I-involvement" by way of a tenacious and meritorious *struggle* ("Dem hielt der Teufelskreis der Ichbezogenheit nur selten stand").[68]

Conclusion: Returning Every Good to the Lord

Francis did not want to become pure and perfect; rather, he wanted to follow in the footsteps of Christ and become Christ-like – nothing more and nothing less. The accounts of his extreme asceticism are

65 *Francis*, 29 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 252-253).
66 Bamberg, *Askese*, 22.
67 Bamberg, *Askese*, 30.
68 Bamberg, *Askese*, 35.

hagiographical. The *vitae* of Antony and Francis are not historically accurate. They are, however, *ascetically* and *ethically* accurate, expressing a real worldview in traditional terminology.[69] Like the authors, we, too, encounter an *exemplary asceticism* in these sources, which may serve as a contemporary source of inspiration. Most compelling to me remains Francis' readiness throughout to "return every good to the Lord"[70] – a phrase taken from his own *Admonitions* that may best capture his spiritual, Christological program of complete "practical self-reform" by "living without anything of his own," always, everywhere, continuously, eternally.

69 With regard to this, Armstrong observes: "Designed to appeal to the rich tradition of holiness manifested in the lives of the saints, it reaches beyond the particular interests of Francis's followers to inspire men and women everywhere. Therefore, Thomas situates the saint, Francis, within the ancient Christian tradition and brings the freshness of his example into the life of the Church" (Amstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 175).

70 *Admonition* 18 (Armstrong, *Francis of Assisi*, 134).

Asceticism among the Judeo-Sufis of Egypt: The Cases of R. Abraham Maimonides and R. David II Maimonides

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Abstract

In order to situate the theory and practice of asceticism among the Judeo-Sufis of Egypt within the larger context of medieval Jewish thought, and to highlight the special importance they lent to asceticism, the present article gives a brief survey of the general approaches to the discipline of *zuhd* among medieval Judeo-Arabic thinkers from Sa'adya to Maimonides. Most medieval writers on asceticism from within this tradition advocated a moderate form of renunciation. This article argues for a subtler distinction within the Jewish tradition by looking more closely at one cultural and chronological sphere: the Judeo-Sufis of Medieval Egypt. There thus follows an in-depth synopsis of asceticism presented in the works of two of Maimonides' descendants, his son R. Abraham Maimuni (1186-1237) and R. David ben Joshua Maimuni (14th century), who were leaders of the Egyptian Jewish pietist movement. It introduces the reader to the main elements of asceticism in these two thinkers' thought, notably making use of heretofore unpublished manuscripts of David's works. The author argues that Abraham and David propound a more acute expression of asceticism, not merely as a "therapeutic" means towards attaining a temperate ethical disposition, but as an ideal, and, in the case of R. David, an indispensable stage in the Path towards gnosis. The article claims that this new emphasis may be explained, on the one hand, by the impact of the Sufi environment predominant in 13th-15th century Egypt on Abraham and David's approach, and, on the other, by their ideal of spiritual preparation in anticipation of the renewal of prophecy and the ensuing redemption. On the second point, the author also suggests that some of the pietists' ascetic practices may have been adopted by early Qabbalists in the East from a similar perspective.

Introduction

In a brief but extremely dense article on the role and significance of asceticism in the Jewish tradition, the Hebraist and Arabist

Georges Vajda maintained that Judaism, unlike Christianity—and, might I add, Islam — does not consider that asceticism, though deemed meritorious or even obligatory in certain circumstances, can lead to any supplementary perfection which is not already conferred on the individual by the regular and integral observance of the religious precepts of the "perfect Law."[1]

Vajda's claim is borne out among most medieval moralists who wrote on asceticism from within the Judeo-Arabic tradition, and who, by and large, propounded a moderate strain of abstinence. Nonetheless, from ancient times, Judaism has always known a category of practitioners whose conduct was characterized by a "going beyond" the strict requirements of the Law.[2] Such individuals, called *ḥasidim* or "pietists," observed the commandments in a manner that exceeded the call of duty, though of course with varying sets of rituals and goals. While these individuals sometimes enjoyed great respect in the eyes of their fellow Jews, their lifestyle was not always perceived as an ideal to be adopted by the community at large, nor did these pietists intend it as such.

In the particular case of the *ḥasidim* who flourished in thirteenth to fifteenth-century Egypt, we find the defense of a more exacting form of asceticism. I discuss this alternative emphasis, first presenting the evolution of the ethical principle of asceticism known within the Muslim and Judeo-Arabic tradition as *zuhd*. The latter, which in the first instance designates abstinence from material pleasures, is considered as an essential virtue of religious life not only for pietists but also for the common devotee.[3] Its practice can assume various nuances deriving from two basic attitudes: on the one hand, an external act of renunciation of things physical, resulting in the mortification of the body, and, on the other, an inner, mental state evincing total indifference to worldly phenomena.[4]

1 G. Vajda, "Le role et la signification de l'ascétisme dans la religion juive," *Archives de sociologie des religions* 18 (1964): 35-43.

2 See S. Safrai, "The Teachings of the Pietists in Mishnaic Literature," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (1965): 15-33.

3 In the following pages, *zuhd* is translated indiscriminately as "asceticism" or "abstinence."

4 For further definitions, see I. Kinberg, "What is Meant by 'Zuhd?'," *Studia Islamica* 62 (1985): 27-44.

Following traditional rabbinic teachings, medieval Jewish ethics does not generally uphold a negative attitude towards the body or life's material benefits. Asceticism, abstinence, mortification, fasting, wearing of penitential garments, or sexual continence are not considered part of the norm of religious practice. However, exceptions, both individual and collective, have arisen.

In general, medieval authors writing in Judeo-Arabic on asceticism advocated a moderate form of self-restraint, with the possible exception of Qaraite authors. Indeed, there emerged in Mesopotamia and the Near East a group with markedly ascetic practices known as the "Mourners of Zion," imbued with an ideal of voluntary poverty and renunciation. These tendencies, prevalent amongst the Jerusalem Qaraites, but also present to a lesser degree in Rabbanite circles, may have been influenced by similar trends of *zuhd* which characterized the initial stages of Islamic mysticism.[5]

An ambivalent attitude towards asceticism, rejecting it, on the one hand, as a recommended path for the masses, while retaining it, on the other, as an ideal of perfection, continued to permeate medieval Jewish ethics. In its first meaning quoted above, *zuhd* did not necessarily signify among the early Jewish thinkers and moralists a severe regimen of mortification, but rather temperance in the enjoyment of the physical life. Thus Sa'adya Gaon (d. 942), one of the first Jewish theologians writing in Arabic, discusses asceticism in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* among the various modes of the ideal life only to reject it on account of its destructive

5 I touched on this issue, which I hope to take up again on a more extensive basis, in my article "Karaism and Sufism," in *Karaite Judaism*, ed. M. Polliack (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 199-211. See also the following article in the same volume: Y. Erder, "The Mourners of Zion: The Karaites in Jerusalem in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," 213-235; and J.T. Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology, Opposition to Philosophy: The Arabic Translation of Salmon ben Yeroham on Qohelet* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), especially 114 and 125, as well as the Arabic texts referred to on pages 190 n. 58 and 364/6 respectively, where Salmon (Jerusalem school, ca. 930-960) uses the typically Sufi notions of *qunû'* (contentedness, also p. 335) and *ittikâl* (reliance on God). Moreover, as far as I know, he is the first Judeo-Arabic author to explain the Patriarchs' pursuit of a pastoral life as a means to *ittikâl* and to depict the biblical patriarchs and prophets as paradigmatic ascetics, both of which motifs continue in Judeo-Sufi exegesis.

potential: were it to be universally applied, it would lead to the ruin of man's earthly existence, which would run counter to God's will. Sa'adya rather expounds a constrained type of renunciation of vital necessities, while attending to the needs of both body and soul.[6] A similar attitude inspired by a reflection on the fragility of human life is adopted by Isaac Ibn Ghiyath, an eleventh-century Andalusi exegete, in his Judeo-Arabic commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes, called precisely *Kitâb al-Zuhd*.[7]

Just prior to his final chapter on the love of God, Bahya Ibn Paquda (Muslim Spain, 11th c.) devotes the ninth chapter of his *Farâ'id al-Qulûb*, the *Duties of the Hearts,* to asceticism, *zuhd* in Arabic, or *perishût* in Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation.[8] Despite his dependence on Muslim mysticism, Bahya's teachings, though clearly marked by a negative attitude to the physical world, remain in line with his Judeo-Arabic predecessors. He equates *zuhd* with temperance and considers total renunciation, consisting of seclusion from society, an ideal rarely attained in biblical times and hardly worthy of recommendation in his own day.[9] In fact, he advocates pursuit of the middle path as that prescribed by Jewish law, and defines the genuine ascetic more in terms of a mental attitude: as one who directs all his actions to the service of God, while at the same time fulfilling his duties within society. It is such a regimen that leads to the highest goal of spiritual life, namely, the love of God. He does, however, envisage a small, religious elite

6 Sa'adya Gaon, *Amânât*, ed. S. Landauer (Leiden: Brill, 1880, 315), and Sa'adya Gaon, *Book of Beliefs and Opinions,* trans. from Arabic by S. Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), treatise 10. See also I. Efros, "Saadia's General Ethical Theory and Its Relation to Sufism," in *Seventy-fifth Anniversary Volume of the Jewish Quarterly Review* (Philadelphia: Jewish Quarterly Review, 1967), 166-177.

7 See G. Vajda, "Quelques observations en marge du commentaire d'Isaac Ibn Ghiyâth sur l'Ecclésiaste," in *The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Volume*, 518-527. See also H. Mittelman, "A Description of *Perushut* (*Al-Zuhd*, "Abstinence") in a Commentary Ascribed to Isaac Ibn Ghiyath and its Comparison to Islamic Mysticism," *Daat* 48 (2002): 57-81 (Hebrew).

8 Bahya Ibn Paquda, *Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*, ed. Y. Qâfih, (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1984), 383-408. See also 146. The sequence of Bahya's chapters is: 1. Divine unity; 2. Contemplation; 3. Submission to God; 4. Reliance on God; 5. Sincerity; 6. Humility; 7. Penitence; 8. Examination of the Conscience; 9. Asceticism; 10. Love of God.

9 Ibn Paquda, *Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*, 9:3, 390-391.

practicing a special ascetic discipline (*al-zuhd al-khâss*), whose presence would serve as an example for the community of believers.[10] Moreover, there is no evidence that Bahya's teachings gave rise in his time to a widespread ascetic movement, as was the case with the Egyptian pietists.

For Judah Halevi, the righteous man must provide every part of his person with its due. Hence, he does not consider the mortification of the body a virtuous act. He writes:

> The Divine law imposes no asceticism (*tazahhud*) on us. It rather desires that we should keep the equipoise, and grant every mental and physical faculty its due, as much as it can bear, without overburdening one faculty at the expense of another [...]. Our law, as a whole, is divided between *fear, love*, and *joy*, by each of which one can approach God. Your contrition on a fast day is not more acceptable to Him than your joy on the Sabbath and holy days, if it is the outcome of a devout heart.[11]

Nonetheless, Halevi describes the ideal pious man (*ḥasid)* as one who, like the biblical prophets, forsakes social and family life and yearns for absolute solitude and an ascetic life. However, since the cessation of prophecy, this ideal of extreme asceticism is no longer relevant.[12]

As for Maimonides, he too reflects the dualistic approach to asceticism already encountered in Bahya. His emphasis on a virtuous and contemplative life, expressed in the *Guide*, necessarily carries as its corollary withdrawal from mundane pursuits and

10 Ibn Paquda, *Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*, 9:2, 386-389. See G. Vajda, *La théologie ascétique de Bahya Ibn Paqouda* (Paris: Larose, 1948), esp. 118-123; A. Lazaroff, "Bahya's Asceticism against Its Rabbinic and Islamic Background," *JJS* (1970): 11-38, H. Kreisel, "Asceticism in the Thought of R. Bahya Ibn Paquda and Maimonides," *Daat* 21 (1988): 5-22. It can be added that in Sufi ethics, too, the ascetics were to serve as an example within society. Cf. al-Sulami, *Âdâb al-Suhba*, ed. M. Kister (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1954), 80. See also *infra*, n. 54.

11 Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*, trans. H. Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken, 1964), Part 2, § 50, 113. See also D. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's* Kuzari (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press, 2000). 45-48.

12 Ibid., Part 3, §1-5, 135-141.

pleasures. Indeed, he adopts a more positive stance towards asceticism and hints that its extreme form is the goal of such perfect individuals as the prophets. Accepting Aristotle's view that touch is the most repugnant of all the external senses, he regards sexual relations negatively. He is opposed to overindulgence in the carnal pleasures, the prevention of which, he states in the *Guide*, is ensured by the numerous prohibitions instituted by the Torah.[13] Yet in his ethical and halachic writings, such as the fourth of his *Eight Chapters* and in his *Mishneh Torah* (*De'ot*, 3), Maimonides pleads for a "middle path," in moral virtues as in asceticism, equidistant from the two extremes of overindulgence and total abstinence. God is not the enemy of man's physical body, and the Torah does not require him to deprive himself of pleasures.[14]

While some individuals may at times follow a temporary regimen of extreme self-deprivation, this is for therapeutic purposes and should not become normal conduct. Such behaviour is akin to taking medicine that may be beneficial for certain ailments, but will harm a normal, healthy person.[15] His dualistic attitude to the Nazirite is worthy of note, since we will revert to it in connection with his son who elaborated upon it. While castigating the Nazirite for depriving himself of worldly enjoyments, he praises those who adopt this austere rule for reasons of sanctity, quoting Amos 2:11, which juxtaposes Nazirites and prophets.[16] Maimonides reprimands his coreligionists who "bind themselves with oaths and vows" and imitate the extreme practices of non-Jewish ascetics — most probably the Sufis. Indeed, I had suggested that Maimonides, by unequivocally discountenancing permanent forms of extremism in his *Eight Chapters*, was polemicizing against his Jewish contemporaries who had been

13 *Guide*, 3:33.

14 Aviram Ravitsky, "The Doctrine of the Mean and Asceticism: On the Uniformity of Maimonides' Ethics," *Tarbiz* 79 (2011): 439-469 (Hebrew); J. Parens, "Maimonidean Ethics Revisited: Development and Asceticism in Maimonides?," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 12 (3): 33-62. See also I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 459-468: "Attitude Toward Asceticism."

15 *Eight Chapters*, ch. 4, *Hilkhot De'ot* 1:4, and *Guide* 3:8, ed. Qâfih, 466-474.

16 *Eight Chapters*, ch. 4, ed. Qafih, 383 and 385; *Hilkhôt Nedârim* 13:23; *Hilkhôt Nezîrût* 10:14, and *Guide* 3:33; 3:48. Cf. Kreisel, "Asceticism," xvi.

attracted to the Sufi-inspired asceticism[17] — the very ideal his son Abraham was to advocate in his ethical regimen!

Notably, Maimonides attributes more radical forms of ascetic conduct to those who follows the path of *ḥasîdut*, which, in keeping with the celebrated ethical syllabus taught by Pinhas b. Yair, is one degree below prophecy.[18] He implies here that the intellectual perfection of the *ḥasîd* approaches that of the prophet. Thus, for the elite a more severe form of asceticism is reserved which could be called 'intellectual asceticism.'

Asceticism in the Writings of Abraham Maimonides

Maimonides' descendants played a prominent part in the Jewish pietist current that arose in thirteenth-century Egypt under the influence of Muslim Sufism.[19] Like the latter, which served them as a model, the Egyptian pietists took seriously the ethical virtue of asceticism both in theory and in practice, and we find in their writings a defense of a more rigorous expression of asceticism which marks a departure from previous trends. Several texts and poems devoted to *zuhd,* probably emerging from their ranks, have survived among the Cairo genizah manuscripts,[20] and certain of their pietistic practices, such as a sober diet, celibacy, wandering, fasting, nightly vigils, solitary retreats, and the wearing of hair-shirts and ragged garments, were inspired by the quest to rein in worldly pleasures.

The leading figure of this movement was none other than Abraham the son of Moses Maimonides (1186-1237), [21] who succeeded his father as Nagid of Egyptian Jewry. Although essentially a halachic work, but with a special emphasis on the

17 I. Twersky, *Introduction to the Code*, 463; P. Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool by Obadiah Maimonides* (London: Octagon Press, 1981), 55, n. 8; P. Fenton, *Obadiah et David Maïmonide, Deux traités de mystique juive* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1987), 36, n. 67.

18 *Eight Chapters*, introduction, Qafih, 372.

19 For an outline of this tendency, see Fenton, *Deux traités*.

20 For example, see *Deux traités*, 31 on *takhalli* ("renunciation"), 32, n. 55.

21 The present writer has devoted a number of studies to R. Abraham and his circle. See the introduction to his *Deux traités*. See also E. Russ-Fishbane, *Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists of Medieval Egypt: A Study of Abraham Maimonides and His Circle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

spiritual significance of the precepts, his magnum opus the *Kifâyat al-ʿâbidîn*, the "Compendium for the Servants of God,"[22] besides including various references to ascetic behaviour, comprises an important chapter on the theme of asceticism.[23] In this work, concerning many of the positions he adopts on ethical issues, Abraham Maimonides continues the teachings of his father but invariably takes them a step further towards his particular pietistic ideal. This is true also in the domain of asceticism. For example, in his discussion of the three levels of the special observance of the Sabbath, Abraham praises the value of fasting on the Sabbath due to a deep immersion in contemplating God's majesty and His creation.[24] In this, he runs counter to his father's unequivocal condemnation of mortification on the holy day.[25]

The chapter specifically dealing with asceticism appears in the second part of *Kifâya* Book IV. This section, intended for those who follow the "Special Way," forms a kind of Sufi ethical manual comprising 13 chapters, some of whose themes—sincerity, humility, faith, and asceticism—are also present in Bahya's *Farâ'id*.[26] The chapter devoted to asceticism (*zuhd*) is the tenth in this section (ch.

22 Abraham Maimonides, *The High Ways to Perfection*, ed. S. Rosenblatt, vols. 1-2 (New Haven and Baltimore: Columbia University Press, 1928-1938), contains the Arabic original and an English translation (henceforth *Kifâya*). There exists a modern Hebrew translation: Abraham Maimonides, *ha-Maspiq le-ʿObedey ha-Shem*, trans. Yosef Duri (Jerusalem: S. D. Sassoon, 1968), as well as a new English translation based on the Hebrew: Abraham Maimonides, *The Guide to Serving God*, trans. Y. Wincelberg (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim, 2008).

23 There are also a few random references to asceticism in Abraham Maimonides' *Commentary on Genesis and Exodus*, ed. E. Wiesenberg (London: S.D. Sassoon, 1958). However, these are generally brief and most often refer to the *Kifâya* for further explanation, for example, his remarks on Gen. 27:4, *Commentary*, 74, which are expanded in the chapter on asceticism, *Kifâya*, II, 288-292.

24 *Kifâya*, chapter 11, ed. I. Rosenblatt, 142. See Russ-Fishbane, *Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists*, 107-108 for a discussion of this passage, which was written in the spirit of the "special way" and not intended as a legal rule for common observance.

25 Cf. Maimonides, *Responsa* II, 208; *MT Shabbat* 30:12; *MT Hilkhot Shebîtat ʿAsôr* 9:4. Ibn Paquda, *Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot,* 9:5, 402 is also opposed to fasting on the Sabbath and festivals.

26 For the sequence of chapters in Bahya's work, see note 8.

20, according to the original numbering),[27] preceded by a chapter on contentedness (*qanâ'a*)[28] and followed by chapters on the combat against the self (*mujâhada*), self-control, and solitude (*khalwa*).[29] Overall, the author of the *Kifâya* expresses a positive attitude towards asceticism in this chapter, which is, significantly, one of the longest in this section (30 pages).[30]

Deftly construed, the chapter echoes, in parts, Bahya's treatment of the subject. Abraham begins with a definition of asceticism, before discussing its value for spiritual life, its essential character, practical instructions towards its attainment and their obstacles, the signs of true asceticism, the latter's benefits, and objections to asceticism and their refutation.

In his opening paragraph, Abraham presents a dualistic conception of man that perceives in the body the adversary of the spirit, which must ultimately be subdued. "As form [viz. the soul]

27 *Kifâya*, II, 224-307; Duri, 113-135; Wincelberg, 330-411.

28 In *Kifâya*, Ar. 216, Eng. 217: "Contentedness is the principle and source of abstinence." Rabbi Abraham considers contentedness a preliminary to abstinence, and he therefore places the latter's chapter after that of contentedness, whereas David Maimonides (see below) reverses the order. By way of comparison, according to al-Muhâsibi (ob. 857) *apud* al-Hujwîrî (ob. 1077), *Kashf al-Mahjûb*, trans. R. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1911), p. 179, contentedness is superior to renunciation.

29 Unfortunately, the *Kifâya* has come down to us in an incomplete form, and the following and final section on *wusûl*, "arrival" or "communion with God," describing the ultimate stage of the spiritual path, has not been preserved. I have endeavoured to define Abraham's conception of *wusûl* on the basis of various references gleaned in his writings in my article "New Light on R. Abraham Maimonides' Doctrine of the Mystical Experience," *Daat* 50 (2002): 107-119 (Hebrew). The contents of the original work as a whole were reconstructed from Genizah fragments and cross-references in my article "Dana's Edition of Abraham Maimuni's *Kifâyat al-'âbidîn*," *JQR* 82 (1991): 194-206. The chapters of the ethical section are: 1. (= ch. 11) Way of the Law; 2. (12) Way of the Elect; 3. (13) Sincerity; 4. (14) Compassion; 5. (15) Generosity; 6. (16) Gentleness; 7. (17) Humility; 8. (18) Reliance; 9. (19) Contentedness; 10. (20) Abstinence; 11. (21) War against the self; 12 (22) Self-mastery; 13. (23) Solitude.

30 In addition to this chapter, according to a cross-reference on page 145, Abraham also devoted a section to abstinence in the lost Third Preamble, which prefaced these ethical chapters. Furthermore, he penned a small tract entitled "On the obligatory nature of asceticism (*zuhd*) and its commendability for religion." See S. Goitein, "A Treatise in Defence of the Pietists," *JJS* 16 (1965): 105-114, and Fenton, *Deux traités*, 82-84.

ascends to its principle, which is God, its attachment to Him is strengthened, and as it descends to [the level of] its substratum, which is matter, its attachment to its principle is weakened."[31] "This world," he states, "is a great veil (*hâjib*) separating the servant from his Master."[32] Pursuit of the spiritual brings us closer to the divinity, whereas pursuit of physical pleasures keeps Heaven at bay. If pleasures become obsessive, they can reduce man to a sort of slavery, which terminates only with his death. Preoccupation with worldly pursuits deflects him from the Divine truths and detracts from the time necessary to acquire spiritual perfection and knowledge of the Most High. Consequently, attachment to worldly pleasures is, as it were, a form of idolatry, while asceticism is among the most sublime virtues and is to be counted among the stations of the exalted way (*al-masâlik al-rafi'a*).[33]

Abraham then proceeds to highlight the value of asceticism. Through aloofness, the ascetic is liberated from mundane preoccupations and his mind is free to meditate spiritual matters.[34] Whoever contents himself with the basic vital necessities, which are obtainable with ease, will spare himself the effort and fatigue wasted in search of the superfluous.[35]

31 *Kifâya*, Ar., 224-226, Engl., 225-227. This dualistic anthropology is consistent with that taught by Maimonides; see for example his *Introduction to the Commentary on the* Mišnah, ed. Qâfih, 22: "In the welfare of the body lies the destruction of the soul, whereas in the destruction of the body lies the welfare of the soul." Cf. the saying to the same effect by the Sufi Sahl al-Tustari (d. 896), *Tafsir*, Beirut: Dâr al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 69 (on Qur. 7, 176): "The more the servant buries his 'self' in the earth, the more he elevates his heart to heaven."

32 *Kifâya*, Ar., 224, Engl., 225. See also *Guide* 3:9, ed. Qâfih, 474: "Matter is a great veil (*hijāb*) preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is. It does this even if it is the noblest and purest matter." Cf. *Guide* 1:30; 2:23; 2:36, and Introduction (ed. Qâfih, 13): "All impediments which prevent man from attaining his highest perfection... derive solely from his matter."

33 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 232, Engl., 233.

34 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 232, Engl., 233, discusses the Special Way in the context of the renewal of the prophecy models of David and Elijah.

35 Cf. my translation of Abraham's son's work *The Treatise of the Pool by Obadiah Maimonides*, 100-101: "Essential commodities are easier to procure than that which is superfluous."

In keeping with a methodology applied by our author throughout this section of the *Kifâya*, he endeavours to confer on his ascetic ideal a biblical and rabbinical legitimization by demonstrating that it was that followed by the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and the ancient prophets (Samuel, Elijah, Elisha), as well as the rabbinical sages of Israel (Abba Hilqiya). In support of this claim, like Bahya, he adduces multiple examples from the Bible and Talmud,[36] while, unlike Bahya, he avoids direct Sufi quotes or anecdotes.[37] Nonetheless, as previously stated, Abraham's positive attitude to asceticism was influenced by both his father's teachings and prevalent Sufi trends. In contrast to Maimonides, however, he manifestly employs Sufi terminology and models. Consider the following description he gives of the ascetic discipline pursued by the (Hebrew) prophets, where the donning of woollen garments and the retreat to the mountains and deserts are obvious references to Sufi practice:

> And thus for all things worldly or most of them, wherefore the saints and the prophets assumed zealousness (*mujâhada*) in forsaking worldly habits in addition to bestirring themselves with the reflections of the heart, and donned wool[38] and contented themselves, insofar as food was concerned, with what was necessary [and] not agreeable and accustomed themselves to fasting and reduction [of rations], and some of them gave up women and forsook [human] settlement and repaired to mountain caves and secluded deserts. All this constituted zealousness for the beginner in the discipline, such as the followers of the prophets and saints at the beginning of their pursuit [of their course]. And zealousness was also displayed therein by him who became confirmed in

36 *Kifâya*, Ar., 234, Engl., 235. Cf. Ibn Paquda, 9:6, 402-405. Moreover, on 252-253 he refers by name to Bahya and this part of the *Hidâya* in connection with the hairy mantle worn by the biblical saints.

37 Some of the Sufi quotes brought by Bahya in his chapter on asceticism were already identified by A. Yahuda in the introduction to his Arabic edition of Bahya's *Hidâya* (Leiden: Brill, 1912), 103-110: "Aussprüche über das Wesen und die Grenze der Akese (Zuhd)."

38 The very term *sufi* is traditionally derived from the woolen (*suf*, in Arabic) apparel worn by the Muslim mystics.

> holiness (*walâya*),[39] and all the more so by the prophets, because it became for them an acquired trait (*malaka, habitus*), so that they had no longing for what is not necessary, wherefore the two opposite extremes were [all] one to them.[40]

I perceive in Abraham's presentation of *exempla* drawn exclusively from biblical and rabbinical sources and his "biblicizing" of Sufi custom an attempt to facilitate the adoption of his special form of asceticism inspired by Sufism by affirming the genuineness of its Jewish foundation. Indeed, when he does refer explicitly to Sufis, it is invariably in order to show their dependence on ancient Jewish rites.[41] Furthermore, as indicated by a quotation from the *Kifâya* preserved in a Genizah manuscript which I uncovered many years ago, he perceived the adoption of Sufi practices, including asceticism, as an indispensable stage in the process of the redemption of the Jewish people.[42]

Abraham Maimonides then proceeds to propose a definition of asceticism which can be traced back to Sufi sources:

> The essence of abstinence consists in its being of the heart. I mean that the heart be abstinent in regard to the love of [the things of] this world, turning away therefrom, and being

39 Here too, and elsewhere, Abraham uses a typically Sufi term, that of the quality of a *walî* ("an intimate of God"). On the latter, see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. XI, art. "walî" [H. Radtke - P. Lory]. This concept is frequently to be found, most often with *anbiyâ'* ("prophets"), in the *Kuzari* 1:4 (ed. D. Baneth, 7) 1:109 (38), 1:115 (40), 2:14 (50), 2:44 (68), 3:11 (99), 3:19 (109), 3:49 (129), 4:3 (151, 159), 5:10 (200), 5:20 (220), and Ibn Paquda, *Hidâya* 2:5, ed. cit. 115; 3:3, 142; 3:4, 155; 3:6, 165; 4:4, 209, whereas, significantly, Maimonides employs *walî* only once in the *Guide*, and even then in a general sense and in the plural (*Guide* 1, 54 ed. Qafih, 130).

40 *Kifâya*, Ar., 248, Engl., 249. Compare this passage to Bahya's description of the first category, composed of extreme ascetics (Ibn Paquda, *Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*, 9:3, 390) who "flee inhabited places, wander in the desert and wilderness, sustain themselves with herbs of the field, don woolen garments and rags, and take refuge in caves," and to Maimonides' historical description of the ascetics in *Eight Chapters*, ed. Qafih, ch. 4, 382-383.

41 *Kifâya*, Ar., 236-238, Engl., 237-239. For such specific references to Sufis, see 223, 321, 323, 349, 419, and 423.

42 See Fenton, *Deux traités*, 75-76.

> preoccupied with the love of God and what unites one with Him.[43]

Ultimately, renunciation does not belong to the first category of asceticism, to wit, the curtailment of physical pleasures, but to the second, namely an inner, mental ethos in which the individual is totally liberated from the desire of this world. Since at this stage asceticism is a spiritual state of mind, it is therefore conceivable that even a rich man, garbed in silk and residing in a palace, could be an ascetic, providing he is immersed in the love of God and had emptied his heart of worldly ambitions. This state is superlatively exemplified by the biography of the Patriarch Abraham, who, despite his great wealth, led a pastoral existence, chose to be monogamous, and even remained unaware of Sarah's great beauty, upon which he had never gazed.[44] This is undisputable proof that asceticism had become for him a permanent disposition.

Conversely, a poor man arrayed in rags, whose diet consists of stale bread, is not necessarily an ascetic, for perhaps he had been reduced to this condition by external circumstances, and not by his own volition. Here again the vocabulary employed in the relevant passage clearly reflects a Sufi background:

> It should not be said then of Abraham [the Patriarch] that he was not abstinent,[45] nor again should it be said of every poor man (*faqîr*)[46] whom we see wearing ragged garments and eating dry morsels that he is abstinent, because he does that by compulsion and not out of choice.[47] Nor again should it be

43 *Kifâya*, Ar., 236, Engl., 237. Cf. Bahya's statement at the beginning of his tenth chapter on love (Ibn Paquda, *Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*, 10, introd., 409): "Our aim in asceticism is to unite the heart and the emptying it [of all save] the love of God." Cf. the definition by Junayd in Abû Tâlib al-Makkî, *Qût al-qulûb*, 1, Cairo: Halabi, 1961, 547: "The essence of abstinence attains one's heart, which is filled with the sole remembrance of God."

44 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 240, Engl., 241.

45 Cf. the similarity with the opinion of Salmon b. Yeruham in J. T. Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology,* 366.

46 Also synonymous with an adept of Sufism.

47 For a similar judgement from a Sufi source, see al-Tûsî, *Kitâb al-Luma' fî l-Tasawwuf*, ed. R. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1914), Ar. 418, Engl., 112: "Others retire from the world and dwell in caves, fancying that solitude will deliver them from their passions and cause them to share in the mystical

> said of one who has assumed the traits of the abstinent by donning coarse garments and eating what is not agreeable, such as dry bread by itself without relish and the like, and [by] isolating himself (*inqitâ'*) in deserts and mountains and the like, that he is truly abstinent, except on condition that his heart turn away from [the things of this] world from which he has separated, not sorrowing over it nor longing for any worldly state other than that in which he is situated, but be, at all events, very firm in the discipline for abstinence [...]. He, then, who turns away from the love of [this] world with his heart, he is the truly abstinent. He, on the other hand, who longs for its goods, whose heart is smitten with the love of them, sorrowing over what he is missing thereof, he is the one who is in reality not abstinent.[48]

How then can true spiritual abstinence be acquired? It necessitates a long preliminary discipline consisting of learning to curb one's natural impulses through the combat with one's self, a subject that Abraham Maimonides was to discuss in the following chapter on zealousness (*mujâhada*) (ch. 21). It is desire and not the body that has to be constrained. Worldly pleasures are not the purpose of man; sensual delights such as food, drink, and cohabitation are shared by dumb beasts, like dogs, asses and swine.[49] Moreover, many physical pleasures are illusory, like the elegance of one's attire, which becomes insignificant when one is not exposed to the public eye.

Pleasure is also a result of habit. A person accustomed to riding an animal would be ashamed to be seen walking on foot; the

experiences of the saints, but the fact is that hunger and solitude, if self-imposed and not the result of an overpowering spiritual influence are positively harmful." See also in the same vein Obadyah Maimonides, *Treatise of the Pool*, fol. 14a, Engl. 93: "Do not believe, like the poor in spirit, that seclusion (*inqitâ'*) is meant for the mountains and caves and that by merely withdrawing thereunto they will accomplish aught, for it is not so."

48 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 240, Engl., 241.

49 *Kifâya*, Ar. 242, Engl., 243. Cf. Maimonides' *Introduction* to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*, I, ed. Qâfih, 41: "Man's purpose is not to eat, drink, or cohabit [...] for these are all ephemeral accidents which do not enhance his essence. Moreover, man shares all of these acts with different beasts. It is but knowledge that enhances his essence and transports him from a lower to a higher level." Cf. also *Guide* 2:36.

interruption of the habit leads after a time to the diminution of desire and renunciation then becomes second nature.[50]

Having evoked the principle of habit, our author distinguishes between two levels of abstinence: on the one hand, an extreme form of renunciation of physical pleasures, undertaken by novices, and, on the other, spiritual abstinence practiced by accomplished ascetics in whom abstinence has become an inured trait (*malaka*) so that they no longer require external training:

> He who turns away from the love of [this] world with his heart, he is the truly abstinent [...] the abstinence of the heart consists of zealousness in resisting natural impulse [...] it consists in the human being's observation with his intellect, in a manner free from passion and delusion, of the fact that the pleasures of this world are not the object of his humanity.[51]

It can be observed that Abraham has opted for his father's second and higher form of asceticism, an 'intellectual asceticism,' which he amplifies into a 'devotional' or 'spiritual' asceticism. It is not that of a temporary stage adopted for therapeutic purposes, as Maimonides advocates in chapter 4 of his *Eight Chapters*, but that of a more strenuous discipline meant to obtain the devotee's intellectual acquiescence.[52] However, he may also have had in mind the select group of individuals evoked by Bahya, who were to practice a "special [mode of] asceticism" as a model for others.[53] Indeed, as I have shown elsewhere, Abraham does precisely envisage such a select group of ascetics (*akhyâr...zuhhâd fî d-dunyâ*), who were to continuously practice solitary meditation (*munqati'în dâ'iman*) and devote themselves (*tafarrugh*) to Divine worship in the synagogue, so as to be a model of imitation (*yatashabbahu*) for their fellow worshippers.[54]

50 *Kifâya*, Ar., 252, Engl., 253.

51 *Kifâya*, Ar. 240-242, Engl., 241-243.

52 Cf. Kreisel, "Asceticism," xix-xx.

53 Bahya, *Kifâya,* Gate 9, ch. 1, 385 and ch. 2, 386-389.

54 P. Fenton, "Maimonides — Father and Son: Continuity and Change," in *Traditions of Maimonideanism*, ed. Carlos Fraenkel (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 103-137, in particular 120.

Practical Recommendations

Abraham Maimonides provides some practical recommendations as to how to enter upon the ascetic way. Since the eradication of habits is impossible in one stroke, especially where they are supported by natural impulse, recourse must be taken to a psychological technique. One must sound one's heart in order to determine what attracts it to worldly pleasures. Thereupon one must modify one's negative habits in order to elevate oneself. This must be done gradually, for haste can prove fatal and lead to failure.[55] For example, if one is accustomed to consuming a variety of dishes at one meal, the number of dishes should progressively be reduced. Only then can one progress to the next stage, which consists in partaking of plain food and avoiding exquisite dishes, before subsequently reducing the quantity consumed. Abraham recommends fasting as a preliminary to abstinence. However, external abstinence is futile if unaccompanied by internal abstinence. The latter consists of attaching one's thoughts to God's love in prayer and fear accompanied by internal purity. For instance, while fasting, one should shun all thoughts of the delicious dishes with which one will break the fast.[56] The association of external and internal should ease the task, "whereupon the gates of mercy will open for you, the lights of wisdom will shine upon you, and the treasures of Divine grace will be revealed."[57]

However, caution must be exercised during his ascetic discipline, both physically by not falling ill, and morally by not falling prey to conceit or illusion. These general guidelines hold true for particular cases.

Most interestingly, among the latter, Abraham Maimonides discusses the exceptional case of reconciling the cultivation of abstinence with the practice of public office, which, in his capacity of leader of Egyptian Jewry, had an idiosyncratic ring to it:

55 Similarly, Maimonides, *Guide* 3:32, in another context, recommends progressive evolution and the avoidance of confronting negative dispositions head-on.

56 *Kifâya*, Ar., 256, Eng., 257.

57 *Kifâya*, Ar., 258, Eng., 259.

> Now a statement about the generalities is unavoidable, and from them guidance will be obtained for the particulars. I say then that as far as the government of a congregation is concerned, [involving] such [functions] as the administration of justice, and headship and prefecture, the discipline towards abstinence becomes possible in conjunction with it only by dint of intense effort, because there is too little time for external discipline, since the most important part of it is employed in preoccupation with that thing wherewith one is preoccupied, and the heart is diverted from internal discipline because of its concern with that matter which engages it, and concerning [situations] like that it is said: "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? Or can one walk upon hot coals, and his not be scorched?" (Prov. 6:27-28).[58]

King David: A Counterexample?

It may be objected that kingship had an adverse effect on the biblical King David. Abraham claims this was not so, since David had already exercised asceticism, to the point where it had become his second nature, definitively acquired, even prior to his accession to the throne. Had not David first been a mere shepherd before becoming king? Furthermore, his was a Divine rule, entirely conducted in accordance with God's will; consequently, he and those like him—presumably other kings and leaders of Israel—enjoyed Divine protection, which ensured the preservation of the purity of their heart, so that neither their appointment to public office nor the temptations attendant upon it had in any way altered their moral stature.[59]

Yet, despite that, the author of the *Kifâya* admits that leadership necessarily has an adverse effect on asceticism. Consequently, one who aspires to austerity should refrain from

58 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 260-262, Engl., 261-263. Some pages previously, Abraham had given a critique of political leadership: "Thus also for the love of leadership and government even though it is an affair of the soul, not a sensual pleasure, yet it is a thing not intrinsically appertaining to the human body, nor having any connection with the person himself, but [rather] diverting him from the perfection of himself" (*Kifâya*, Ar., text, 244, Engl., 245).

59 Cf. Tûsî's argument, cited in note 68.

public office. He explains that the same dilemma also applies at a family level:

> As for the government of the members of his household, relatives, kinsmen, domestics and the like, he who is resolved upon this elevated path must gradually reduce his domestic staff, and sever relations with whomsoever is not indispensable, such as servants and domestics. Thereafter, he should reduce his connections with his relatives until he remains only with those whose care is required of him by law, namely his wife and minor children, or senile parents unable to provide for themselves, or his father, his mother, whom old age now prevents from self-sufficiency. In such cases, one faces a difficult dilemma. Preoccupation with them diverts one from his ultimate goal, while by abandoning them, he neglects his duty and transgresses the precepts.[60]

Accordingly, Abraham, quite exceptionally among Jewish moralists, takes a rather reserved attitude towards marriage.[61] It is true that Maimonides approved of the sort of celibate asceticism endorsed by Ben Azzai, but that was if it served the purpose of intellectual perfection subsequent to the subduing of the sexual impulse.[62] Abraham, however, goes further than his father and, providing prooftexts from the lives of the patriarchs and prophets, declares that whosoever embarks upon this path should do so prior to marriage, postponing the latter until such time as perfection is attained.[63] Abstinence moreover requires keeping aloof from family and society, such as Elisha's separation from his parents at

60 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 262-264, Engl., 263-265.

61 On the question of celibacy amongst the Judeo-Sufis, see Fenton, *Deux traités*, 68-69, and Russ-Fishbane, *Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists*, 67-70.

62 MT *'ishût* 15:2-3.

63 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 264-266, Engl., 265-267. His son had a similar attitude. Cf. Obdayah Maimonides, *Treatise of the Pool*, Ar., fol. 14a-b, Engl. 94: "The accomplished adepts who pursued this Path strived to perfect their souls before marriage knowing full well that after having begotten spouse and offspring there would be little opportunity for spiritual achievement, and if they were to achieve anything it would be rare and after much hardship." See Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology,* 336-337, for Qaraite utter opposition to celibacy.

the behest of Elijah, a theme which is discussed more fully in the subsequent chapter on solitude.

The Signs of Asceticism

Abraham Maimonides goes on to examine the signs which inform the devotee of the authenticity of his achievement along the path of abstinence. The element of duration is not a consideration, for some reach their goal only after many years and much effort, whereas others obtain the same result in a short space of time.[64] Again, Abraham Maimonides invites the devotee to examine his attitude at a psychological level and to set as a criterion the question of whether any change has occurred in his internal attitude to his material existence and whether he misses the objects he has renounced. He states with great subtlety:

> The extent of the deflection of the soul [= one's psychological reaction] is also subject to variation, for if it deflected [i.e. was disturbed] slightly, it is closer to abstinence, and if it is deflected greatly, it is closer to the absence of abstinence.[65]

The Benefits of Abstinence

Our moralist proceeds to deal with the fruits of abstinence which afford the individual immunity from various sins, such as dishonesty in commercial dealings or sexual offences through lust and provide him with strength to comply with the positive commandments of the Torah. However, the achievement of inner asceticism paves the way to higher mystical states which are conducive to communion with the Divine (*wusûl)*:

> When however, [abstinence] is firmly established, the fruits it produces are the confirmation of "fear [of God]", and

64 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 266-268, Engl., 267-269.

65 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 268, Engl., 269. Similar, but not identical considerations are to be found *apud* al-Makkî, *Qût al-qulûb*, I, 506-508.

> genuine "love [of God]" and sincerity in the "service [of God]" and the attainment of the mystical goal (*wusûl*).[66]

Besides these moral benefits, asceticism also bears worldly fruits, such as peace of mind and relief from aggravation, which are infinitely superior to the pleasures that must be abandoned in order to attain them.[67]

Three Challenges to the Necessity of Asceticism, and their Refutation

Abraham reserves the final part of this chapter to rebutting three hypothetical objections to the advocacy of asceticism. All three concern biblical accounts of material welfare and luxury which seem to be at odds with the principles of asceticism: 1) the promise of material reward in return for the observance of the religious precepts; 2) the materialistic nature of the patriarchal blessings; 3) and the magnificence of the priestly garments worn during Divine service.[68] In connection with the first, he asks:

> How can it properly be said that abstinence is among the recommendations of the Law [...] when we find that the Bible has already rendered the comforts of this world the reward of obedience and their removal the punishment of disobedience?[69]

To this quandary, Abraham Maimonides offers two replies. Firstly, asceticism is reserved for a narrow minority and never imposed upon the nation as a whole, for that would lead to the abandonment of necessary pursuits such as agriculture and commerce and would bring about the general collapse of society.[70] The common people are in need of these promises, since the true

66 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 270, Engl., 271. On *wusûl*, see *infra*, n. 29, and art. 'wisâl' *EI*[2] vol. XI, 228-230 [D. Gril]. As we will see shortly, these four stages are developed by David II Maimonides in his treatment of asceticism.

67 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 270-272, Engl., 271-273.

68 Interestingly, this question is also broached in Sufi literature. Cf. al-Tûsî, *Kitâb al-Luma',* 101, who discusses the wealth accrued to Muhammad, notably from the spoils taken from the Jews. He argues that prophets possess a God-given strength which raises them above self-interest.

69 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 272, Engl., 273.

70 A similar argument was already advanced by Bahya, *Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*, ch. 9:1, 385.

nature of reward — the bliss in the world to come — reserved for the elite, was not explicitly revealed, for, because of its abstruse nature, it would be unattractive to the common people.

Secondly, mundane pursuits and occupations were to be encouraged, for without them the world, including the ascetics, could not subsist. The Torah promises worldly benefits to the obedient in order to assist them in their religious duties, but such benefits are not the ultimate reward.

A second objection against asceticism could be raised from the materialistic content of the blessings bestowed upon his sons by the Patriarch Isaac. To this challenge Rabbi Abraham develops a lengthy reply.[71] A preliminary question raises the difficulty of Isaac's blessings being contingent upon the delicacies he requested (Gen. 27:25). Abraham provides two answers to this dilemma, his own and that of his companion Rabbi Abraham he-Hasid.[72] In the former, he maintains that the request for delicacies was due to Isaac's need to bring on a certain spiritual symmetry (*munâsaba*[73] between himself and Esau as a prerequisite to the blessing. Likewise, according to Rabbi Abraham he-Hasid, the delicacies stimulated an intimacy (*taqarrub*) between Isaac and Esau which facilitated the transmission of the blessing.[74]

To the second aspect, namely, that the blessings themselves consisted of the bestowal of material prosperity, Abraham replies yet again that these promises, in keeping with those vouchsafed by the Torah, were merely a means for obtaining the ultimate reward, which is of a spiritual nature.[75]

A third objection concerns the splendour of the priestly vestments, inlaid with gold, jewels, and precious stones. Is not this show of magnificence at odds with an attitude of asceticism?

71 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 280-296, Engl. 281-297.

72 On this central figure of the pietist circle in Fostat, see P. Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham ha-Hasid, the Jewish Sufi," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 26 (1981): 47-72. In his *Commentary on Genesis* 27:4, ed. S. Wiesenberg (London: S. D. Sassoon, 1958), 75, Abraham, refers to this idea developed in the chapter on asceticism in the *Kifâya* and reports it in the name of his grandfather, Rabbi Maymūn. This supplementary nearness referred to here is perhaps akin to *munâsaba*. See following note.

73 On this term see Fenton, *Deux traités*, 140, n. 13.

74 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 282-290, Engl. 283-291.

75 Interestingly, this problematic is also posed in Sufi literature. Cf. al-Tûsî, *Kitâb al- Luma'*.

Abraham replies that the purpose of their elegance was to instil a sense of grandeur into the souls of the masses who beheld him. Their ornateness contrasted with the simplicity of the linen garments the High Priest was wont to don upon entering the Holy of Holies. Here he had no need to beautify himself, for the goal of the ascetic was to appear before God in an intangible presence (*hudûr ma'nawî*).[76]

It can be observed that at times the ultimate state of spirituality is reached through utter poverty,[77] while at others, ascetics were rewarded with earthly prosperity, from which they were inwardly detached. These belong to the mysteries of Divine Providence.

In conclusion, Abraham states:

> God will assist whoever tends (*qâsid*) towards Him and travels (*sâlik*) [the path] leading to Him, in achieving his aim; for he that loves his master and is abstinent in regard to everything except Him, him does his master love, and he, who is in earnest in the quest of Him, reaches the object of his quest.

Finally, we would like to add another brief mention of asceticism, which comes up in the section of the *Kifâya* dealing with vows.[78] As already pointed out by I. Twersky, Moses Maimonides displayed a somewhat dialectical attitude to vows, on the one hand practically forbidding them in his ethical theory since they favour abstinence and self-mortification, while on the other hand considering them commendable in a legal context if they were to enhance one's moral conduct.[79]

In his chapter on vows, while clearly taking his cue from his father, Rabbi Abraham departs quite substantially from the latter's first position and expands on the commendable aspects of vows.

76 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 296-298, Engl. 297-299.

77 *Kifâya*, Ar., text, 298-306, Engl. 299-307. For the first category, R. Abraham gives the examples of Elijah and Elisha, Nahum Ish Gamzu, Honi ha-Ma'agal, Abba Hilqiya (cf. B. Ta 'anit 21a, 23a), and, for the second, King David, Eli 'ezer b. Harsom (cf. B. Yoma 35b) or the wife of R. Aqiba (B. Nedarim 50a).

78 This chapter is included among those published by N. Dana, *Sefer ha-Maspik le'Ovdey Hashem* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1989), 307-311.

79 Twersky, *Introduction to the Code*, 467-468.

Though not an obligation, the latter contain a "mystery" (*sirr*)[80] which trains the devotee in the spiritual discipline of asceticism (*zuhd*) and in shunning worldly enjoyments which deflect him from Divine worship (*ta'abbud*). The same is also true of the "mystery" of the discipline of the Nazirite, which keeps him aloof from physical passions and those that perturb his intellect, providing that the aim of his vow is to serve God, as it is stated: "Vows are a barrier for abstinence" (*Abôt* 3:13).[81]

Asceticism in the Writings of David II Maimonides

Asceticism is also discussed in the works of some of Abraham Maimonides' descendants who perpetuated the Judeo-Sufi tradition. Among the latter are to be counted Abraham Maimonides' son 'Obadyah (1228-1265)[82] and especially David II b. Joshua Maimonides, the last known member of the Maimonidean dynasty (c. 1335-1415).[83] David succeeded his father Joshua as *nagîd* of the Egyptian community in 1355, a function which had been occupied over the past century and a half by several of his ancestors, some of whom had been associated with the Judeo-Sufi circle. We find him later in Syria, in Aleppo and Damascus, where remnants of his writings were discovered. David II Maimonides deals with this theme in at least two of his preserved Judaeo-Arabic works, on the one hand his as-yet-unpublished *Tajrîd al-Ḥaqâ'iq* ("Abstract of speculative truths and extract of ethical aims"), and, on the other, his *al-Murshid ila t-Tafarrud* ("The Guide to Detachment"), of which I have published the Arabic text, as well as a Hebrew and French translation.[84]

80 In Abraham Maimonides' writings, this term denotes the deeper spiritual significance of a precept. This is an example of Abraham's "spiritualization" of Maimonides' *Code*.

81 R. Abraham "fills in" the missing data in Maimonides' statement on Naziritehood in MT *Hilkhôt Nezîrût* 10:14 by providing an anecdote connected with Simon the Just as an illustration of nazirite sanctity. Incidentally, in his *Beth Yosef*, R. Joseph Caro (d. 1575) gives *ad loc* the same example, which is probably what Maimonides had in mind.

82 See, for example, Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, ch. 14-15, 101-105.

83 On 'Obadyah, see Fenton, *The Treatise of the Pool*, and idem, *Deux traités*, 115-118. On David II Maimonides, see *Deux traités*, 195-204.

84 *Deux traités*.

The *Tajrîd al-Ḥaqâ'iq* is divided into two parts, the first of which, containing 46 chapters, deals with philosophical issues. The second part, originally composed of twelve chapters, treats of ethical principles. Substantial but incomplete sections of the two parts, containing in all over 460 pages, have been preserved in the libraries of Cambridge, Oxford, and Saint Petersburg.[85] The Bodleian manuscript (Huntington 489), written, by the way, in David Maimonides' own hand, contains almost all of the second part. Its ninth chapter (fols. 130a-138b), entitled "True bliss is attained through asceticism, contentedness, and gnosis (*zuhd, qanâ'a, ma'rifa*)," is relevant to our subject.[86] His exposition in this chapter is theoretical and markedly more mystical in nature in comparison to Abraham Maimonides' account. Unlike his ancestor, he provides no practical indications but explains in Sufi terminology the mystical role asceticism indispensably plays in the ascending scale of virtues leading to the "perfect man" (*al-insân al-kâmil*).[87] The underlying structure of this progressive regimen is based on the celebrated saying by R. Pinhas b. Ya'ir referred to previously:

> 1) Heedfulness leads to cleanliness, 2) cleanliness leads to purity, 3) purity leads to abstinence, 4) abstinence leads to holiness, 5) holiness leads to modesty, 6) modesty leads to fear of sin, 7) fear of sin leads to piety, 8) piety leads to the Holy

85 P. Fenton, "The Literary Legacy of David ben Joshua, Last of the Maimonidean Negidim," *JQR* 75 (1984): 1-56, especially 2-8. On the impact of this work, see idem, "New Light on Maimonidean Writings on Metempsychosis and the Influence of Avicenna," in *Avicenna and His Legacy : A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 341-368, esp. 359-368.

86 There is also a certain amount of relevant material in Chapter 4 (fols. 14a-96a). The latter is an enlargement on ch. 4 of Maimonides' *Eight Chapters* and deals with the "mean" in regard to twenty different virtues, including a discussion (fols. 54-58) of contentedness and abstinence (*qanâ'a, zuhd*).

87 He devotes chapter 11 to a description of the Perfect Man, as opposed to *al-shakhs al-kâmil*, dealt with in his *Guide to Detachment.* See *Deux traités*, 230 and 295. On these terms, which manifestly carry Sufi overtones, see also P. Fenton, "The Second Ibn Tibbon: Salomon Munk and His Translation of the Guide," in *Maimonides' "Guide of the Perplexed" in Translation: A History From the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth*, ed. J. Stern, J.T. Robinson, and Yonatan Shemesh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 199, n. 67, and *infra* n. 93.

> Spirit, 9) the Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead, and 10) the resurrection of the dead proceeds from Elijah.[88]

David Maimonides commences his chapter with the statement that *asceticism, contentedness, and gnosis* are the key to true bliss, for the latter can only be attained by eschewing physical delights, the extravagance of the irascible soul, and the whims of the imaginative soul.[89] In the following passage he perceives asceticism as the first of three "journeys" or stages culminating in Divine gnosis:

> Know that the individual can attain true beatitude through three disciplines: eschewing delights of the appetitive soul, avoiding the profligacy of the irascible soul, and the whims of the imaginative soul. It is this discipline which involves asceticism (*zuhd*) with regard to worldly pleasures. This is called abstinence and entails "recoiling from all but God." The second discipline entails assiduity in the performance of worship, that is prayer and Divine service, turning towards God and the observance of the religious precepts. This is called worship (*'ibâda*) and entails "the going out towards God." These two disciplines of abstinence and worship are referred to in our texts as "worship through fear." The third discipline which is conduct [carried out] with pure thought towards grasping God, the contemplation of His greatness through the marvels of His creatures and His radiant wisdom, with certain and true apprehension and abundant love, through sincere affection of the true essence insofar as He is the Real. This discipline is called "arrival at (*wusûl*) God" and this is gnosis (*ma'rifa*) [...][90] and this is known in our texts as "worship through love."

88 Mishnah Sota 9:15. David Maimonides refers to the different versions of this saying and varies his interpretations accordingly (fol. 137a). On the variations, see S. Liebermann, *ha-Yerushalmi ki-fshuto* (Jerusalem: Darom, 1934), 35 *et seq*.

89 I have as yet not found a Sufi text which refers specifically to these three principles as stages along the Path. However, in the following passage *qanâ'a* ("contentedness") is replaced by *'ibâda* ("worship"), which brings us closer to the classical Sufi formula *sharî'a, tarîqa, ḥaqîqa*. See following note.

90 These are the well-known three stages of the journey to God in Sufism, also referred to in his *Murshid*, 94. Cf. *Deux traités*, 298-299.

He then goes on to say:

> Now with non-gnostics, abstinence in relation to worldly enjoyments is practiced either in order to obtain in return Divine reward, or through fear of punishment [...] Such attitudes are those of an insincere servant *('obed shelo li-shmah*) [...]. Ibn Sina calls the latter "a transaction by which the next world is purchased with the present."[91] However, those that practice abstinence through love of God or in order to exalt Him are praiseworthy.[92]

Having said this, he recognizes that "worship through fear" is nonetheless an indispensable stage and constitutes a [category] of abstinence. Nonetheless, "worship through love" solely for the sake of the Divine essence is, of course, superior to the former and "is the goal (*ghâya*) of all goals and the finality of all ends" whereby the individual becomes a "true servant of God" and worthy of the name of Israel (fol. 135b).

In the progressive stages of R. Pinhas b. Ya'ir's regimen, "abstinence" is an essential degree upon which hinge the higher levels:

> 1) Heedfulness is the first of the degrees of 4) abstinence (*zuhd*), the last degree of which is 7) "fear of sin." As for 8) piety (*hasidût*), it refers to assiduity in the performance of the

91 Ibn Sina, *Ishârât*, III, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo: Dâr al-ma'ârif, 1947), 226.

92 The author is following Maimonides' *Commentary on Sanhedrin* 10 (ed. Y. Qâfih [Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1965], 199) and his *MT Hilkhot Teshubah* 10. See also Maimonides' *Commentary on Abot* I (ed. Y. Qâfih [Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1965], 408-410), whom David II quotes explicitly. Cf. also Joseph Ibn 'Aqnin, *Sefer ha-Musar*, ed. W. Bacher (Berlin: Mekizey Nirdamim, 1911, 5-6. It is noteworthy that in the first passage of his *Comm. on Sanh.* 10 (ed. Qâfih, 199b) is to be found one of the instances in which Maimonides mentions the expression *al-insân al-kâmil* (see also *Intro. to Comm*. Vol. I, ed. Qâfih, p. 45b: *rajul kâmil*). Although this term can designate an individual who has perfected his practical and intellectual virtues, Maimonides was certainly aware of its mystical overtones in Sufism. David II Maimonides devotes his following chapter (ch. 10) precisely to the Perfect Man. The term also occurs in the *Midrash* (Numbers) attributed to David I Maimonides, Cambridge University Library, Ms Ff2.17, fol. 130a: 'If the Perfect Man ennobled his soul and transported (*wassalahâ*) it to its principle.'

> duties of the Law, whereas the 9) "holy spirit" alludes to gnosis. At this level, the gnostic's thought has veered towards the abode of supernal sanctity, in which emanation of the Divine illumination (*shurûq nûr al-Haqq*) becomes continuous within the individual's inner self (*sirr*). Through this, the gnostic obtains true life or 10) "the resurrection of the dead" [...]. As for the expression "and the resurrection of the dead proceeds from Elijah," therein is contained a most marvellous and subtle allusion, for "Elijah" is a metaphor designating the souls' conjunction (*ittisâl*) with their principles (*mabâdî*) (fol. 136a-137a).[93]

David Maimonides declares that he has explained this more fully in his exegesis of Joel 3:4 in *Maqâlat Derekh ha-Ḥasidût*, which, now lost, was apparently also built around R. Pinhas b. Ya'ir's maxim (cf. 137a).[94]

In short, spiritual asceticism refers to the point at which the soul attains perfection in its regimen of perseverance. Henceforth, it turns in its entirety (*bi-kulliyatihâ*) towards the Divine Reality to a point where it unceasingly proclaims "This is the day of our Lord" prior to the hour of separation (*firâq*), i.e., "the terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 3:4). However, this degree is reserved for the "select few," while it behooves ordinary individuals to persevere in their asceticism.[95]

> As we have explained, beatitude will come about through asceticism, worship and gnosis [...] as set out in the verse "Thou shalt *fear* the Lord thy God; Him shalt thou *serve*, and to Him shalt thou *cleave*, and *swear* by his name" (Deut. 10:20). Now "fear" refers to asceticism, "service" refers to assiduous

93 Employment of this saying to designate the gradual stages of the mystical way is not peculiar to R. David, for it is already found in Bahya, who does not, however, use it as a basis for an ethical syllabus. Cf. Ibn Paquda, 8:3, 364. But in his *Taqwîm al-Adyân*, written in 1223, Daniel Ibn al-Mâshita does just that, dividing the maxim into two spiritual levels: the "stations of perseverance" (*manâzil al-ijtihâd*) and the "stations of piety" (*manâzil al-hasidût*). See P. Fenton, "A Critique of Maimonides' *Guide* by Daniel Ibn al-Mâshita," in *Genizah Research after Ninety Years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic*, ed. J. Blau and S. C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 78.

94 He mentions notably that the station of humility (*'anawa*) refers to gnosis (*'irfân*), "the aim of the perfect ones and the design of the gnostics."

95 Here we have an echo of the two levels of ascetics already encountered in the doctrines of Bahya and Abraham Maimonides.

> worship i.e., "worship through fear," whereas "cleaving" refers to gnosis, i.e. "worship through love."[96] The latter implies the preoccupation of one's thoughts with grasping the [Divine] Reality and being attached (*wusla*)[97] to His gate. As for "cleaving and swearing by His name," it signifies that once the individual has arrived at this exalted degree (*manzila*) and reached the nobleness of His essence, that is His name, he will become cognizant of what he has apprehended just as one who gives oath must be fully conscious of the object of his oath [...]. Every virtuous and perfect man prays that he may attain this degree (fol. 138a-b).

The *Al-Murshid ilâ t-Tafarrud,* whose very title, "The Guide to Detachment," smacks of a regime of abstinence, embodies the most far-reaching synthesis of traditional rabbinical ethics and the spiritual stations of the Sufi path. The above-quoted adage by R. Pinhas b. Ya'ir also forms the framework of the progressive stages of the pietist path (*ḥasidût*) expounded in this work. The latter is divided into 28 chapters, three of which, chapters 7, 8, and 9, touch on the virtue of abstinence, designated with the Mishnic term *perishût*. The treatment is much less elaborate than in the *Tajrîd,* probably because the *Murshid* is in fact an abridgement of the larger work called *Maqâla fî Derekh ha-Ḥasidût*, only remnants of which have been preserved. It is noteworthy that amongst the latter, fragments dealing with abstention and solitude (*perishût, 'uzla, khalwa*) have also come to light.[98]

Chapter 7 of the *Murshid* deals with the third station, namely, that of asceticism, (*perîshût*),[99] which David Maimonides considers the quintessence of the pietistic way. He understands *perîshût* primarily as an act of withdrawal from society into a state of solitude and seclusion:

> An ascetic *(pârûsh)* is an individual who withdraws from the benefits and pleasures of this world. In a word, he isolates

96 In his *Murshid*, 30 (*Deux traités*, 248), David considers the ascetic practice of fasting and vigils expedients towards the revelation (*mukâshafa*) of gnosis.

97 On this term, see *Deux traités*, 140, n. 11.

98 Cf. "Literary legacy," 15.

99 *Murshid*, Ar., text, 18, Hebrew, 19, French trans., 236-239.

> himself and avoids all else besides God. Hence, abstinence is seclusion and withdrawal.

Withdrawal presents numerous advantages, enabling one to devote oneself to worship and an intimate dialogue with God rather than with men.[100] Seclusion preserves one from the sins to which one is most often exposed in society as well as from discord and quarrels and harm caused by slander, jealousy, falsehood and prejudice. In addition, solitude in this world is a preparation for death insofar as it eases the grief of solitude after death. The Sages have alluded to this phenomenon in the expression: "the righteous, even after death, are called 'living'" (B. Berâkhôt 18a).[101]

David Maimonides harps back to the theme of asceticism in his eighteenth chapter, which deals with the temperance to be exercised in relation to the five senses. He follows herein Maimonides' theory of the golden mean but concludes the chapter by making a distinction, already encountered above, between outward or preliminary asceticism and true or spiritual asceticism which entails the total submission of the senses to the soul:

> One must exercise moderation in respect of the sensual phenomena, restricting oneself to what is indispensable and necessary since it is impossible to completely abstain from them. As excess in sensual matters impedes the achievement of the desired goal, a person must limit himself to what is necessary to sustain the body weakened by the ascetic discipline. This rule will assist him in advancing along the Path of true asceticism (*al-zuhd al-ḥaqîqî*). Asceticism is indispensable as a means to inculcate spiritual principles and

100 The exposition of these advantages is borrowed from al-Ghazali, *Ihyâ' 'Ulûm al-Dîn*, vol. 2, Beirut, n. d., 201ff.

101 In the following Chapter 8 (*Murshid,* Ar., text, p. 18-20, Hebrew, p. 19-21, French transl., p. 281-283) the author examines the seven categories of *perûshîm* or ascetics discussed in the Talmud (TB *Sotâh* 22b). Though perhaps inspired by Bahya's categorization of ascetics (*Torat Ḥobot ha-Lebabot*, 9:3, 389-393), these are not identical with those presented in the *Duties of the Hearts*, which speaks of the three sincere categories and the three hypocritical ones. According to our author these categories are established according to the devotee's level of knowledge and training and whether his practice of withdrawal is out of love, like Abraham, or out of fear, like Job.

> eradicate physical ones, for whenever bodily forms and preoccupations take hold of the soul, they tarnish its luminosity. It is indispensable too that his [asceticism] be genuine, for whoever abandons external pleasures in a specious manner, while his heart in fact stills inclines towards them, his asceticism will be of no avail since God neither considers [external] forms nor deeds, but fathoms the innermost heart, the recesses of the soul and the depths of the conscience. [...] Although in the initial stages of the devotee's itinerary, he may affect outward asceticism, he must evolve towards true asceticism, as our Sages specified: "[by all means let a man engage in good deeds, even if not for their own sake], for through the work for a selfish purpose he will arrive at the stage of doing good for its own sake" (B. Sanhedrin 105b). The mystery (*sirr*)[102] of this discipline is to obtain the submission of the vital soul and its subordination to "the lamp of the Lord" (Prov. 20:27), i.e., the human soul. In short, he must subject the sensitive, appetitive, and irascible faculties to the luminous substance and Divine light.[103]

Though echoes of Moses Maimonides' treatment of the subject of asceticism still reverberate in this text, we can observe that the ascetic discipline has moved to the fore to become an essential component of spiritual life.[104]

Finally, do we know if the Egyptian Judeo-Sufis practiced what they preached? Admittedly, we have no precise statistics from this period, but Abraham Maimonides does give random references to ascetic practices among the members of his circle, such as solitary retreats and the wearing of special garments. Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the actual adoption of these practices is the fact that numerous names mentioned in surviving Geniza documents are followed by the epithet *he-Ḥasîd* 'the pious', or indeed *al-zâhid* 'the ascetic', suggesting that the phenomenon was actually widespread.[105]

102 See *supra*, n. 80.

103 *Murshid*, Ar., text, p. 14-18, Hebrew, p. 15-19, French transl., p. 236-239

104 Space does not allow me to deal with additional chapters which touch on this subject, such as Chapter 18, dealing with temperance and [the golden mean]. Cf. *Murshid,* Ar., text, 56/58, Hebrew, 57/59, French trans., 270-271.

105 Cf. *Deux traités*, p. 37.

Conclusion

In contrast to Georges Vajda's view that the classical writers on Jewish ethics, such as Bahya, Halevi, and Maimonides, propounded a moderate form of asceticism, I demonstrate that for Abraham Maimonides and his descendants, 'Obadyah and David, the value of asceticism as a spiritual expedient was greatly enhanced. It was no longer an intermediary stage of temporary duration, a therapeutic step in the climb towards the attainment of a temperate ethical disposition or the achievement of equanimity. Instead, it was promoted to a supreme ethical principle and would almost have been an end in itself, were it not for the fact that it had become a gate through which the highest spiritual stations of communion and gnosis could be attained.

The reasons for this shift in emphasis, I believe, are to be sought in the increasing influence of the Sufi environment in which Egyptian Judaism evolved, coupled with the conviction that theirs was the generation proximate to the renewal of prophecy and the redemption.[106] Preparation for the latter demanded a strict regimen of moral and intellectual purification and renunciation. This discipline of a "special asceticism," though intended to have a wide resonance, was, however, reserved for the select few, capable of plying the "elevated paths" that were to prepare the way.

A final thought. It is commonly held that, faced with fierce opposition, Abraham Maimonides' Judeo-Sufi enterprise failed as a popular movement. I suggest that many of its principles in fact survived, especially its ascetic components, and were eventually absorbed into the nascent mystical trends of Eastern Qabbalah, in which an increase in acute ascetic practices can again be observed in preparation for the impending redemption.[107]

106 I have described at length the pietist way as a "prophetic discipline" in my *Deux traités*, 70-80, which has been further elaborated upon by Russ-Fishbane, Part 3, "Prophecy and Messianism," 187-243.

107 I have dealt with the transfer to the Holy Land of some of the pietists' practices, such as the "solitary retreat" (*hitbôdedût*), and their adoption by the Qabbalists in *Deux traités*, 96-105.

Ascetic Eating Practices and Torah Study in the *Pesaqim* of R. Moses of Evreux and His Circle

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Abstract

Scholarship has noted that the Tosafists Moses b. Shne'ur of Evreux and his brother Samuel (d. c. 1255) endorsed a number of ascetic and pietistic behaviors that are similar to those found in *Sefer Ḥasidim* and other texts of the German Pietists. A manuscript collection of rulings compiled by a student of Evreux, either Isaac b. Joseph or Pereẓ b. Elijah of Corbeil, includes an unusual ascetic eating practice of R. Moses that differs from those of several other European rabbinic scholars (and texts) at this time. This study proposes that Moses of Evreux was influenced by the thinking of an important earlier Tosafist in adopting this ascetic practice as a means of focusing more deeply and devotedly on Torah study. A careful reading of the section of the rulings in which this practice appears provides further evidence for this suggestion, and analogous eating behaviors in both northern and southern France in prior periods are identified and analyzed.

Sefer Kol Bo, a late thirteenth-century Provençal halakhic compendium, records a series of "things that will bring a person to the fear of sin, composed by R. Moses of Evreux (*devarim ha-mevi'im ha-'adam lidei yir'at ḥet 'asher katav ha-Ra"m me-Evreux*)"[1] that is also found in R. Moses' name in the parallel compilation, *Orḥot Ḥayyim*.[2] Ephraim

1 See *Sefer Kol Bo*, ed. D. Avraham, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 2009), 219-20, at the end of section 66, following a copy of penitential work by Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer Niqra Moreh Ḥatta'im ve-Niqra Sefer ha-Kapparot*. On *Sefer Moreh Ḥatta'im*, see Ivan Marcus, "Ḥasidei Ashkenaz Private Penitentials: An Introduction and Descriptive Catalogue of their Manuscripts and Early Editions," *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan and F. Talmage (Cambridge, MA: 1982), 57-58, 69-74.

2 See *Sefer Orḥot Ḥayyim le-R. Aharon ha-Kohen mi-Lunel*, ed. Y. D. Shtizberg (Jerusalem: 1956), fol. 228b (*'inyanim 'aerim bi-teshuvah*); and see also my *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: 1992), 76. On the provenance of Aaron *ha-Kohen* and the nature of his compilation, see Judah Galinsky, "Of Exile and Halakhah: Fourteenth-Century Spanish Halakhic

Urbach discussed the *Kol Bo* material at the conclusion of his treatment of the talmudic interpretations and methods of the Tosafist study hall associated with Evreux, which was headed by Moses b. Shne'ur and his brothers, Samuel and Isaac, during the second quarter of the thirteenth century.[3]

Moses of Evreux's instructions begin with the need to avoid anger and haughtiness, and to conduct one's worldly affairs and interactions with humility. They then continue:

> And be careful to engage constantly in Torah study to the extent possible in order to fulfill it (*ve-havvei zahir la'asoq ba-Torah tamid ka'asher tukhal 'al menat le-qaymah*). And when you rise to take leave of the book (*ve-ka'asher taqum min ha-sefer*), seek the opportunity to fulfill what you have studied and review your deeds night and day so that all your days will be [suffused with] repentance. Remove all extraneous thoughts from your heart during prayer...and contemplate in your heart the words [of prayer] before they leave your mouth. Indeed, this should be done for every sphere of activity. In this way you will not come to sin, including with regard to eating and drinking.

R. Moses concludes with a warning to avoid associating with frivolous people (*leẓanim*), as well as additional recommendations for proper and effective prayer.[4]

Several studies (including two of my own) have identified a range of pietistic tendencies associated with the rabbinic leadership of Evreux, and have considered the extent to which these tendencies were influenced by the German Pietists.[5] By looking more closely at

Literature and the Works of the French Exiles Aaron ha-Kohen and Jeruham b. Meshullam," *Jewish History* 22 (2008): 81-96.

3 See E. E. Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* (Jerusalem, 1984), 1:484-85. Another significant formulation attributed to Moses and Samuel of Evreux (on the prerogative of a rabbinic student to argue with his teacher's interpretations and decisions) is recorded in *Orḥot Ḥayyim*, fol. 64b (*Hilkhot Talmud Torah*). See my "Rabbinic Authority and the Right to Open an Academy in Medieval Ashkenaz," *Michael* 12 (1991): 233-36.

4 On the relationship between Moses of Evreux's formulations in this text and the so-called *Iggeret ha-Ramban*, see my *Jewish Education and Society* (Detroit: 1992), 174-175 (n. 69).

5 See Israel Ta-Shma, *Knesset Meḥqarim*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: 2004), 111-119; my *Jewish Education and Society*, 74-79; my *Peering through the Lattices: Mystical,*

another type of religious behavior affected by Moses of Evreux and his circle, the present study seeks to highlight an aspect of their piety that has gone largely unremarked.

An unusual eating practice attributed to R. Moses is found in a section of *pesaqim* (halakhic rulings) on religious and moral comportment associated with Isaac b. Joseph of Corbeil (d. 1280) or Pereẓ b. Elijah of Corbeil (d. 1297), both of whom studied with the Tosafists of Evreux. This practice is recorded in ms. Cambridge Add. 3127 and ms. Paris BN heb. 407: "And R. Moses would cut his meat into very thin pieces so as not to taste the flavor of the choice meat."[6]

This culinary practice appears to reflect one of the broader aims of Moses of Evreux as formulated in the list featured in *Sefer Kol Bo* and *Orḥot Ḥayyim*: a person should carefully consider what he eats, ostensibly in order to avoid becoming too fully sated, and perhaps to escape the larger pitfall of gluttony. At the same time, however, R. Moses' intention to limit his enjoyment of the meat's taste betrays an ascetic dimension not reflected within those instructions. However,

Magical and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period (Detroit: 2000), 26-27; 59-68; Haym Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism: *Sefer Ḥasidim* I and the Influence of *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92 (2002): 470-71, 481-84; J. Galinsky, "The Impact of *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz* in Northern France," *Jewish History* 34 (2021): 155-75; and below, n. 22.

6 See ms. Cambridge Add. 3127 (IMHM #17556), fol. 165v; and ms. Paris Bibliotheque Nationale (BN) heb. 407 (IMHM #27901), fol. 236d: והר״ר משה היה מחתך הבשר דק דק שלא לטעום טעם בשר חשוב (reproduced below in the Appendix). Cf. H. S. Sha'anan, "Pisqei Rabbenu Pereẓ ve-Aḥerim be-'Inyanei Oraḥ *Ḥ*ayyim," *Moriah* 17:9-10 (1991): 12, sec. 15; my *Peering through the Lattices*, 62, 91; H. Soloveitchik, ibid., 481, 491; and Simcha Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot* (Jerusalem: 2006), 202 (n. 66), 203-4. Isaac of Corbeil and Pereẓ of Corbeil studied under R. Moses' brother, Samuel b. Shne'ur of Evreux, and perhaps also with R. Moses. In any case, they were well aware of Moses of Evreux's teachings and cited them. See, e.g., Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer 'Ammudei Golah (Semaq)*, ed. Constantinople (1510), *miẓvah* 153 (and the introduction in that edition: *ve-zeh ha-gadol ha-R. Yiẓḥaq ba'al ha-ḥotem mi-Corbeil hayah ḥasid gadol, talmid shel gedolei Evreux*); *Haggahot Rabbenu Pereẓ, miẓvah* 11:3; E. E. Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 2:571, 576; I. Ta-Shma, *Knesset Meḥqarim*, 2:114 (n. 9); *Tosafot Evreux 'al Massekhet Sotah*, ed. Y. Lifshitz (Jerusalem: 1969), editor's introduction, 23-24, 30, 33; and *Tosafot Rabbenu Pereẓ le-Massekhet Bava Meẓi'a*, ed. M. Hershler (Jerusalem: 1970), editor's introduction, 9-10. On the similarities and connections between *Tosafot Rabbenu Pereẓ* and *Tosafot Evreux*, see *Tosafot Yeshanim ha-Shalem 'al Massekhet Yevamot*, ed. A. Shoshana (Jerusalem: 1994), editor's introduction, 24-26; Ta-Shma, *Knesset Meḥqarim*, 2:113 (n. 7); idem, *Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: 2000), 112; and my *Brothers from Afar: Rabbinic Approaches to Apostasy and Reversion in Medieval Europe* (Detroit: 2021), 60-62, 177-79.

as we will see shortly, other northern French Tosafist texts posited a link between this type of eating behavior and engagement in intensive Torah study, a goal that is prominently featured by R. Moses in the *Sefer Kol Bo/Orḥot Ḥayyim* listing. We will show that this connection is discussed in the section of *pesaqim* mentioned here.

Self-denial, not as a form of asceticism per se but as a means towards meaningful Torah study and other spiritual pursuits, was discussed by a number of European rabbinic figures. Solomon b. Abraham ibn Aderet (Rashba) of Barcelona (d. c. 1310) received a question concerning an arrangement made between a Torah teacher and his (mature) pupil, which stipulated that the student would serve the teacher; in return, the teacher would give him private instruction. Failure to live up to this agreement by either side meant that the one who broke the agreement, which was created through a mutual oath, would be prohibited to eat meat or drink wine for an unspecified period.

Rashba's response deals largely with the manner by which such an oath can be nullified according to Jewish law. However, in outlining the basis for such a nullification, Rashba notes that "one who afflicts himself cannot properly undertake Torah study and its reasoning (*she-'ein ha-mesaggef 'aẓmo yakhol la'amod 'al ha-Torah veha-sevara*)." Rashba supports his view with a statement by the Amora Rav Sheshet (*Ta'anit* 11b; see also *'Eruvin* 40b), that "the rabbinic student who occupies himself with fasting has let a dog eat his portion," although Rashba also notes that individuals react differently to the effects of food denial. "Some feel sated even when eating only bread and water, while for others, the absence of a full meat diet is considered insufficient." In these situations, individuals behave according to "the strength of their own nature." Rashba further notes that while Resh Laqish is among those Amoraim (*Ta'anit* 11b) who considered one who fasts on a regular basis to be a pious individual (*ḥasid*), he asserts within this same talmudic discussion that "a Torah scholar is not permitted to undertake fasting because he [weakens himself and] thereby diminishes the work of heaven (*melekhet shamayim*)."[7]

7 See *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, 3:319. Cf. *Sefer Ḥasidim* (*defus Parma*), ed. J. Wistinetski (Frankfurt: 1924), 49-50 (secs. 66, 68); 381 (sec. 1555); Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer Roqeaḥ*, ed. B. S. Schneerson (Jerusalem: 1967), 100 (sec. 210); *Sefer Rabiah*, ed. A. Aptowitzer, vol. 3 (Brooklyn: 1983), 602-03 (sec. 853); *Pisqei ha-Rid 'al Massekhet Ta'anit* (11b), ed. A. Y. Wertheimer et al. (Jerusalem, 1971), 176; *Pisqei ha-Rid le-*

Sefer Ḥasidut, which was likely composed in northern France c. 1225 and adopts modified forms of the pietism found in *Sefer Ḥasidim*, maintains "that staying away from foods is a great boundary to preserve the fear of heaven (*yir'at ha-Shem*), since being sated with foods can lead to improper thoughts. Thus, a person who has before him dishes of fish or meat or other delicacies (*mi-she'ar ma'adanim*) should not avoid eating them entirely but rather, as a manifestation of *yir'at ha-Shem*, should not fill his stomach with them so that his desire is fully sated."[8] This approach is reminiscent of the advice given by the Amora R. *Ḥ*iyya (*Gittin* 70a), that "a meal you are truly enjoying should be a meal from which you pull your hands away."[9]

Jonah b. Abraham of Gerona (d. 1263) cites Rabad of Posquieres (d. 1198) as recommending this same type of restraint in his brief treatise *Sod ha-Teshuvah*. A person ought not eat or drink his fill of meat and wine and should thus avoid indulging his desires. However, he should not abstain from these foods entirely; instead, he should leave something remaining when the food is still before him, "as a sign of respect for the Creator (*yaniaḥ likhvod ha-bore*)."[10]

Massekhet Nedarim (10a), ed. A. Lis (Jerusalem: 1977), 435; and *Arba'ah Turim* (with the *Beit Yosef* commentary), *Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, sec. 571. Rashba's responsum, according to the text, was addressed to "Mudela in Navarre." My colleague Prof. Benjamin Gampel has suggested that the location involved was in fact Tudela; the letters *tet* and *mem* in their printed forms are easily interchanged. The sagacity of this suggestion is supported by the fact that Rashba sent at least seven other responsa there (1:379, 1165; 3:12, 40, 120, 185; 4:264).

8 See *Sefer Ḥasidim* (*defus Bologna*), ed. R. Margoliot (Jerusalem: 1957), 62-63 (sec. 12); *Sefer Ḥasidut* has been identified as the first portion of this edition of *Sefer Ḥasidim*, through section 152. Cf. *Sefer Gematri'ot le-R. Yehudah he- Ḥasid*, ed. D. Abrams and I. Ta-Shma (Los Angeles: 1998), 32 (fol. 4v); and my *Peering through the Lattices*, 35, n. 2.On the nature and provenance of *Sefer Ḥasidut*, see H. Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism," 455-465; and J. Galinsky, "The Impact of *Ḥasidei Ashkenaz in Northern France*" (above, n. 5).

9 See *Gittin* 70a (noted by Margoliot, ibid.). Cf. Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot De'ot*, 4:15.

10 See ms. Parma de Rossi 189 (IMHM #13095), fol. 260b; ms. Hamburg hebr. 80 (Cat. Steinschneider 187; IMHM #919), fol. 37a; and ms. Oxford (Bodl. Cat. Neubauer) 2343 (IMHM #21407), fol. 27b: וכן אומ׳ רבי׳ הר״ר אברהם בן דוד הגדר הגדול והמופלא מניעת המאכלות. וכן פירש דבריו אל יעכב עצמו לגמרי שלא יאכל בשר ולא ישתה יין כל עיקר כי דייך מה שאסרה תורה אך בעת מאכלו לפניו ועודנו תאב לאכל יניח לכבוד הבורא ואל יאכל כדי תאוותו. See also *Ba'alei ha-Nefesh leha-Rabad*, ed. A. A. Buchwald (Bnei Brak, 2011), 170-71 (*sha'ar ha-qedusah*); *Orḥot Ḥayyim*, fol. 228a; and my *Peering through the Lattices*, 66 (n. 90). *Sefer ha-Yir'ah/ Ḥayyei 'Olam*, which has

Unlike these other rabbinic formulations, however, Moses of Evreux's practice, which sought to diminish the full flavor of the meat by cutting it into thin strips, was undertaken prior to eating and did not entail leaving behind or pushing away food. The essence of such an approach can be found in an earlier northern French Tosafist formulation. The Talmud (*Ketubot* 104a) describes Rabbi Judah the Prince's thoughts and actions toward the end of his life. As he was about to pass away, Rebbe extended his ten fingers toward the heavens and declared, "Master of the universe, you know that I toiled in the study of Torah with my ten fingers, but I did not enjoy [pleasures] with even the smallest finger."

The standard *Tosafot* to tractate *Ketubot* and the *Tosafot ha-Rosh* (both of which originated with the *Tosafot* of Samson b. Abraham of Sens, *ha-Rash mi-Shanẓ*, d. 1214) adduce a similar (albeit unidentified) midrashic teaching that appears to reflect a passage in *Midrash Eliyyahu Rabbah/Tanna de-Vei Eliyyahu*. It cites this talmudic passage as its source: "Even before a man prays that Torah should enter his body, he should pray that delicacies (*ma'adanim*) do not enter his body." These *Tosafot* passages suggest that eschewing the pleasure of delicacies makes a person's Torah study more focused and efficacious — the message that R. Judah the Prince, the leading rabbinic sage of his generation, had sought to impart.[11]

been attributed to Rabbenu Yonah of Gerona (who was also a student of Evreux) or to a R. Isaac *Ḥasid*, writes simply ומאוד יהיה צנוע באכילתו; see ms. Parma de Rossi 189 (IMHM #13095), fol. 256v. Cf. James Clark, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 118-20; Roger Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment* (Oxford: 1988), 75-78.

11 See *Tosafot Ketubot* 104a, s.v. *lo neheneti 'afilu be-'eẓba' qetanah* (and Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 2:625-27, 713 [n. 74]); *Tosafot ha-Rosh 'al Masskhet Ketubot*, ed. A. Lichtenstein (Jerusalem: 1999), 733; *Tosafot Ketubot* 106a, s.v. *haynu*; *Midrash Tanna de-Vei Eliyyahu* (Bnei Brak: 2017), 401-2. Cf. Baḥya ibn Paquda, *Ḥovot ha-Levavot, Sha'ar ha-Perishut*, ch. 7 (Jerusalem: 1954), 252-53; and see I. Ta-Shma, *Knesset Meḥqarim*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 2010), 133-42, for a Hebrew translation of this work produced in southern France. On the overall relationship of *Tosafot ha-Rosh* to the *Tosafot* of Samson of Sens, see Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 2:586-99; I. Ta-Shma, *Ha-Sifrut ha-Parshanit la-Talmud*, 2:80-82; *Ḥiddushei ha-Ramban le-Massekhet Ketubot*, ed. Ezra Shevat (Jerusalem: 1993), editor's introduction, 34-37; and J. Galinsky, "Ha-Rosh ha-Ashkenazi: Tosafot ha-Rosh, Pisqei ha-Rosh, Yeshivat ha-Rosh," *Tarbiz* 74 (2005): 396-400. Samson b. Ẓadoq, *Sefer Tashbeẓ* (Lemberg: 1858), fol. 50a (sec. 535, *dinei ḥasidut*), attributes the (midrashic) passage to an unidentified geonic responsum (*teshuvat ha-Geonim*).

As students of Samson of Sens (and his brother, Isaac b. Abraham of Dampierre,[12] Riẓba), Moses of Evreux (and his brother Samuel) were likely familiar with this interpretation and the perspective it reflected.[13] Although the *Tosafot* texts make no indication that Samson of Sens or his colleagues undertook any actual practices in this regard, it is reasonable to suggest that Moses of Evreux, an active thirteenth-century Tosafist who valued and espoused a range of religious practices that required intense personal discipline, adopted an eating practice — denying himself full enjoyment of the taste of meat—in order to enhance his own Torah study, as modeled by the saintly behavior of Rav Yehudah *ha-Nasi*.

Although the majority of the substantial collections of halakhic *pesaqim* issued by both Isaac and Pereẓ of Corbeil were intended for all those who sought to observe Jewish law,[14] a number of *pesaqim* attributed to Rabbenu Pereẓ by name contain halakhic practices specifically directed to his students, as indicated by the terms *ha-baḥurim shelo*, *le-baḥurav*, *le-talmidav*.[15] This would also seem to be the

12 See Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 1:4-7981; *Tosafot Evreux 'al Massekhet Sotah*, ed. Lifshitz, editor's introduction, 20, 29; and Shalem Yahalom, "Ha-Tosafot le-Pereq 'Arvei Pesaḥim: Zihui ha-'Orekh u-Meqorotav," *'Alei Sefer* 26/27 (2017): 74.

13 The manuscript from which *Tosafot ha-Rash mi-Shanz 'al Massekhet Ketubot,* ed. A. Lis (Jerusalem: 1973) was published (ms. Cambridge Add. 508.1, IMHM #16801) ends at *Ketubot* 100b; see the editor's introduction, 1; and cf. Benjamin Richler, "Kitvei ha-Yad 'al Tosafot 'al ha-Talmud," in *Ta-Shma: Meḥqarim be-Madda'ei ha-Yahadut le-Zikhro shel Yisra'el M. Ta-Shma*, ed. A. Reiner et al. (Alon Shvut: 2012), 2:802. See also the *Avot* commentary in *Maḥzor Vitry*, ed. S. Hurwitz (Jerusalem: 1963), 559, on the passage in the sixth chapter that Torah knowledge is acquired by diminishing pleasure (*be-mi'ut ta'anug*): דכתי' ולא תמצא בארץ החיים (איוב כח:יג), במי שמחיה את עצמו עליה; the commentary attributed to Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 111a, s.v. *deqa ḥayyef* (where this verse in the book of Job is also cited): חופף ראשו ומעדן בעצמו בשעה שהיה לו ללמוד תורה; and cf. Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, 3:12. Avraham Grossman, *Ḥakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim* (Jerusalem: 1995), 413-416, attributes the *Avot* commentary to Jacob b. Samson, a student of Rashi, while I. Ta-Shma, "Al Perush Avot shebe-Maḥzor Vitry," *Qiryat Sefer* 42 (1967), 507-8, maintains that Rashbam, among others, also contributed to this commentary. On the authorship of the Rashi commentary to *Pereq Ḥeleq*, see the literature cited in Grossman, ibid., 217 (n. 278).

14 On this corpus and its manuscripts, see S. Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 198-211.

15 See Emanuel, ibid., 208-29, and below, nn. 34, 37. There are far fewer references to students within the *pesaqim* of Isaac of Corbeil as compared to the *pesaqim* of Rabbenu Pereẓ, suggesting perhaps that R. Isaac did not teach in a high-level *beit midrash* or involve himself in the compilation of *Tosafot* to the extent that

address for several of the behavioral and pietistic guidelines found in the section of ms. Cambridge Add. 3127 under discussion here. In addition to the eating practice attributed to Moses of Evreux, the following related strictures are recorded there: one should not enjoy a meal to which he is invited by his neighbors if it is not for the purpose of a *miẓvah* (*she-lo lehenot mi-se'udat ha-reshut kemo hazmanat shekhenav 'im lo li-devar miẓvah*), although this passages goes on to specify that being invited by one's Torah teacher (*hazmanat rabbo*), or to a meal offered during a festival period (on *Rosh Ḥodesh* or *Ḥol ha-Mo'ed*), is considered to be a "*miẓvah* meal" in which a Torah scholar may participate. In addition, one should not laugh too heartily or frivolously (*she-lo lemale piv seḥoq min ha-lev*), nor stroll aimlessly (*she-lo le-tayyel be-ḥinnam*).[16] Finally, one should not overly enjoy worldly pleasures during the week, except in order to maintain the strength of his body. This ostensibly refers to food consumption, since it connotes a fairly public act, as we shall see in a moment. The implication is that such pleasures may be enjoyed on the Sabbath, when partaking in finer foods is encouraged.[17]

This last instruction then adds that these efforts may be dispensed with in the presence of others in order to avoid ridicule (*u-bifnei rabbim muttar pen yeḥashev le-la'ag*). This formulation suggests that as with the first instruction, which delineates those meal invitations that can be accepted and those that should be avoided by a Torah scholar or student, this directive is also directed more

Rabbenu Pereẓ did; see Emanuel, ibid., 211. Isaac of Corbeil did compose *Tosafot* to tractate *Yevamot*; see my *Brothers from Afar*, 10, n. 20. And a passage in the introduction to *Sefer 'Ammudei Golah*, ed. Constantinople, reports that for several years, Isaac managed to finish the study of the entire Bible and Talmud each year, whether or not the students were able to join him fully in this endeavor (וכמה שנים עברו עליו שהיה שונה בכל שנה ושנה שיתא סדרי וד' ועשרים, הן עם התלמידים הן בלא תלמידים. כי מה שלא היו התלמידים מספיקים ללמוד הוא היה חוזר בפני עצמו עד שכל שנה היה חוזר שיתא סדרי ועשרים וארבע). However, no students of R. Isaac are known to us.

16 On the connotations of this phrase and activity, cf. *Sefer Ḥasidim* (Parma), ed. Wistinetski, 89 (sec. 278); 194 (sec. 770); 206 (sec. 815).

17 See ms. Cambridge Add. 3127, fol. 165v (and ms. Paris BN heb. 407, fol. 236d), cited below in the Appendix: **שלא ליהנות מן העולם דרך תענוג בחול כ״א לקיים חיזוק גופו ובפני רבים מותר פן יחשב ללעג**. Cf. H. Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism, and German Pietism," 481.

narrowly to the rabbinic elite and their students.[18] In ms. Paris BN heb. 407, the very next passage records the practice by Moses of Evreux to cut his meat into thin pieces, that serves as a striking example of his own avoidance of culinary pleasures; it begins with a conjunction (*ve-ha R. Mosheh hayah meḥatekh ha-basar daq daq*) which indicates that this passage as well was directed to the elite.

However, in ms. Cambridge Add. 3127 (as displayed below in the Appendix), an additional instruction, *she-lo lifrosh min ha-Torah* (lit. not to separate oneself from the Torah), is found between the instruction not to enjoy one's food overmuch during the week and R. Moses' eating practice. Given the demanding nature and unified goal of the two passages that surround this instruction, as well as the conjunction with which the passage about R. Moses begins in this manuscript, it is difficult to imagine that the teacher is simply reminding his devoted students to avoid straying from the teachings of the Torah in the broader sense — especially in the midst of a nuanced discussion about cultivating behaviors of self-denial. Rather, the author's intention here is to inform his elite (albeit youthful) readers that even a dedicated student of Torah may be distracted from his studies by culinary and other readily available pleasures. Indeed, this phrase may well be intended to connote that by staying away (*lifrosh*, in the sense of *perishut*) from indulgent eating practices, the dedicated student of Torah will avoid being separated from substantive Torah

18 A gloss of Rabbenu Pereẓ to *Sefer Tashbeẓ*, fol. 25a (sec. 310) perhaps comports with the meal invitation guidelines under discussion here. Where additional fruits were brought to one's table only after the blessing on an initial fruit had been made, Meir of Rothenburg ruled that each subsequent fruit required its own blessing (due to *heseḥ ha-daʿat*; the decision to bring out additional fruit had not yet been made when the first fruit was being eaten). On the other hand, Maharam held that only one *berakhah ʾaḥaronah* is needed for all of the fruits that the individual had consumed. Rabbenu Pereẓ adds another caveat: "But when a person is eating in the house of his friend, for example at the meal celebrating a circumcision or on Purim, one blessing over all fruits (and wines) is sufficient, even if the additional wine has not yet been brought to the table. For this depends on the intent of the host (*lefi she-talui be-daʿat baʿal ha-bayit*), who means from the beginning to provide this additional food and drink for his guests" (and there is no *heseḥ ha-daʿat*, as per *Berakhot* 42a, regarding food provided by the home of the exilarch). It is suggestive that Rabbenu Pereẓ chose to make his point about these two *miẓvah* meals rather than an invitation to a *seʿudat ha-reshut* at a friend's home, although it is possible that these two kinds of *seʿudat miẓvah* were highlighted because of the expectation that the host will be especially generous at these meals.

study (*she-lo lifrosh min ha-Torah*), precisely as suggested by the *Midrash Eliyyahu Rabbah* passage noted by *Tosafot Ketubot* (104a). The use of the verb form *lifrosh*, which is often associated with self-denial, is thus completely intentional.

Moreover, after two brief instructions about not embarrassing one's fellow or calling him by unflattering nicknames, Cambridge Add. 3127 continues with several formulations about the extent to which a person must be committed to daily if not constant Torah study. To be sure, the term *'adam*, which is employed at this point in the guidelines for the first time, perhaps indicates that, although Torah study is still the focus, the target audience has been widened to include those who are not at an elite level of achievement.[19]

The instruction which follows in this manuscript is that one should not unduly afflict himself (*ve-'ein le'anot nafsho*): "And if he has sinned, he should go and study more (*ve'im ḥata yelekh ve-yilmod yoter*) because the Torah provides expiation (as per Proverbs 16:6, "through kindness and truth sin is expiated; and kindness and truth refer to Torah)." This formulation suggests that although the guidelines imparted here are not intended principally as acts of penance but rather as guidance for the maintenance of substantive Torah study, such Torah study can also help to provide penance. The text cautions again that a person should not cause himself excessive suffering through fasting or other forms of self-denial. A person should do only what he is able to withstand so that his endeavors, in Torah study and perhaps more broadly, and certainly in the performance of *miẓvot*, do not become compromised.[20]

These *pesaqim* then go on to indicate that it is appropriate to fast two or three times every twenty-four weeks (a pace that yields two or three fasts a year), in imitation of the practice of the *'anshei ha-ma'amad*, who were assigned to fast twice a year and read selected biblical texts as the daily sacrificial order was performed in the Temple on behalf of the Jewish people (*Ta'anit* 26a), adding that "the holy R. Isaac (of Corbeil) was accustomed to fasting once a month." During these fasts, one should confess and fully repent, express regret for negative actions and recount them to a *rav*, ask forgiveness from

19 See ms. Cambridge Add. 3127, fol. 165v-166r: אדם חייב להיות כשכיר יום להיות זהיר ביום. שאם תבטל תלמוד תורה בלילה...וחייב לעשות מדברי תורה קבע ומכל דבר אחר עראי לבד מן המצוות שהן חובה עליו בגופו וכו׳.

20 See ms. Cambridge, Add. 3127, ibid.: ואין לו לאדם ליצטער בעינוים לא בתענית ולא בעינוי נפש רק כפי היכולת כדי שלא יבא לידי ביטול עסקיו וכל שכן מצוותיו.

God, and donate to charity. If it is not possible to fast once a week, one should regularly set aside charity or abstain from eating certain foods.[21] Ms. Cambridge Add. 3127 then resumes its presentation of a more typical assortment of halakhic rulings (by Isaac of Corbeil) in various areas of Jewish law.

These last few passages about fasting reflect the influence of the German Pietists, whose possible impact on Evreux and his students has been noted.[22] The fasting and self-denial in this portion of the text indeed serve mainly as forms of penance. However, as we have seen, the acts of self-denial found prior to these last passages in the section relate to students of Torah in ways that the writings of the German Pietists do not: as stimulants or co-requisites for deep and committed Torah study.

Although there are some instructions at the very beginning of these moral guidelines, prior to those concerning self-denial and Torah study, which ostensibly apply to non-scholars as well (such as not gazing at women or Christian religious objects, not doing something that is hateful to one's fellow, not dealing dishonestly with people or their money, not sullying the honor of parents and rabbinic scholars [*ḥakhamim*], and not mentioning or swearing in the name of Heaven irresponsibly), there are a number of other ethical regulations in this portion of the *pesaqim* that would also have been especially relevant to budding and experienced Torah scholars: not to pursue honor, not to do frivolous things or actions that are an affront to the Torah and its students (*ve-lo lignai shel ha-Torah ve-lomdehah*); not to be suspicious of seemingly proper people; and not to establish dominion over another (*lo litol serarah 'al 'ish*) unless done for the sake of Heaven.[23]

Linking ascetic practices to intensive Torah study, as in the group of *pesaqim* found in ms. Cambridge Add. 3127 (and less expansively in ms. Paris BN heb. 407), is reminiscent of the description

21 See ms. Cambridge Add. 3127, ibid.: ובאותן הימים יתודה וישוב בתשובה שלמה ויתחרט במעשיו הרעים ויספרם לרב ויאמר כזאת וכזאת עשיתי. ויבקש מאת השם מחילה מהם...ויפריש מה שירצה...וטוב שלא לאכול יום אחד בשבוע. ואם לא יכול להתענות, טוב שיתנדב ויפריש מידי יום ביום בקביעות.

22 See *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Margoliot, 135 (sec. 97), and 204 (sec. 225); H. Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism," 459-60, 492-93; Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Philadelphia: 2014), 72-76; and above, n. 5. On Isaac of Corbeil's espousal of a variety of teachings and practices of the German Pietists, see my *Peering through the Lattices*, 81-92.

23 See ms. Cambridge Add. 3127, fol. 165v; and Soloveitchik, ibid., 490-91.

provided by Benjamin of Tudela, nearly a century earlier, about what he encountered in the rabbinic study hall at Lunel. In describing the religious behaviors of Asher b. Meshullam of Lunel, a late twelfth-century Provençal thinker and talmudist (whose extensive commentaries on the Talmud have unfortunately been lost, and who had affinities with both philosophy and mysticism), Benjamin writes: "He separated himself from mundane things and immersed himself in study, poring over books day and night, fasting and not eating meat (*she-piresh me-'inyanei ha-'olam ha-zeh ve-'omed 'al ha-sefer yomam va-laylah u-mit'aneh ve-'eino 'okhel basar*)." In light of these practices, Benjamin of Tudela refers to him as R. Asher *ha-parush*. From Benjamin's description, it appears that Asher's asceticism was linked to his desire to spend every moment immersed in Torah study, unconcerned and undeterred by what was happening around him in the physical world; there may also have been a mystical dimension here, as was true of other contemporary Provençal rabbinic figures characterized by similar epithets (*ha-nazir, he-ḥasid,* and *ha-qadosh*).[24]

A number of other sources and possible influences should also be considered when assessing the eating behaviors associated with the Tosafist study hall of Evreux and its students. In addition to a passage in tractate *Nedarim* of the Talmud Yerushalmi (8:5, fol. 40b), which maintains that the Amora R. Yoḥanan accepted or extended a personal fast until he was able to finish an interpretation of a complete talmudic periscope (*hareni be-ta'aniti 'ad de-ḥasal pirqi, 'ad de-nisḥal parshateh*), passages within *Hekhalot* literature and its derivatives refer to the adjuration of the *Sar ha-Torah* (and to achieving *petiḥat ha-lev*) following a series of ascetic preparations and rituals, which allowed the adept to remember everything that he had studied while achieving great clarity in his thinking and analyses.[25]

We can also identify potential role models from among earlier rabbinic figures in northern France. Menaḥem of Le Mans, who lived

24 See Moshe Idel, "Qeta 'Iyyuni le-Asher b. Meshullam mi-Lunel," *Qiryat Sefer* 50 (1975), 149-53; idem, "Sarid mi-Perush R. Asher mi-Lunel li-Berakhot," *Qoveẓ 'al Yad* 11 (1985): 79-88; Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Qabbalah* (Princeton: 1987), 231-31; Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquieres* (Philadelphia: 1980), 27-29, 251-52; Ta-Shma, *Knesset Meḥqarim* 4:159-61; and Ram Ben-Shalom, *Yehudei Provence: Renaissance beẒel ha-Knesiyyah* (Ranaana: 2017), 377-81.

25 See Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* (Princeton: 1996), 25-26, 43-50, 157-66, 209-29; Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood* (New Haven: 1996), 45-46, 59-71; and my *Peering through the Lattices*, 140-42, 236-40.

into the eleventh century, was eulogized by his son, R. Elijah *ha-Zaqen*, as "the father of all Israel for the Talmud that he taught (*'avi kol Yisra'el be-talmudo she-ribbeẓ*)," and as "the holy one, whose bodily holiness was one of self-denial and self-abnegation (*ha-qadosh, guf qadosh, guf ha-me'uneh ve-guf ha-mesaggef*)."[26]

As recorded in the *Tosafot* of his son Elḥanan, Isaac (Ri) b. Samuel of Dampierre (d. c. 1190), the leading northern French Tosafist during the late twelfth century, regularly accepted personal fasts upon himself.[27] He also asked his teacher and uncle Rabbenu Tam whether a person who undertook a series of fasts without accepting them during the afternoon of the previous day was in fact credited with these fasts.[28] The standard *Tosafot* to tractate *'Avodah Zarah*, which were redacted in the study hall of Rabbenu Pereẓ, cite the more lenient view of Rabbenu Tam, but conclude by noting Ri's conduct, suggesting that this was the preferred approach.[29] Similarly, in his *Sefer Miẓvot Qatan*, Isaac of Corbeil cites Rabbenu Tam, affirming that a fast undertaken by an individual need not be declared beforehand in order for it to be effective; however, he then notes that he heard (*ve-shamati*) that Ri always made a formal acceptance during his afternoon prayer on the day before the fast was to take place. As far as I can tell, Rabbenu Pereẓ and Isaac of Corbeil are the only northern French Tosafists (aside from Ri's son) to record Ri's position.[30]

26 See A. Grossman, *Ḥakhmei Ẓarefat ha-Rishonim*, 83-84.

27 See *Tosafot R. Elḥanan (ben ha-Ri) 'al Massekhet 'Avodah Zarah* (34a), ed. A. Y. Kreuzer (Jerusalem: 2003), 231:. ויש לאדם להחמיר ולקבל כל תעניותיו בתפילת המנחה בשומע תפלה. ואפי׳ בשבת רגיל ר׳ לקבל התענית בא-להי נצור לשוני כשרוצה להתענות באחד בשבת

28 See ibid., 230: וכבר שאל ר׳ לר״ת על אחד שעשה כמה תעניות בלא קבלה מאתמול אם הפסיד כל תעניותיו וענהו כי יפה. Cf. *Teshuvot u-Pesaqim le-Ri ha-Zaqen* in *Shitat ha-Qadmonim 'al Masskhet 'Avodah Zarah*, ed. M. Y. Blau, vol. 3 (New York: 1991), 234-35 (sec. 120, *leshon Rabbenu Elḥanan*); E. E. Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 1:238; and my *Peering through the Lattices*, 42-43

29 See *Tosafot 'Avodah Zarah* 34a, s.v. *mit'anin le-sha'ot*; and Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 2:654-56.

30 See *Sefer Miẓvot Qatan*, *miẓvah* 96, ed. Constantinople, fol. 87b; and cf. the glosses of Rabbenu Pereẓ ad loc., sec. 2. *Tosafot ha-Rash mi-Shanẓ* [in *Shitat ha-Qadmonim 'al Massekhet 'Avodah Zarah* , ed. Blau, vol. 2 (New York: 1969), 107] presents Rabbenu Tam's view, but makes no reference to the position or practice of his teacher Ri. Note also that Rabbenu Pereẓprovides guidance in his *pesaqim* for an individual who has undertaken his own personal fast and is leading the prayer service (*ve-'od 'omer keshe-yaḥid mit'aneh ve-hu 'aẓmo shaẓ*). He should quietly recite the *'anenu* prayer in his personal *'amidah*, as is usual on the afternoon of

Although Ri of Dampierre was familiar with magical techniques and mystical teachings and texts, including the *Hekhalot* corpus, and he even had some affinities, if not direct contact, with Judah the Pious,[31] Ri does not comment about why he undertook these individual fasts or their purpose.[32] However, Ri was also the first Tosafist to describe how learned students in northern France slept in their clothing during the weekdays in the study hall, only loosening their shoes, reflecting their dedication to their studies.[33] Although the historicity of this description has been challenged, another of Rabbenu Pereẓ's *pesaqim* contains the following parallel description from his period, which serves in large measure to confirm Ri's report: "And Rabbenu Pereẓ ruled that yeshiva students (*baḥurim*) who don their *tallit qatan* at the beginning of the week and do not take it off the entire week (except for the Sabbath) are not [otherwise] required to remove the *tallit qatan* in order to make a [new] blessing over it."[34] The similarity between Ri's depiction of these arduous study routines and conditions and that of Rabbenu Pereẓ is surely not coincidental. In

a fast day. However, when he repeats the *Shemoneh 'Esreh* prayer during the *ḥazarat ha-shaẓ*, he should recite *'anenu* again, in an undertone (*be-naḥat*), during the blessing of *shomea' tefillah* (rather than as the separate blessing added to the repetition of the *Shemoneh 'Esreh* on a public fast day). See ms. Paris BN heb. 407, fol. 236d (=Sha'anan, "Pisqei Rabbenu Pereẓ," 12, sec. 9).

31 See my *Peering throught the Lattices*, 191-95; my "Judah *he*-Ḥasid and the Tosafists of Northern France," *Jewish History* 34 (2021): 177-98; and my ""The Patterns and Implications of Tosafist Citations from *Hekhalot* Literature," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought in Honor of Moshe Idel*, ed. A. Bar-Levav and R. Margolin (2021; in press).

32 Ri was also in direct literary contact with Asher b. Meshullam of Lunel (R. Asher *ha-Parush*). See, e.g., *Tosafot Berakhot* 11b, s. v. *she-kevar* (and *Tosafot R. Yehudah Sirleon*, ad loc.); *Tosafot Bava Qamma* 64a, s.v. *'amar*; and 64b, s.v. *me-hekha*. The author of *Sefer ha-Manhig*, Abraham b. Nathan of Lunel, studied with Ri of Dampierre and transmitted R. Asher's questions about various talmudic and halakhic issues to his teacher. See E. E. Urbach, *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, 1:237-38; I. Ta-Shma, *R. Zeraḥyah ha-Levi Ba'al ha-Ma'or u-Bnei Ḥugo* (Jerusalem: 1993), 165-66; and Pinchas Roth, "Ma'aseh be-Halshanah ki-Neqamah: Qeri'ah Ḥadashah bi-Teshuvat Ri ha-Zaqen le-R. Asher mi-Lunel," *Shenaton ha-Mishpat ha-'Ivri* 29 (2016-2018), 154-57

33 See Moses of Coucy, *Sefer Miẓvot Gadol, lo ta'aseh* 65, s.v. *veha-qosher* (ed. Y. M. Peles [Jerusalem: 1993], 1:147). See also Barukh b. Isaac, *Sefer ha-Terumah* (sec. 243; Barukh was a student of Ri); and cf. Isaac b. Moses, *Sefer Or Zarua'*, ed. Y. Farbstein (Jerusalem: 2010), 2:114 (*hilkhot Shabbat ve-'Eruvin*, 114, sec. 84:12), which likely reflects his experiences in the study hall of Ri's student, Judah Sirleon of Paris.

34 See S. Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 208 (and n. 93).

short, the ascetic practices and values espoused by the northern French Tosafist Isaac of Dampierre could easily have made their way to the Tosafists at Evreux and to their students during the mid-thirteenth century, along with Samson of Sens's interpretation of the pious eating behavior of the leading Tanna and Torah scholar Rav Yehudah *Ha-Nasi*, who sought to avoid all delicacies (*ma'adanim*).

A similar form of ascetic behavior associated with prayer is endorsed by Rabbenu Pereẓ in a gloss to *Sefer Tashbeẓ*. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 10b) prohibits eating or drinking substantial beverages prior to prayer; these are considered by the Talmud to be haughty behaviors, since one has not yet accepted the yoke of heaven prior to prayer. *Sefer Tashbeẓ* notes that the German Tosafist and halakhic authority Rabiah (d. c. 1225) ruled that it was permissible to drink water prior to the morning prayers because drinking water does not display or reflect any degree of haughtiness (*ki mai ga'avah shayakh be-mayim*). Rabbenu Perez, however, comments on Rabiah's ruling that he believes that one should not be allowed to drink even water prior to prayer because this causes the individual to be sated, which does reflect an aspect of haughtiness.[35]

The extent to which the widespread asceticism at this time within Christian society impacted these developments among the Tosafists of northern France is also worthy of further consideration, as is the provenance of the so-called *Sefer Ḥuqqei ha-Torah*, which contains a blueprint for establishing a high-level, advanced talmudic study hall that includes several notable ascetic or even quasi-monastic practices.[36] The term *perishut* figures prominently in this text, although in this context it mainly denotes the separation of the academy head from his wife and family during the week (and, of course, the separation of the students from the teacher's family as well). Study halls during this period in northern Europe were typically located within the home of the academy head, and *Sefer Ḥuqqei ha-*

35 See *Sefer Tashbeẓ*, fol. 17b (sec. 203, at the beginning of *dinei tefillah*: מיהו נראה דאפילו מים אסור לשתות דכיון דממלא נפשו ממה שהוא צריך אחר שנתגאה קרינן ביה). For his part, Isaac of Corbeil in his *pesaqim* permits drinking water before prayer (agreeing with the view that *'ein ga'avah be-mayim*), adding the practical consideration that it is better to drink water before prayer than to feel thirsty during the prayers; see Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 205.

36 See R. Ben-Shalom, *Yehudei Provence* (above, n. 24); Haviva Pedaya, *Ha-Shem veha-Miqdash be-Mishnat R. Yiẓḥaq Safi Nahor* (Jerusalem: 2001), 21-26; my "A Monastic-like Setting for the Study of Torah," in *Judaism in Practice*, ed. L. Fine (Princeton: 2001), 191-202; and above, n. 10 (end).

Torah clearly advocated a greater degree of separation, preferably by maintaining a separate *beit midrash* facility that housed only the students.[37] In this connection, it is also worth noting a passage found in the *pesaqim* of Rabbenu Pereẓ, that it was his practice not to speak with any woman who was not his wife in a separate room in his home (even if the door was open), except in the presence of one of his students.[38]

However, the ascetic tendencies and practices highlighted in the present study are not related to sex, nor are they centered on penance or the avoidance of sin in the manner of the German Pietists. Rather, a circle of northern French Tosafists in the late thirteenth century sought to deepen the study of the Divine word for themselves and their students by advocating diminished involvement in culinary and other mundane pleasures.[39] They may have taken their cue in this regard from earlier Tosafists and other European rabbinic predecessors, but they developed their own distinct modes of expressing and transmitting these values.

Appendix

Ms. Paris BN heb. 407 (fol. 236d)	Ms. Cambridge Add. 3127 (fol. 165v)
שלא להנות מן העולם דרך תענוג בחול לכוונת תענוג כ״א לקיים חיזוק גופו ובפני רבים מותר מן יחשב ללעג.	שלא ליהנות מן העולם דרך תענוג בחול כ״א לקיים חיזוק גופו ובפני רבים מותר פן יחשב ללעג.
	שלא לפרוש מן התורה.
והר״ר משה היה מחתך הבשר דק דק שלא לטעום טעם בשר הטוב.	והר״ר משה היה מחתך הבשר דק דק שלא לטעום טעם בשר חשוב.

37 See my *Jewish Education and Society*, 66-67, 104.

38 See S. Emanuel, *Shivrei Luḥot*, 209: ועוד שהרב לא היה מדבר עם שום אשה בבית אחד או בחדר אחד ואפי׳ הפתח פתוח ויש בני אדם הדרים באותה דירה אם לא יהיה עמו בחדר בחור אחד ואפי׳ עם חמותו.

39 Cf. Michael Satlow, "`And on the Earth You Shall Sleep': Talmud Torah and Rabbinic Asceticism," *The Journal of Religion* 83:2 (2003): 204-25 (thanks to Dr. Judah Galinsky for this reference); Elliot Wolfson, "Martyrdom, Eroticism, and Asceticism in Twelfth-Century Ashkenazi Piety," in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. J. Van Engen and M. Signer (Notre Dame, 2001), 171-220; and Yishai Kiel, "Toratam ha-Musarit—Datit shel Ḥasidei Ashkenaz: Bein Sagfanut ve-Ḥushaniyyut," *Da`at* 73 (2012): 85-101.

The Ambiguous Attitude to Asceticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and the Case of Levi ben Avraham

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that two major considerations framed medieval Jewish philosophical approaches to asceticism. The first was a legal consideration. The fulfillment of many of the commandments precluded the adoption of an extreme ascetic regimen. The second consideration was a philosophical one. Medieval Jewish philosophical approaches to asceticism are intrinsically linked to approaches to the nature of the soul, its perfection and its final state. In Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, the goal of life was to free the rational soul from the body and its temptations in a quest for purity and conjunction with the spiritual world. This encouraged a far more ascetic lifestyle in the case of the spiritual elite than the limited constraints upon one's physical appetites imposed by the Torah. Among the earlier medieval Jewish philosophers, whose approach to the soul was basically shaped, albeit indirectly, by Platonic thought with its negative view of the body, the appreciation of more extreme forms of asceticism can be clearly detected.

Maimonides, however, is more influenced by Aristotelian thought, with its stress on the perfection of the speculative intellect, which alone survives after death. The implication of this view is that all activities ultimately are to be judged by their contribution to attaining knowledge leading to the intellectual love of God. Hence, even the intellectual elite should engage in ascetic practices only to the point where they further this end. Maimonides' apparently conflicting positions regarding asceticism essentially signal this idea. In general, Maimonides advocates satisfying the demands of the body, but no more than is necessary for its health. Even the Aristotelian "middle way" favored by the Torah, in Maimonides' view, is seen as leaning more in the direction of asceticism. The question for him is in what circumstances should one move even further in that direction, even at the expense of not fulfilling some of the Torah's commandments.

The article concludes with a look at the approach of Levi ben Abraham as reflected in his encyclopedia *Livyat Ḥen*. Levi follows in the footsteps of

Maimonides and interprets him along the aforementioned lines. He brings a wealth of material from biblical and rabbinic literature in an attempt to show that there is no conflict in any of the authoritative Jewish sources on this issue. Each of the contradictory rabbinic opinions on this subject deals with a different individual, indicating the regimen required in that one particular case. In general, Levi's encyclopedia comes to complete the Maimonidean project of presenting Judaism as being in harmony with Aristotelian philosophy. Levi's interpretation of Jewish sources on the subject of human perfection and the role asceticism plays in the attainment of this perfection nicely illustrates this point.

A

Medieval Jewish philosophical approaches to asceticism are intrinsically linked to the question of the nature of the soul, its perfection and its final state. Perhaps in no other area did ancient Greek philosophical conceptions have a greater impact on the development of Judaism, greater even than the Aristotelian philosophical notion of God's unique unity and incorporeality. While the latter notion became the foundation for medieval Jewish rationalist theology, it had little influence on Jewish *praxis*. In the case of approaches to the soul, by contrast, there was a clear and direct influence not only on such fundamental theological conceptions as reward in the World to Come, but also the importance of certain practices in this world, especially ascetic ones, in preparing the soul to attain its perfection and ultimate felicity.

Two dominant conceptions of the soul in Greek philosophy penetrated Judaism. The first was the Platonic conception that emerges from the *Phaedo*, which viewed the rational soul as a substantive immortal entity that exists independent of the body. This soul is placed in the body to animate and lead it, but often finds itself beguiled by the body and its passions. Hence, the soul that seeks purification and wisdom feels itself trapped in the body, which counters its desire for contemplation, the activity that characterizes its essential nature. It seeks to free itself from this state, or in the words of Plato:

> Surely the soul can best reflect when it is free of all distractions such as hearing or sight or pain or pleasure of any kind that is, when it ignores the body and becomes as far as possible

> independent, avoiding all physical contacts and associations as much as it can, in search for reality (Phaedo 65c).[1]

In a subsequent passage, Plato reiterates this notion:

> And purification [...] consists in separating the soul as much as possible from the body and accustoming it to withdraw from all contact with the body and concentrate itself by itself, and to have its dwelling, so far as it can, both now and in the future, alone by itself, freed from the shackles of the body (*Phaedo* 67d).

Plato concludes: "The philosopher's occupation consists precisely in the freeing and separation of soul from body. [...] Then it is a fact, Simmias, that true philosophers make dying their profession (*Phaedo* 67e)." In the *Republic*, Plato further develops his notion of the soul by describing its tripartite division – rational, emotive and appetitive – in which the rational part is the true essence of the individual.[2] The practical consequence of this strict dualism between soul and body, in which only the rational soul is regarded as immortal, is to focus all of one's efforts on the wellbeing of the soul, more specifically, its rational part. It is easy to see how such a conception would lead one to embrace ascetic practices, with the intent of freeing the soul from physical desires that impurify it and dim the light of its true nature. To be sure, in the *Republic* Plato advocates achieving a harmonious balance between the three parts of the soul, a balance in which the rational part ensures that each part receives its proper due, thereby satisfying one's physical appetites and allowing expression to one's emotions, rather than attempting to suppress the other parts completely. But in developing this idea, Plato appears to be most concerned that the other two parts not infringe on the workings of the rational part. Rather, by submitting themselves to the rational part, they enable it to function in the best possible manner, inasmuch as the rational part is in need of their service for the period that it is

1 Translated by Hugh Tredennick, as appears in Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1963), 48. For a discussion of Plato's approach to the soul, see, for example, David Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1986); see also Hendrik Lorenz, "Ancient Theories of Soul," 2009, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ancient-soul/

2 *Republic*, Book 4.

attached to the body. Plato's approach to the soul was adopted by Philo, who very much leans towards asceticism in his philosophy.[3] Plotinus too further develops this approach, stressing the origins of the soul in the supernal world, and treating the purpose of life as one of attempting to purify the soul by the ethical and rational virtues in preparing it for its return to its source.[4] Philo was to exert a strong impact on the Church Fathers, while Plotinus was to play a crucial role in molding Islamic and Jewish philosophical and mystical theologies.

Along with the Platonic approach to the soul, the medieval world also inherited the Aristotelian approach, which like that of Plato was a dualistic one.[5] For Aristotle, however, the rational soul was not an independent substance, and certainly not immortal. Rather it was a "form" to the body's "matter."[6] Like all forms, it could only exist united with matter. Hence, with the decomposition of the body, the particular soul that was attached to it ceases to exist. For Aristotle, the actualized intellect alone – that is to say, the thought of that which exists, as abstracted from the images found in the soul – is immortal.[7] The rational soul possesses only the potential for such thought, and hence it too cannot survive at death. Later, in the thought of Alfarabi, immortality is considered to be attained only by the perfect human intellect – namely, the acquired intellect –which grasps immaterial existence.[8]

Instead of Plato's approach in which each part of the soul is given its due – that is, it is directed by the rational part to act in the most appropriate manner at the appropriate time and in the most appropriate circumstances – Aristotle's approach is based on training

3 For a discussion of asceticism in Philo's philosophy, see, for example, R.D. Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), 33-39.

4 For a discussion of Asceticism in Plotinus, see, for example, Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, translated by Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993).

5 For a discussion of Aristotle's theory of the soul, see, for example, Christopher Shields, "Aristotle's Psychology," in an article in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-psychology/. Shields brings an extensive bibliography at the end of his article.

6 *De Anima* 2.1, 412a.

7 *De Anima* 3.5, 430a.

8 For a discussion of Alfarabi's approach to the intellect and its immortality, see Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992), 44-73.

oneself in the doctrine of the mean. One is to avoid extreme traits and develop moderate ones. This is the personality that characterizes the model citizen in the ideal state. Yet, as we have seen, Plato viewed physical desires in general as dimming the light of the immortal rational soul, which is shackled by the body in its quest for purification and wisdom. This view encouraged adopting a more ascetic approach, one that greatly minimizes the activity of the emotive and appetitive parts. The Aristotelian view too suggests that the perfection of the intellect is the overarching goal of one's behavior. This entails judging all activities ultimately from the standpoint of their contribution to this goal, even if this point is not stated explicitly in Aristotle's writings.[9] According to this view, any overindulgence in physical pleasures or other passions involving the body is seen as bad because, among other things, it impedes the attainment of the truths of speculative philosophy. Nevertheless, the Aristotelian approach is hardly characterized by the negative attitude to the body marking the Platonic one. After all, even the rational soul in the Aristotelian view has no existence independent of the body. One of the faculties of the human soul is thought, but only the actualized thought of that which exists has a distinct identity. Moreover, the striving for knowledge exists in a social context, and requires a healthy and well-cared-for body. The Aristotelian approach thus leads to an ambivalent view of asceticism, and certainly does not countenance its more radical forms.

B

The strict dualism characterizing both Plato's and Aristotle's approaches to the soul have almost no parallel in the Bible. The one crucial exception is the famous verse in Ecclesiastes, one of the later biblical books: *And the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God Who gave it* (12:7). The case in rabbinic thought is more complex. Ephraim Urbach maintained that one can detect a growing influence of Greek, particularly Platonic, philosophy on rabbinic thought in the treatment of the relation between soul and body. One has only to think of the famous passage in B.T. Shabbat 152b which

9 Aristotle concludes the *Nicomachean Ethics* with a discussion in book ten of the perfection of the intellect as the human being's ultimate perfection, which clearly suggests this point.

expounds the verse in Ecclesiastes by likening the soul to precious garments that the wise carefully preserve and return them to their Maker unsullied, while the foolish soil them by wearing them to work. Nevertheless, one does not find the same sharp dichotomy between body and soul in rabbinic thought as one finds in Greek philosophy.[10] Urbach further argued, when it came to *praxis*, particularly ascetic practices, this dualistic conception appears to have exerted no impact at all on rabbinic thought. Rather, the impetus for ascetic practices in the rabbinic period was due to the fear of sin or a desire for atonement, according to the view that suffering atones for one's sins. The failed Bar-Kokhva rebellion also brought in its wake a tendency towards asceticism on the part of some of the rabbinic elite. Even in this case, the predominant rabbinic view was against ascetic practices.[11] In general, neither biblical nor rabbinic Judaism advocated asceticism as a way of life to purify the soul, in Urbach's view. Rather, they advocated strict adherence to the Torah. This law may have placed some limitations on the pleasures of the body but was far from ascetic in character. Urbach may have understated the case of Greek philosophic influence in this area. Nonetheless, the overall impression one gains from rabbinic Judaism is that he is essentially correct in his analysis. This is certainly true of the impression gained by the medieval Jewish thinkers in their consideration of the traditional sources, as we shall see below.

C

If in the rabbinic period Greek philosophic approaches to the soul, particularly the Platonic, can be discerned in Judaism, but still leave little if any impress in the realm of *praxis*, the situation changes radically in the medieval world.[12] The Platonic notion of the soul, its tripartite division, and its essential immortality, already heavily influenced Saadiah, who hardly is a Platonic thinker but whose thought reveals clear Platonic, Neoplatonic and Stoic influences. One has only to examine the tenth and final section of his treatise, *The Book*

10 For Urbach's discussion of this issue, see *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Israel Abrahams, trans. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1975), vol 1, pp. 214-254.

11 See *The Sages*, 447-448, 587.

12 The most comprehensive study of theories of the soul in early medieval Jewish philosophy remains that of Saul Horovitz, *Die Psychologie bei den jüdischen Religionsphilosophen des Mittelalters von Saadia bis Maimuni*, Breslau 1898.

of Beliefs and Opinions, to discern this influence.[13] In this section, Saadiah accepts the tripartite division of the soul, which previously in his treatise he had already treated as immortal.[14] He also adopts a positive attitude towards asceticism.[15] While his basic argument in this section is based on the Platonic view of achieving the proper balance and harmony between all the parts of the soul and their predilections or aspirations, a view that Saadiah justifies theologically by arguing that all these predilections were created by God, he still heavily favors some predilections over others - particularly those of asceticism, knowledge and worship. Consider what he has to say in regard to asceticism. After bringing many of the arguments of the proponents of asceticism, most of them focusing on the evils and transient nature of earthly existence, Saadiah concludes: "Now I considered carefully their allegations and found them to be for the most part correct."[16] Ultimately, he rejects this extreme course of action because it would mean the end of civilization and of human life if all were to practice it. It also would lead their adherents to hate the rest of humanity. He thus concludes that this trait is commendable when practiced to uphold the restraints imposed by the divine law. Yet in discussing other traits, such the inclinations to eating, drinking and sexual intercourse, Saadiah does not limit these practices only in

13 For an analysis of this section see Israel Efros, "Saadia's General Ethical Theory and Its Relation to Sufism," in *The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Volume of the Jewish Quarterly Review*, ed. Abraham A. Neuman and Solomon Zeitlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Quarterly Review, 1967), 166-177. Saadiah discusses the reasons for the commandments in book 3 of his treatise, but without any reference there to the nature of the soul and its traits.

14 Saadiah does not regard the soul as incorporeal; only God is incorporeal in his view. Rather it is made of the purest substance, similar but even superior to that of the spheres. The soul is created simultaneously with the completion of the body. See *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* 6.3. For a study of the various theories of the soul which Saadiah lists and discusses in book 6 of his treatise, see Herbert Davidson, "Saadia's List of Theories of the Soul," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1967), 75-94.

15 For a survey of different attitudes towards asceticism in medieval Jewish philosophy, particularly in the later period, see Dov Schwartz, "The Tension been Moderate Ethics and Ascetic Ethics in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *Between Religion and Ethics*, ed. Avi Sagi and Daniel Statman (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 185-208 (Hebrew).

16 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 10.4, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press 1948), 366.

respect to upholding the divine law's prohibitions in these areas. Rather, he indicates that these inclinations should be satisfied only to the extent required for one's subsistence and to produce offspring. He thereby alludes to his positive evaluation of a more ascetic lifestyle, going beyond that which the divine law demands. This is also true of his subsequent discussion of divine service. His description of those who devote themselves entirely to this activity focuses on their extremely ascetic lifestyle. While in this case too, Saadiah ultimately rejects engaging in divine service exclusively to the complete abandonment of the cultivation of the world, he nonetheless adopts a laudatory stance toward this way of life.

It is important to stress that already with Saadiah we begin to see what will become the dominant tendency in medieval Jewish thought regarding the purpose of the commandments. In one passage in his treatise Saadiah describes their ultimate purpose as purifying the soul,[17] as suggested by the previously mentioned rabbinic parable. This view lends itself to a naturalistic understanding of the purpose of the commandments. They are not simply actions commanded by God, albeit rational ones, with God maintaining a kind of check list to determine the extent to which Jews observed them or not, and then weighing their deeds on the scales of justice and bestowing the appropriate reward or punishment. This seems to be the dominant rabbinic view, as well as Saadiah's own view in most of his discussions. Rather, there is an integral connection between the actions commanded by God and their effects on the soul, which ultimately determines the final fate of the soul. This view easily leads to the conclusion that perhaps an even more rigorous regimen than that commanded by the divine law is required in the effort to purify the soul. In a crucial sense, Saadiah sets the stage for what will be the primary reason for the medieval Jewish thinker's ambiguous attitude toward ascetism. At one end lies their philosophic conception of the soul and its perfection, with the negative effect of the body and the desires it evinces in the soul serving as a stumbling block to achieving its innate perfection. At the other end lies their commitment to the divine law whose fulfilment involves marrying, having a family, feasting on holidays and being involved in the affairs of the world - activities which mitigate against an ascetic lifestyle.

17 *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* 4.5.

If Saadiah leans towards advocating asceticism, Baḥya Ibn Paquda in his *Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart* comes close to embracing asceticism almost completely in order to attain purity of the soul. Parts of his discussion of asceticism in the ninth section of his treatise read like a dialogue with Saadiah, addressing in part Saadiah's objections to the most extreme form of asceticism. In Baḥya's description of three levels of asceticism, he describes the highest level as consisting of those who isolate themselves completely from society, eating only what they find such as grass and leaves.[18] Like Saadiah, however, Baḥya cannot explicitly advocate this form of asceticism for it strays too far from the moderation prescribed by the Torah, which does not favor desisting from the cultivation of the world. In introducing his description of these ascetics, though, he indicates that they follow the highest form of asceticism in order to resemble the spiritual beings by abstaining from all which separates them from God. In the context of Baḥya's philosophy, there is no state more exalted than that of resembling the spiritual beings. Even the more moderate form of asceticism explicitly advocated by Baḥya, the third form, is fairly extreme. These are the ascetics who *internally* separate themselves from the world though they continue to live in society. They regard themselves as strangers in this world, detest it, and take from it even less than their sustenance. All the while they prepare for the next world and anticipate death. Physically, however, they continue to cultivate the world. This form of asceticism is regarded Baḥya as being closest to the way of the mean associated with the divine law, for it stops short of a complete physical abandonment of the world.[19] Baḥya's view that a more extreme regimen than that commanded by the divine law is required finds expression also in the preceding chapter, in which he counsels the followers of the divine law to abstain from every pleasure and bodily comfort except for what is necessary by nature, and the elimination of all else from the soul. In his view, then, the regimen the commandments impose thus is not really adequate for the spiritual

18 *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart* 9.3, trans. Menahem Mansoor (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 408. For a discussion of asceticism in Bahya's thought see Howard Kreisel, "Asceticism in the Thought of R. Baḥya Ibn Paquda and Maimonides," *Daat* 21 (1988): vii-xiii. See also Naḥem Ilan, "Al-I'tidal Al-Sharī'i: Another Examination of the Perception of Asceticism in the *Duties of the Heart* of Baḥya," *REJ* 164 (2005): 449-461.

19 *Duties of the Heart* 9.3, p. 409.

striving of the elite. The elite are best served by treating all pleasures permitted by the Torah as forbidden to them, even when practiced in moderation.[20]

At first blush, Halevi represents an opposing tendency to these thinkers in his condemning asceticism as running counter to demands of the divine law, and in emphasizing the role of the commandments in attaining the ideal state of the soul. He opens one of his discussions of the reasons for the commandments with a question posed by the Khazar king: why there are not more ascetics among the Jews?[21] This question offers Halevi a good way of presenting the gist of his approach. The sage is made to reply to the king:

> It is painful for me [to see] that you forgot the principles that I imparted to you and to which you agreed. Did we not agree that one cannot draw near to God except by way of the actions that God commanded? Do you think that drawing near is only by submission and humility and similar acts?[22]

Halevi goes on to explain:

> The divine law does not command asceticism, but equibalance and allotting to each faculty of the faculties of the soul and body its just portion without augmentation. For augmentation in reference to one faculty is deprivation in regard to another. One who inclines to the appetitive faculty deprives the rational faculty, and the opposite. One who inclines to the faculty of domination deprives other faculties. For this reason prolonged fasting is not service [of God] for one whose appetites are weak and whose body is feeble and frail; in this case [physical] pleasures serve as a counterbalance and safeguard. The minimization of wealth is not in the service [of God] if it comes legitimately and easily, and its acquisition does not distract from learning and [religious] practice. This is especially true of one who is head of a household with children and hopes to disburse it on what is pleasing to the will of God. On the contrary, it would

20 See also *Duties of the Heart* 3.4, p. 191.

21 *Kuzari* 2.45.

22 *Kuzari* 2.46. I have used the translation of Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 111 (with emendations).

> be preferable to augment it. In general, our Law is divided between awe, love and joy. Approach your God with each of these. Your submission on fast days does not bring you closer to God than your joy on Sabbaths and festivals, when your joy stems from thought and intent [...].[23]

In other words, God legislates the Torah in accordance with the Platonic ideal of giving each part of the soul its due, and creating a perfect harmony between the various parts in the soul's striving for conjunction with the divine world.

Yet Halevi's approach is hardly one dimensional. At times he appears to see in asceticism an even better path for one who belongs to the spiritual elite:

> [...] Verily, he would like to reach the rank of Enoch [...] or the rank of Elijah in order that he be free to isolate himself in the company of the angels. He will not feel desolate in his withdrawal and loneliness. Rather, it would be pleasant for him. He would feel desolate in a crowd due to his being deprived of gazing upon the kingdom of heaven, which absolves him from need to eat and drink. For those like him, complete isolation is proper. They even desire to die since they already attained the final end, after which there is no additional level to pursue. The philosophers too like to isolate themselves to purify their thoughts, so that they attain true conclusions from their logical reasoning [...] This is the level of Socrates.[24]

Halevi treats this state as the optimal one, though with the crucial caveat that it is appropriate only for a very select group of individuals. In the passage quoted above we also hear an echo of the Platonic idea that philosophy is a preparation for death. Halevi goes on to argue, however, that in his own period, which is characterized by a lack of wisdom and without the proper conditions to attain prophetic perfection, this behavior is exceptionally detrimental to the individual. Rather than free him from the concerns of the material world, the practice of social isolation and abstinence on the part of the imperfect individual leads him to concentrate more on worldly

23 *Kuzari* 2.50, p. 113.

24 *Kuzari* 3.1, pp. 135-136.

matters and his physical desires rather than less. For the prophetic or intellectual-spiritual elite, however, asceticism is the most appropriate form of behavior in the proper circumstances, a view reminiscent of that of Baḥya Ibn Paquda.

We can see that all of these thinkers keenly felt the tension between the way of the Torah and the way of asceticism. Yet in regarding the purification of the soul as the goal of life, they felt that the elite should not be satisfied with restricting themselves to the demands of the divine law. For them, a more stringent ascetic life style better serves their quest for spiritual perfection.

D

All these early medieval Jewish thinkers appear to share in common the Platonic/Neoplatonic view that the rational soul is by nature an immortal entity. As noted previously, the Aristotelian tradition saw only the intellect as immortal, and in the view of Alfarabi, at least in his earlier writings, only the perfect human intellect (his later view being that human immortality is impossible for everyone). Alfarabi's earlier view appears to match Maimonides' position.[25] The striving for intellectual perfection requires that ultimately all of one's activities have to be gauged from the standpoint of their contribution to this goal, which Maimonides equates with the true love of God. Maimonides makes this point explicit, that is, intellectual perfection resulting in love of God is the final purpose of all one's activities, in *Eight Chapters*, chap. 5, and in the "Laws of Character Traits" 3.2.

25 See Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought* (Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press 1999), 141-146. For Alfarabi's approach to the intellect, soul and human immortality, see Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect* (above, note 8). It is not my purpose in this context to discuss the issue of the intellect and its immortality in Maimonides' thought, and the various scholarly approaches to this issue, including the one advanced by Shlomo Pines. Pines argued that Maimonides adopted Alfarabi's later position as found in his (mostly lost) *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, which denies the possibility of human immortality altogether. In my book I argue against this position. I also argue against Davidson and Alexander Altmann, who interpret Maimonides along Avicennian lines, which essentially accords immortality to the intellect that attains any intelligible. This position approaches the one later advanced by Gersonides.

The question for Maimonides remains whether ascetic practices contribute to intellectual perfection or serve as an obstacle to attaining it. His answer appears to be that it depends on the individual and the circumstances. If we understand this to be Maimonides' fundamental answer to the problem, we can better understand what appear to be glaring contradictions in his approach.[26]

Maimonides is perhaps best known in the field of ethics for introducing the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean as the view of normative Judaism. A careful reading of both *Eight Chapters* and "Laws of Character Traits," however, reveals that his view of the "mean" is not exactly what most of us would regard as the midpoint between exaggerating in the satisfaction of our physical desires and denying them. Rather the midpoint is more in the direction of asceticism. One is to satisfy these desires, in Maimonides' view, *only* to the extent of maintaining the health of the body, but no further. To be sure, both in *Eight Chapters*, chap. 4, and in "Laws of Character Traits" 3.1, he castigates the Nazirite for depriving himself of physical enjoyment that the Torah allows, and treats this as the official rabbinic view.[27] Such deprivations, he argues, are appropriate only for those who suffer a sickness of the soul in overindulging the satisfaction of one's physical desires. In other passages of the *Mishnah Torah*, however, he adopts a more unmitigatedly positive view of vows of abstinence and of the Nazirite.[28] What he appears to be arguing in this apparently contradictory stance is that the circumstances of the individual and the motivations behind asceticism are what determine whether it should be enjoined or encouraged. For most of society, asceticism hardly advances them to human perfection, since they are not by nature prepared to attain such perfection anyway. Rather it results in their being more afflicted by sicknesses of the soul, insofar as it leads

26 I have dealt with this issue in *Maimonides' Political Thought,* 175-182, and my discussion here is based on my analysis there. Numerous studies have been devoted to Maimonides' ethical approach and the doctrine of the mean. Many of them I mention in my book. For subsequent studies see in particular David Shatz, "Maimonides' Moral Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, ed. Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), 167-192; and Aviram Ravitzky, "The Doctrine of the Mean and Asceticism: On the Uniformity of Maimonides' Ethics," (Hebrew) *Tarbiz* 79 (2010-11): 439-469.

27 See the two opposing rabbinic opinions on this issue in B.T. Ta`anit 11a; B.T. Nedarim 10a.

28 See M.T. "Laws of Vows" 10.4; M.T. "Laws of Nezirut" 10.14.

to their thinking more, rather than less, of the physical pleasures of which they are depriving themselves - a point already made by Halevi.[29] Moreover, those from the Jewish masses – that is to say, those who do not belong to the intellectual elite – who practice asceticism, normally do so in order to ape the practices of those who are considered to be holy in Christianity and Islam. Maimonides makes this point fairly explicit in *Eight Chapters*, chap. 4. For such individuals, whom Maimonides sees as being the majority of those Jews practicing asceticism, these practices are clearly detrimental both to themselves and to their society. Hence, we can understand his polemic against them. At the same time, Maimonides hints that, for the intellectual elite, asceticism may be the better course in certain circumstances, that is, when these practices enable the individual to better contemplate the eternal truths. Hence in the "Laws of Matrimony" 15.3, Maimonides clearly approves of Ben Azzai who did not marry and contribute to the cultivation of the world, since, in his words, his soul was in complete love with the Torah.[30] Maimonides implicitly understands this to mean that Ben Azzai refrained from raising a family since it would interfere with his studies of the eternal truths. In other sections of the code, Maimonides appears to approve of the abstinence from physical desires of such individuals in general.[31] In the *Guide* Maimonides reinforces this approach. On one hand, he points out the difficulty in contemplating if one is physically sick or suffers physical deprivations, given the tie of the rational soul to the body.[32] On the other hand, he extolls abstinence for the right motive, namely to subdue one's enslavement to the pleasures of the body which interfere with intellection.[33] Even physical isolation is advocated by Maimonides, albeit within the confines of living in society.[34] This enables the elite individual to satisfy basic material needs while still avoiding contact as much as possible with others -

29 *Kuzari* 3.1.

30 See B.T. Yevamot 63b.

31 See, for example, M.T. "Laws of Study of the Torah" 3.12.

32 *Guide* 3.27.

33 *Guide* 3.33; 3.48.

34 *Guide* 3.51. Maimonides may well have been influenced by Baḥya in this view; see above. Maimonides' view of the ultimate state, not unlike the view of Baḥya, is that one engages in all one's physical activities without thinking about them at all. The intellect remains continuously focused on the contemplation of the intelligibles.

contacts which serve as an obstacle to the pursuit of perfection. In short, Maimonides essentially counsels the intellectual elite to judge all their activities by their contribution to the perfection of the intellect.

E

With this in mind, we can turn to the late 13th century Provençal Jewish thinker Levi ben Avraham and his encyclopedia, *Livyat Ḥen*.[35] The longer recension of this treatise was completed by Levi in 1295. The encyclopedia consists of two parts, the first devoted to the sciences and the second to Judaism. Most of the first part has not survived, including, unfortunately, the part on the human soul and intellect. The various sections of the part on Judaism have all survived, either in their earlier shorter recension or later longer one, or both.[36] Despite the loss of the section on the soul, one can still attain a fairly accurate view of Levi's approach to the soul from his encyclopedic poem, *Batei ha-Nephesh ve-ha-Leḥashim*.[37] Levi appears to remain faithful to Maimonides and the Aristotelian tradition in seeing only the intellect as surviving the death of the individual. This is reinforced by his treatment of the World to Come, as well as his treatment of *gehinnom*, in the section of *Livyat Ḥen* that he devotes to

35 For a description of this thinker and his encyclopedia, see Howard Kreisel, *Judaism as Philosophy: Studies in Maimonides and the Medieval Jewish Philosophers of Provence* (Boston: Academic Studies Press 2015), 116-160.

36 The entire Jewish section of the encyclopedia has been published in four volumes. See Levi ben Avraham, *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah* (Hebrew), ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press 2007); *Livyat Ḥen: The Secrets of the Faith and the Gate of the Haggadah* (Hebrew), ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press 2014); *Livyat Ḥen: The Work of Creation* (Hebrew), ed. Howard Kreisel (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies 2004); *Livyat Ḥen: The Work of the Chariot* (Hebrew), ed. Howard Kreisel (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies 2013).

37 The part of the poem dealing with the intellect was published by Dov Schwartz, "The Commentary of R. Solomon ben Menaḥem to 'Batei ha-Nefesh ve-ha-Leḥashim' on the Subject of the Intellect" (Hebrew), *Kobez al Yad* 13[23] (1996): 299-330.

Jewish beliefs.[38] Parenthetically, Levi ascribes to at least some of the rabbinic sages a view of the soul that is essentially Platonic in nature, namely that the soul is a substantive entity in its own right, though he himself appears to reject this view.[39]

In the lengthy part of the encyclopedia devoted to Judaism, Levi deals with asceticism primarily in the context of his discussion of the reasons for the commandments, specifically in the chapter devoted to the laws of incest, circumcision and vows.[40] In all of his discussions Levi cites profusely from biblical and rabbinic literature. Many of discussions read like running commentaries on these sources. Insofar as his sources are full of contradictory statements on the subject of abstinence in the area of physical desires, Levi's goal in his discussion is to reconcile between them.

Levi begins his discussion by pointing out the benefit of vows of abstinence, for they accustom the person to abandon what is not absolutely necessary for the individual's existence. Certainly, one whose inclination is to indulge one's physical desires must practice abstinence to overcome it. As opposed to Maimonides' discussion in *Eight Chapters*, but similar to Maimonides' discussion in the *Guide*, Levi cites the biblical and rabbinic characterization of the Nazirite as "holy," insofar as he abstains from wine and intoxicating beverages which cause great harm to the individual.[41] Yet Levi does not ignore the opposite rabbinic view, namely that the Nazirite is labeled a "sinner" due to his abstinence from what is permitted by the Torah, the view brought by Maimonides in chapter four of *Eight Chapters*.

38 See *Livyat Ḥen: The Secrets of the Faith and the Gate of the Haggadah*, chap. 20, pp. 161-163. Levi interprets *gehinnom* not as the opposite of the Garden of Eden but as its deprivation, in that it represents "the annihilation and deprivation of existence" (p. 161).

39 He writes there: "Some understood *gehinnom* as the elemental fire that surrounds the sphere of the moon. It prevents the soul from ascending, and it rotates it in a constant motion. For they understood that the soul was made of a fine material substance like the substance of the heavens" (p. 162). See also chap. 19, p. 160. This view of the punishment of the ignorant and non-righteous souls is reminiscent of that of Joseph Ibn Ẓaddiq in *Sefer ʻOlam Qatan*, S. Horovitz, ed. (Breslau: Druck von Th. Schatzky, 1903), 79. The notion that the matter of the soul is similar to that of the heavens is similar to the approach of Saadiah mentioned above.

40 *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah*, chap. 16, pp. 422-429.

41 *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy*, 423-425.

Levi's explanation of these contrary views revolves around the generally accepted scientific idea that one's inclinations and character traits depend in large part upon one's physical disposition or temperament. Levi writes: "One who is of good temperament and not craving to satisfy one's appetites - if he refrains from meat and abstains from wine is called a 'sinner'."[42] In this view, one whose temperament is not evenly balanced, thereby leading him to excessive physical cravings, must overcome this imbalance by abstinence. Those whose temperament does not lead them to indulgence have no need for this regimen. It is the latter individual who, in becoming a Nazirite, is labeled by the sages a "sinner," by depriving himself of what is permitted and would not cause him any harm.[43]

One may justifiably conclude that this mirrors exactly Maimonides' position in *Eight Chapters*. Nonetheless, what Levi adds to the discussion is to make more explicit the physical basis for character traits and the interaction not only between actions and character traits but also between character traits and one's physical disposition, a view that Maimonides himself brings in the final chapter of *Eight Chapters* as well as in the *Guide* 3.12.[44] More important, Maimonides brings his contrary views regarding abstinence in different sources, and leaves it to his readers to reconcile his positions. Levi is precisely one of these readers. While he does not cite Maimonides explicitly in the course of his discussion of vows, though it is clear that much of his discussion is based on Maimonides, he concludes his discussion with the following statement: "What brought me to make a division and introduce conditions in regard to vows was in order that the words of the Master [i.e., Maimonides] not contradict each other."[45]

42 *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy*, 424.

43 Levi also brings the view here that the mother's behavior at the time of her pregnancy affects the fetus's physical disposition. In this manner he explains the command to Samson's mother that she abstain from wine and why Samson was required to be a Nazarite all his life in order to preserve his strength.

44 See also the fourth reason that impedes the learning of the divine science that he brings in *Guide* 1.34. In his legal works, however, his tendency is to devalue the influence of one's physical makeup on one's character traits due to pernicious effects of this idea on the pursuit of moral virtue. This is also clear from his discussion in *Eight Chapters*, chapter 8.

45 *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy and the Secrets of the Torah*, chap. 16, p. 429.

Levi also attempts to reconcile the sages' contradictory statements regarding voluntary fasts. R. Elazar labeled the person who voluntarily fasts a "sinner" while Resh Lakish labels this person a "ḥasid."[46] Levi's solution is to argue that R. Elazar deals with scholars, in whose case fasting would be harmful to their studies. Resh Lakish, on the other hand, is dealing with the non-scholar. In this case fasting would have a positive result in inducing submission to God. Again, we see that what determines whether abstinence is good or bad depends entirely on the motive behind it and the circumstances of the individual. The scholar, in Levi's interpretation of R. Elazar's view, should avoid extreme asceticism, rather than embrace it, in order to attain ultimate perfection.

The topic of asceticism is also dealt with by Levi in the context of his biblical exegesis. Levi devotes a section of his encyclopedia to the Work of Creation. As in the case of Maimonides, Levi sees the story of the Garden Eden as being primarily, if not exclusively, a philosophical allegory. Adam represents the theoretical intellect; Eve, the other parts of the soul that are attached to the body. The meaning of the command not to eat from the tree of knowledge means not to engage in satisfying physical needs more than necessary. Levi points out that only eating from the tree was forbidden, not touching of the tree. This means that satisfying one's physical needs that are required to maintain one's health and to continue the species is permitted. Eating, however, signifies engaging in the gratification of the body and enjoying what is superfluous.[47] Hence both the motives and the measure of one's actions determine whether the act is to be regarded as forbidden or not.[48] In this context Levi warns against tormenting one's body, for by weakening it one also weakens the intellect.

The three children of Adam also have allegorical significance, as Maimonides already hinted in the *Guide*.[49] Levi expands upon this suggestion. One of the interpretations he brings is that Cain is the rational power engaged in the crafts and whose task is to satisfy a person's material needs. Abel is the deliberative power whose task is

46 *Livyat Ḥen: The Quality of Prophecy* , 425; see B.T. Ta'anit 11a-b.

47 *Livyat Ḥen: The Work of Creation*, chap. 4, p. 105.

48 Unfortunately, Levi does not expound upon Eve's treatment of the prohibition, in her words to the serpent, as including touching (Genesis 3:3), and the implications of her addition. See *Genesis Rabbah* 19.3.

49 See *Guide* 2.30.

proper governance, while Seth is the speculative power whose task is to discover the eternal truths. He is the one who represents the *telos* of human beings.[50] Levi stresses that all these powers are necessary and should be developed in the order that the Bible presents them. In this philosophical allegory, Cain killing Abel signifies the unbridled pursuit of material goods and satisfying physical desires without succumbing to proper governance. Levi sums up this idea in a good Platonic manner by saying: "What is intended by God for the human species is that each one of these three will be exist in a fit manner."[51] Levi continues by indicating the necessity of restoring the proper balance if one of them exceeds its boundaries, particularly the faculty associated with Cain. In this vein Levi cites and explains the biblical stories involving the children of Cain, as well as numerous rabbinic midrashim on these passages.

I labeled Levi's attitude towards asceticism, as well as that of his predecessors, as an ambiguous one, but it would be better to label it a discriminating one, as is the case also with Maimonides. Ascetic practices that are more rigorous than those imposed by the Torah are necessary for everyone, but in accordance with one's individual circumstances. Ultimately in this model, what determines their practice is the extent to which they contribute to perfection, whether ethical perfection or more important, intellectual perfection, the true perfection of the human being.[52]

F

In conclusion, two major considerations framed medieval Jewish philosophic approaches to asceticism. The first one was a legal consideration mitigating against extreme forms of asceticism – the commandments of the Law of Moses. In order to fulfill many of the commandments, one could not adopt an extreme ascetic regimen. The obligation to procreate, to feast on the Sabbath and holidays, etc., all militated against such a lifestyle and created a balance between the various inclinations of the soul. The second was a philosophic consideration. The goal of life involved freeing the rational soul from

50 *Livyat Ḥen: The Work of Creation*, chap. 6, pp. 152-169.

51 *Livyat Ḥen: The Work of Creation*, 160.

52 How representative Levi's approach is of that of other Maimonidean philosophers in the Middle Ages is a question that deserves a separate study.

the body and its temptations in its quest for purity and conjunction with the spiritual world. This certainly encouraged a far more ascetic lifestyle in the case of the spiritual elite than the limited restraints upon one's physical appetites imposed by the Torah. Among the earlier medieval Jewish philosophers, whose approach to the soul was basically shaped, albeit indirectly, by Platonic thought with its negative view of the body, the appreciation of more extreme forms of asceticism can be clearly detected.

Maimonides is more influenced by Aristotelian thought, with its stress on the perfection of the speculative intellect. The implication of this view is that all activities are ultimately to be judged by their contribution to attaining knowledge leading to the intellectual love of God. Hence, even the intellectual elite are to engage in ascetic practices only to the point where they further this end. For example, one should not engage in voluntary fasting if it weakens the intellect, only when it helps to focus the intellect on the attainment of the intelligibles. Maimonides' apparently conflicting positions regarding asceticism essentially signal this point. On the one hand, God, as Maimonides notes in *Eight Chapters*, chapter 4, does not hate the body. On the other hand, "all of man's acts of disobedience and sins are consequent upon his matter," Maimonides maintains in *Guide* 3.8.[53] Hence, when the body, or more accurately, the appetites of the soul associated with it, serve more as a stumbling block to the intellect than an aid, which they often do, it is clear that suitable steps must be taken to remedy this situation. In general, Maimonides advocates satisfying the demands of the body, but no more than is necessary for its health. Even the Aristotelian "middle way" favored by the Torah, in Maimonides' view, is seen as leaning more in the direction of asceticism. The question for him is in what circumstances should one move even further in that direction, even at the expense of not fulfilling some of the Torah's commandments, as in the case of Ben Azzai who did not marry and procreate so as not to interrupt his studies.

Levi ben Abraham follows in the footsteps of Maimonides and interprets him along these very lines. While he does not add any important new insights to the subject, the significance of his discussion lies in the wealth of material he brings from biblical and

53 *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1963), 431.

rabbinic literature in an attempt to show that there is really no conflict in any of the authoritative Jewish sources on this issue. Each of what appears to be a contradictory rabbinic opinion is really dealing with different individuals, indicating the regimen required in each of their cases. In general, Levi's encyclopedia comes to complete the Maimonidean project of understanding much of Judaism as being in harmony with Aristotelian philosophy. Levi's interpretation of Jewish sources on the subject of human perfection and the role asceticism plays in the attainment of this perfection nicely illustrates this point.

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-ʿEdut*, the *Zohar*, and others,[3] Baḥya'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-Qemaḥ* into English, based on his 1970 Hebrew edition. On the omissions in this translation, see his own note: *Encyclopedia of Torah Thoughts* [רבנו בחיי /כד הקמח], translated and annotated by Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1980), XII, n. 15 (and see further in our discussion below). *Shulḥan shel Arba ʿ* 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 Baḥya's commentary on *Pirqei Avot*. While we used Brumberg Kraus's translation of *Shulḥan shel Arba ʿ*, in the case of Baḥya's Commentary on the Torah and *Kad ha-Qemaḥ* 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, V*enturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 186–285; idem, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menaḥem 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-Qemaḥ*.

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 Naḥmanides'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 Shaʿarei 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, Baḥya'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," *Archævs* 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 Baḥya, 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 Baḥya's opening for the weekly Torah portion of *Qedoshim*, Rabbenu Baḥya, *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 Baḥya's theosophical-theurgical interpretation of this concept, see idem, Num. 6:3, 27, and Efraim Gottlieb, *The Kabbalah in the Writings of R. Baḥya 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. Baḥya 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 Baḥya, *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, *Baḥya*, 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 Baḥya*, 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. Baḥya 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 (*oraḥ 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" (*oraḥ 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 (*oraḥ*) mentioned and not "way" (*derekh*)? For it is from the term guest (*o're'aḥ*), for man in this world is as a "a stranger in the land, like a traveler (*o're'aḥ*) 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 life[11] [...] 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-Girondi*, 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 Girondi 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-ʿelyon*) 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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Gen. 23:1, 200.

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

14 On the *Tzadik* as a foreigner in this world, see Baḥya'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. Baḥya ibn Paquda's discussion in *Hovot haLevavot* 6:5, mentioned in the following note.

15 *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, s.v. *ʾevel* (*bet*)," 52. It seems that here, Baḥya'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]; Baḥya 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 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'aḥ ha-behemit*) it will tire, and its material (*ḥomer*) will be diluted.[17] Simultaneously, the light of the intellect (*or ha-*

Mansoor (Oxford and Portland: The Littaman 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 Baḥya's *Kad ha-Qemah – Meni'a ha-Kad*, he incorporated a paragraph from Zohar Ḥadash, Midrash ha-Ne'lam on Ruth, 80a, cf. Priztker edition, vol. VI, translation and commentary by Joel Hecker (Stanford: Standford University Press, 2016), 120-121. However, for Ibn Shaprut the intellectual soul is identical with the intellect, unlike Baḥya, 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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya'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'aḥ 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-Qemaḥ*, s.v. *"ta'anit*," 441-443.

20 *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, 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 *'ṣapaḥat ha-shemen'* - notes on *Kad ha-Qemaḥ* [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-ṭovlin*) 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-Qemaḥ*, 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-Qemaḥ*, 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 Baḥya was referencing the Christian *signum crucis* and the Muslim *Wuḍū* (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 Baḥya, *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 Baḥya ben Asher, *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, 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 *Wuḍū* 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 Sunnī Fiqh* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006), 51-55.

29 An interesting parallel to Baḥya'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 'iḍ 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 apotheotic 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 Paqūda'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 miṣvah* (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 Buchhandlund [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 Baḥya 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-simḥat*

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*2 (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 Baḥya and Rashba, see Jacob Reifmann, "Toledot Rabbenu Baḥya [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, *Baḥya*, 215; Efraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, ed. Joseph Hacker (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1976), 260, 572; Herbert Millen, "Baḥya 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 Baḥya's Torah commentary, see Reifmann, idem, 83-82, n. 38. Cf. Béla Bernstein, *Die Schrifterklärung des Bachja b. Asher ibn Chalâwa und ihre Quellen* (Berlin, 1891), 28, nn.11-12; Chavel's introduction to his edition of Baḥya, *Be'ur*, vol. 1, 9-8; Gottlieb, *Baḥya*, 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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya, *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. Baḥya 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, Baḥya 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 (*ḥush 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 Baḥya in his commentary on Isaac's feast. See Rashba, *Perushei haHaggadot*, 15, 92, n. 21. For adaptations of Baḥya in later sources such as Menahem Ziyyoni 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: *Shulḥan 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'aḥ 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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya 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 Baḥya, 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 Baḥya'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 Naḥmanides'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 Baḥya chooses to use a similar expression while analyzing both, might suggest they are interconnected and perhaps even complementary. If one accepts the assumption that Baḥya 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, Baḥya 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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya 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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya 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-neṣḥi*)

47 For consistency in the order of these wordings, see *Kad ha-Qemaḥ*, 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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya'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 Baḥya in relation to the "leaders of the Israelites" (*aṣilei benei yisra'el*) (Ex. 24:11), see Gottlieb, *Baḥya*, 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 *Shulḥan 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 Baḥya 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 Aṣeret*. 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. "*aṣeret*," 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 Baḥya adapted Azriel: Gottlieb, *Baḥya*, 20. This term is also mentioned in a context close to the above discussion of Baḥya, 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 HaIvrit, 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: *Liqquṭei 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 Miṣvot*); 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 – Nusaḥ 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. *"aṣeret*," 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 ʿ"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 consisted 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 *Aṣeret*,[70] however, this [the *Aṣeret*] 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 *Aṣeret* (*Inyan ha-Aṣeret*), 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 corelated 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. Baḥya 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, Baḥya — 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, Baḥya 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 Baḥya'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 *Liqquṭei 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 Baḥya, 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 (*koaḥ 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 Guttmann, "Abraham bar Chijja's," 453, n. 4. Jakob Guttmann worked in collaboration with Adolf Poznanski on the publication of *Megillat ha-Megalle*, which was finally completed by Guttmann's son, the scholar Julius Guttmann, in Berlin in 1924. For several discussions in which Baḥya referred to Bar Ḥiyya's *Megillat*, mostly based on the forementioned article by Guttmann 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 ʻalei ḥayyim*), for he [God] did not want to permit flesh of a moveable soul (*nefesh ha-tenuʻah*). Why[84] 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 (*baʻalei nefesh ha-tenuʻah*) of the antediluvian generation sinned and corrupted (*hesh'ḥitu*) their path [...] then it was permitted to slaughter (*lishḥoṭ*) 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 Arbaʻ*, 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, Baḥya 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: *Arbaʿah 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 Baḥya 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: Baḥya, *Be'ur*, Lev. 11:43-44, 464-468. Cf. *Shulḥan shel Arbaʿ*, 461, 472; Baḥya, *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 Baḥya'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 *miṣvot* associated with eating meat in some of Baḥya'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 Baḥya 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 Penzieri: 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. Elior 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 ḥibbur," *Materia Giudaica* 24 (2019): 106; (2) In R. Joseph Angelet, *Kupat Ha-Rochlin*, Ms. Oxsford, 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 Luḥot 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 ḥayyim*), 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 Baḥya, see Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating," 231-234, 252.

91 *Shulḥan shel Arba'*, 496. For a partially parallel discussion, see Baḥya, *Pirqei Avot*, 3:17, 588. Apart from the paraphrase of Baḥya 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-aruḥat 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.

Otherness Precedes Asceticism: Emmanuel Levinas's Criticism of Onto-Theology[1]

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I explore Emmanuel Levinas's ethical dialectic on asceticism and its relation to otherness and closeness. In parallel, I argue that Levinas's stance on asceticism constitutes a vehement criticism of the analytic insistence on onto-theology. In Levinas's later works, particularly *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, he maintains that Christian asceticism (especially in the Orthodox and Protestant traditions) has mistakenly focused on onto-theology, i.e., on an incarnated God who comes to mind. On the one hand, a number of continental thinkers argue that an individual can achieve direct communication with God through a symmetrical, reciprocal relation as a self-contained unit. Kierkegaard, for instance, claims that the subject's isolation through asceticism is a necessary and sufficient condition to meet God. As each person is responsible directly to God and his responsibility is a matter of his faith, the religious life does not coincide with ethics and sometimes even appears as an absurdity if measured by ethical norms. Similarly, Heidegger endorses the radical replacement of religion, prioritizing consciousness and cognition as necessary and sufficient conditions to comprehend God, via the esotericism of *Dasein*. Levinas raises severe objections to these positions. He claims that God exists outside of the cosmos and that we can seek only His trace through the other person. Hence, an individual cannot be in a direct relation with God as the person is a finite being and God is Transcendence (Infinity). This is why God disappears from human relations after sending the Other to me and subjugating me as a hostage. It is only here that we can speak about asceticism, that is, the individual must appear only as an equal interlocutor, as a subject, not as an object, emptying itself and abandoning all its ontological narcissistic criteria for the Other. In this sense, the ascetic self always starts from the Other. However, Levinas goes further, arguing that God leaves all human affairs in our own hands, absenting Himself almost entirely from our world. To

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. M. Dimitrova (University of Sofia) and Dr. A. Georgallides (University of Cyprus) for their wise guidance, advice, and productive feedback on a previous draft of this article. They both immensely improved the argumentation and methodology of this text.

Levinas, the individual is a subject in the sense of being commanded by and thus subject to God. One's thinking and consciousness is awakened not by exploiting the face of the Other but by serving it eternally as an infinite call and response, as a substitute for a direct relationship with the Divine. One's self-conscious personality, the "I," is secondary to the morally subjected "me" which practices asceticism for the sake of the Other.

Introduction

> "...moi responsable je ne finis pas de me vider de moi-même"[2]

The question of asceticism as a matter of consciousness begins with Plato, who argued that a utilitarian process of goodness must be distinguished from the absolute Good.[3] Plato, the first Theologian, as a number of analytic thinkers characterized him, was the first philosopher to systematically address asceticism and the Good in terms of morality.[4] In medieval Byzantine[5] philosophy, in the Patristic (Eastern) tradition, Christian Fathers strove to isolate the subject – to achieve *kenosis* – by following a path that recognized only the self and the spirit of God as necessary and sufficient conditions of the soul's salvation.[6] This line of thought has been further explored in the

2 E. Levinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris: Librarie Philosophique, 1986), 120; trans. B. Bergo, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 73: "...as a responsible I, I never finish emptying myself of myself."

3 See H.L. Stewart, "Was Plato an Ascetic?," *The Philosophical Review* 24.6 (1915): 603-13.

4 It is worth mentioning that Levinas was a great admirer of Plato, and summed up his view of Plato's contributions to philosophy, theology, and ethics in his remark that "philosophy is Platonic." See E. Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. M.B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), ix. See also his comments on Plato in Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 23.

5 Levinas seems to have been familiar with Byzantine theological tradition. In his work *Time and the Other*, trans. R.A. Cohen (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 70, n. 43, he discusses Heidegger's view on death in relation to Byzantine tradition: "Death in Heidegger is not, as Jean Wahl says, the impossibility of possibility, but the possibility of impossibility. This apparently Byzantine distinction has a fundamental importance."

6 By Patristic tradition, we mean the Christian Orthodox perspective in which self-transcendence depends on Trinitarianism through *kenosis* and faith. This thesis sets up an intriguing opposition between the Orthodox conception of human and divine personhood as being grounded in love and the relationship to the other, on the one hand, and conceptions of personhood drawn from post-

Cartesian philosophy, emphasizing such attributes as rationality and self-consciousness, on the other. *criterialism*: Concerning the theory of *criterialism* see T. S-G. Chappell, "Knowledge of Persons," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5.4 (2013): 31-56. Fr Sophrony of Essex, one of the major defenders of Patristic tradition, insists that God is not a mere essence or an Absolute Being without direct characteristics. On the contrary, he reminds us that God says: "ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν" (I am who I am) (Exodus 3:14), and demonstrates that God is a person and human beings need the same personal adjustment to be called persons. Sophrony insists that if we want to justify personhood we must turn towards the Triune God, the real and perfect personal existence. Sophrony posits an absolute correlation and symmetry between God and Man, as in Kierkegaard. Although God is uncreated and Man is created, it is possible to share the same personal measures, thus enabling an entity to become a person exactly as it happens to the Triune God. Levinas, on the other hand, would reject this argument, since, in Judaism God does not become a person, and there is no becoming in God, especially not the essential becoming described by Sophrony. Thus, for Levinas, God cannot become a person in the same way humans do, because there is no way that God has become a person (or three persons into one substance, as held by Christian Trinitarianism). Levinas takes a clear stand in the debate on incarnation, vehemently rejecting any theories that could objectify God's essence. For Levinas, everything is about Ethics, and whether Man can realize and understand his power to ethical consent, namely, to seek the trace of God through the face of the other person. Levinas understands *kenosis* only through man's capabilities and not through God's direct interference in the world (as Orthodox Christians do). For Levinas, "more important than God's omnipotence is the subordination of that power to man's ethical consent. And that, too, is one of the primordial meanings of *kenosis*." See E. Levinas, "The Name of God According to a Few Talmudic Texts," in *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, trans. G.D. Mole (Bloomington: The Athlone Press, 1994), 126. The most valuable and comprehensive works concerning asceticism as *kenosis* in (medieval) Patristic tradition is N.V. Sakharov, *I Love Therefore I am: the Theological Legacy of Archimandrite Sophrony* (2002): 93-115. See also J-C Larchet, "Suffering in Spiritual Life and Teaching of Elder Sophrony (in Greek)," *Πρακτικά Διορθόδοξου Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου: Γέροντας Σωφρόνιος. Ο Θεολόγος του Ακτίστου Φωτός* (2007): 435-56; see especially the English summary: 455-56. A comparative study between Levinas and Orthodox Patristic tradition on the relation of beings and freedom has been published by T.A. Ables, "On the Very Idea of an Ontology of Communion: Being, Relation and Freedom in Zizioulas and Levinas," *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 672-83, especially chapter 2: "The Levinasian Critique of Ontology," 676-78. For Levinas's view on ascetic suffering, see his chapter "Useless Suffering," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. M.B. Smith and B. Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 91-102; and W. Edelglass, "Levinas on Suffering and Compassion," *Sophia* 45.2 (2006): 43-59, where the author discusses suffering along with being and alterity. See also a valuable text on Levinas and *kenosis* written by R.D.N. van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis* (The Netherlands: Springer, 2007), especially Part II: "Ethics, Religion and *Kenosis*," 101-206, where the author defines and discusses

Western philosophical and theological tradition through the writings of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, where the subject must be seen as a self-enclosed unit before God: asceticism of the spirit. We suggest that for the Thomistic tradition, asceticism precedes otherness and individualism precedes relationalism, something that begins through the strict esotericism of God's essence and His relation to human beings.

It is worth noting that the definition of esotericism, which has then been translated as *kenosis* (asceticism), can be traced back to Thomas Aquinas, in his works *Summa Theologica*[7] and *Contra Errores Graecorum*,[8] where he claims that God's mind is absolutely outside of the cosmos and has nothing to do with our intentionality. God provides a rather ascetic esotericism on how He explores His relation to human beings. In other words, for Aquinas, God has no real communication with nor relation to human beings, as He can neither exceed His essence nor be compared to anything. God thus communicates and relates to human beings only through an inner esoteric dialogue[9] with Himself, in a process called by Aquinas "esoteric asceticism." Hence, the God-Man relationship is real from the side of human beings but an illusion from that of God. However, according to Aquinas (and centuries later through the Hegelian dialectic), God's spirit is translated (and there is only one way to be translated) through the human being's consciousness, due to the fact

the paramount importance of *kenosis* in Levinasian thought through Ethics and Religion in comparison to other philosophical and theological accounts. The terms "*kenosis*" and "self-emptying" sometimes also refer to the God-person relation. For a helpful discussion on this matter, see M.L. Baird, "Whose *Kenosis*? An Analysis of Levinas, Derrida, and Vattimo on God's Self-Emptying and the Secularization of the West," *The Heythrop Journal* 48 (2007): 423-37. As Baird correctly points out (p. 424), "Levinas's model of *kenosis* [which he defines, borrowing Levinas's phrase, 'as subordination [of God's omnipotence] to man's ethical consent;' see E. Levinas, *In the Time of the Nations*, trans. M.B. Smith (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 126] is a diachronic and transcendental self-emptying that has no immediate real time analogue."

7 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Indianapolis: Christian Classics, 1981).

8 Concerning the analysis of Aquinas's monograph see M. Jordan, "Theological Exegesis and Aquinas's Treatise Against the Greeks," *Church History* 56.4 (1987): 445-456.

9 Concerning Levinas's view on dialogue, divine and cosmic, see H. Ben-Pazi, "Ethics Responsibility and Dialogue: The Meaning of Dialogue in Levinas's Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 50.4 (2015): 1-20.

that God cannot escape His necessity or His absolute essence. Whatever enters a human being's intentionality is solely through the Spirit of God; our spirit derives and recalls ideas from God's Spirit. This is the only way, according to Aquinas and Hegel, for God to enter humanity.

The aforementioned syllogism introduced by Aquinas is not far from the contemporary Western tradition, as regards the analysis of subjectivity in the fields of history and political philosophy. For instance, a pessimistic line of thought runs that politics nowadays (especially under socialism and capitalism) react exactly as the Thomistic dialectic suggests: modern states develop a similar model of thinking, that is, conventions, regulations, terms and conditions to decide what is right and wrong, constructed and determined via states' esotericism. Modern states seek self-vindication through their inner narcissistic esotericism, which is possible to trace back to Aquinas's onto-theological theory.

To return to our main discussion, Levinas is not far from the above tradition, which is quite anti-Christian.[10] Philosophically speaking, he follows the same path as those who reject deism and hold that God does exist infinitely and beyond metaphysics, above any secular onto-theological knowledge and apprehension.[11] In parallel, he would agree with Aquinas that even though God exists, He cannot exceed His essence and His Absolute necessity, and thus cannot possibly interact directly with human beings, as Christians mistakenly believe, through the appearance of a Man-God incarnate.[12] However, Levinas takes the argument a step further. He maintains that the Thomistic tradition of *kenosis* (i.e., inner esotericism of Spirit) demands further clarification and modification. Crucially, Levinas states that, "human existence should not be thought of as self-

10 By anti-Christian, I mean that, for Levinas, the incarnation of *Logos* cannot be construed philosophically.

11 H. Ben-Pazi correctly maintains that the Levinasian perspective must be seen primarily ethico-philosophically, through Jewish tradition, and not onto-theologically, through the cosmic chain of immanence. He claims that "Levinas offers a philosophical-ethical reading of Jewish wisdom, which gives religion metaphysical meaning, but maintains its connection to normative ethical discourse." See especially H. Ben-Pazi, "Theodicy as the Justified Demands of Atheism: Yeshayahu Leibowitz Versus Emmanuel Levinas," *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 36.3 (2016): 266.

12 Concerning Levinas's argumentation on the Christian principle of incarnation of *Logos*, see Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, 53-60.

orientated, but as a reception of the other."[13] This otherness, in turn, precedes any asceticism. In this approach, the self must be exterior to any esoteric narcissism. It must be responsive, hostage, subjected to otherness, self-emptying, dispossessed.[14] This is the Levinasian explanation of asceticism, bearing no resemblance to Aquinas's divine esotericism, which directly affects self-consciousness and the history of man in general. Moreover, Levinas, like Kierkegaard, criticizes the established Church's mistaken use of the term asceticism by defending secularism as a cosmic ideology that exploits humans' free will.

Kierkegaard, therefore, in order to bolster his *ressentiment* against the established Church, proposed a rational, ascetic way of life, combining the aesthetics-ethics-religion triptych with a kind of isolationism, where self-consciousness and individual perception are necessary and sufficient conditions to meet God.[15] On the other hand, Levinas, who was familiar with Kierkegaard's existential accounts of asceticism, unpacked a different dialectic: otherness precedes asceticism and relationalism precedes individualism. Levinas argues that what stimulates an individual's subjectivity to God is not a rational mind or a systematic apprehension of intentionality (i.e., fundamental ontology) but the face of the Other (i.e., ethical metaphysics).

Levinasian Ethics and the Problem of Onto-Theology

It is worth investigating whether we can provide valid arguments or a proper ethical intuition to answer the following question: can conscious human beings be cognitively aware of God? Philosophical accounts integrating God with man's thinking appeared centuries before Christ. Socrates (470-399 BC) and especially Plato (427-423 BC)[16]

13 Van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis*, 1.

14 S. Benso clearly defines Levinas's notion of asceticism by saying, "Levinas maintains, the other is always a step beyond, always further than the I can reach (the ascetic ideal!);" See S. Benso, "Levinas: Another Ascetic Priest?," *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 27.2 (1996): 142.

15 Concerning Kierkegaard's notion of asceticism, see N. Khawaja, *The Religion of Existence: Asceticism in Philosophy from Kierkegaard to Sartre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), loc. 1601-2580 [Kindle version].

16 For instance, Plato, in his work *Parmenides*, denies any ontological relation between God (τό Ἕν) and *logos*. He contends in Parmenides's dialogue that "[...] οὐδαμῶς ἄρα ἐστί τό Ἕν. Οὐ φαίνεται [...] τό Ἕν οὔτε ἐστίν [...] Οὔδ' ἄρα

together with Aristotle (382-322 BC)[17] systematized the philosophy of religion during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. But it was Plotinus (204/5-270 AD)[18] who – having pre-Socratic influences – first initiated

ὄνομα ἐστίν αὐτώ, οὐδέ λόγος, οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη, οὐδέ αἴσθησις, οὐδέ δόξα. [...] Οὐδέ ὄνομάζεται, οὐδέ λέγεται, οὐδέ γιγνώσκεται." See Plato, *Λάχης, Μένων, Παρμενίδης*, (in Greek), tr. B. Tatakis, (Athens: Daidalos, 1990), 72: 142a. (Trans.: "The *One* cannot be shown. It is invisible, separated from the Being, which should be neither named, nor described not thought of nor known.") For the hypothesis of the Idea and Good in Plato, see J. Grondin, *Introduction to Metaphysics: from Parmenides to Levinas*, trans. L. Soderstrom, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 21-45.

17 Concerning Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, especially book Ε', Ζ', Λ' and his consideration of being as being and Being as first philosophy, see Grondin, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 46-55, and regarding onto-theology, see 55-66. For Aristotelian Ethics, see Aristotle, (in Greek), vol. 1-4 (Thessaloniki: Zitros, 2006).

18 Concerning Plotinus's *Metaphysics of the One*, see Grondin, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 68-73. In parallel, Levinas refers to Plotinus's works several times. Levinas is an admirer of Plotinus's theological aspects especially concerning Plotinus's argument on "the One" (Τό Ἕν). The majority of Medieval and Byzantine philosophical and theological theories developed upon on the basis of Plotinus's and Neo-Platonists' theology of the *Ἕν*. The most comprehensive monographies on Plotinus are written by H. J. Blumenthal, *Soul and Intellect: Studies on Plotinus and Later Neo-Platonism*, 1993, especially ch. VI, 140-152, where he comments on the Ennead V, which analyzes the notion of the One and what it is to be intellectual. Also see J. Bussanich, "Plotinus's Metaphysics of the One," in L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38-65; and K. Corrigan, "Essence and Existence in the Enneads", 105-129 (both texts) in Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 1996. Levinas argues that "Plotinus conceived the procession from the One as compromising neither the immutability nor the absolute separation of the One. It is in this situation, at first purely dialectical and quasi-verbal [...] that the exceptional signifyingness of a trace delineates in the world" (Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 105-106). Presumably, Levinas derives several ideas from Ennead V, where Plotinus explores his argument on the conception of the One and his attributes against intelligibility, humans and absolute knowledge. For instance, Levinas might agree with Plotinus's position regarding the Transcendence of the One: §6. [The One] is beyond being. This is the requirement of negative theology. See Plotinus, *The Enneads,* ed. L.P. Gerson, trans. G. Boys-Stones et al., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 581. However, Levinas would disagree with Plotinus's generic remark that "the Intelligibles are not outside the Intellect" (ibid. 5.5 [32], 583). Levinas argues against this view since he believes that intelligibility is prior consciousness, will and freedom. It dwells between me and the eternal *a priori* responsibility for the Other. Levinas shows familiarity with Plotinus's texts, saying, "if you read the *Enneads*, the One doesn't even have consciousness of self, if it did have consciousness of self, it would already be multiple, as a loss of perfection. In knowledge, one is two, even when one is alone. Even when one assumes

the 'duality of the One' (τὸ Ἕν ἐν δυσί ὑποστάσεσι), which influenced a number of medieval thinkers such as Augustine (354-430 AD), Maximus the Confessor (580-662 AD) Aquinas (1225-1274 AD), and Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 AD), who brought questions about God and philosophy of religion into metaphysics.[19] However, it was Martin Heidegger who first introduced onto-theology, a term unpacked in this chapter, into the philosophy of religion.[20] Specifically, this chapter analyses whether we can speak of God beyond and above onto-theology. Before diving into arguments regarding Levinas's and Kierkegaard's insights on God and our subjectivity as a response to God's command, several terms must be defined.

By onto-theology,[21] we mean the integration of thinking between beings *qua* beings and God. In short, onto-theology supports the radical replacement of religion, giving priority to consciousness and cognition as necessary and sufficient conditions to comprehend God. In Kant's words, "ontotheology describes a kind of theology that aims to know something about the existence of God without recourse to scriptural or natural revelation through mere concepts of reason

consciousness of self, there is already a split." See Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, 112.

19 Concerning the philosophy of religion from ancient times to the twentieth century, see *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion*, 5 vols., ed. G. Oppy and N.N. Tsakakis (London and New York: Routledge 2013).

20 Immanuel Kant coined the term "onto-theology," but it was Heidegger who introduced it to the context of the relation between theology and ontology. Kant remarks that the belief that one can actually "strive for a supposed contact with God" involves a "kind of madness." See Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, trans. A. Wood and G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 169–70. In parallel, Heidegger points out that the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics brings God into philosophy, leaving to be answered the question of how the deity enters into philosophy. In Kantian thought, there is a return to onto-theology "in which it determines the idea of God where God is posited as the totality of reality." See E. Levinas, *God, Death and Time* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 154.

21 One of the most "dangerous" pitfalls of onto-theology is the danger of "reducing God to another familiar object of our worldly experience which is a constant reality and threat in so much of theology and church life, often exploding into public life in the form of fundamentalism." See A.K. Min, "Naming the Unnamable God: Levinas, Derrida and Marion," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60.3 (2006): 114.

alone."[22] By contrast, for Heidegger, "ontotheology is a critical term used to describe a putatively problematic approach to metaphysical theorizing", something that, as Heidegger claims, "is characteristic of Western philosophy in general."[23] Influenced by Western tradition, Heidegger "tries to turn existence into entities which can be understood and mastered through technological drive."[24] According to Levinas, onto-theology "consists in thinking of God as a being and in thinking being on the basis of this superior or supreme being."[25] Levinas considers onto-theology as a misleading theory since it "corrupts our thinking about God," and thus we need to "think God without Being."[26] From the moment that God came into philosophy, we can speak of onto-theology, in which world and being are always "apprehended and comprehended by thinking."[27] According to Heidegger, "the comprehension of being in its truth was immediately covered over by its function as the universal foundation of beings, by a supreme being, a founder, by God. The thinking of being, being in its truth, becomes knowledge (*logos*) or comprehension of God: theology."[28] However, when "being is immediately approached in the form of a foundation of beings, it comes to be named God": this is onto-theology.[29] The more thinking and logic are developed, the more we

22 See M. Halteman, "Ontotheology," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Taylor and Francis, viewed 14 October 2019).

23 See S.R. Uttley, "'Exorcising the Curse of Sisyphus': English Catholic Education and the Possibility of Authenticity: A philosophical Study after Heidegger, Derrida, Lonergan and Boeve," unpublished PhD thesis (Nottingham: Nottingham Trent University, 2016).

24 See S. Minister. and J. Murtha, "Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion," *Philosophy Compass* 5.11 (2010): 1029.

25 See Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 160. Sometimes Levinas refers to God using Platonic terminology: The Good/God. Levinas claims that "the Good is, in spite of us" (M. Dimitrova, *In Levinas' Trace* [Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011], 42). By this statement he means that even if God exists, He does not exist as most people think, but it is impossible to comprehend (as beings) how God evaluates human situations and issues.

26 See note 16.

27 See, Levinas, *God, Time and Death*, 167.

28 Ibid., 123.

29 Ibid., 123. Several thinkers contend that Levinas does not intend to negate Heidegger's ontotheological insights entirely, but rather to recast them, since he himself inserted God into conversation as well, albeit within an extremely different framework: through the face-to-face relation. For instance, A. Peperzak claims that Levinas has no intention to reject or to 'destroy' Heidegger's thinking on ontotheology, but to criticize it as a "a manifestation

can speak of onto-theology. We can say that onto-theology is parallel to fundamental ontology.[30] The image of God alone cannot be construed without beings' power of comprehension. People throughout history did not have the power of comprehension because they lacked technology, and only in modern times, with modern technology, can they construe the image of God. Thus, onto-theology needs a neo-technological culmination of modernism in order to reveal itself. We can infer that, according to onto-theology, there is no God without beings and no beings without God. God as *Θεός*, the supreme infinite Being, is signified by beings, and beings are signified by God. In western (Anglo-Saxon) philosophy of religion, onto-theology is the mediator between God and beings (*όντα*) *qua* beings. The Heideggerian being is an impersonal power leading "to an account of history as impersonal destiny."[31] The ethical stance of Levinas "is not an instrumental contract that the self of will to power [...] makes to defend itself against the other and to launch its self-aggrandizing onslaught on the freedom of the other,"[32] but an infinite command of goodness.

Meaning,[33] in onto-theology, does necessarily have to be. Thought and comprehension are inseparable from meaning. To be

of the natural egoism which constitutes the elementary form of [immanent] life." See A. Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 10.

30 By choosing this mode of thinking, that is, by considering God with the power of knowledge and comprehension, we inevitably reduce God's essence into beings. This is a huge mistake, as God, according to Levinas, is irreducible to human knowledge and *Physics*. R. Scruton, in support of this thesis, notes that not only subjects but God is unrelated to objects and physical laws. It is only objects that follow these laws. This is the reason why Levinas prefers the term "humans" rather than "beings": "Look for them [i.e. subjects] in the world of objects and you will not find them. This is true of you and me; it is true too of God. *Physics* gives a complete explanation of the world of objects, for that is what "physics" means. God is not a hypothesis to be set beside the fundamental constants and the laws of quantum dynamics. Look for him in the world of objects and you will not find him." See R. Scruton, *The Face of God: The Gifford Lectures* (London: Continuum, 2012), 166. However, Levinas would have taken this a step further, clarifying that not only cannot God be understood by the laws of quantum physics, He cannot be understood directly by subjects either.

31 R. Kearney (ed.), *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century* (London-New York: Routledge [kindle paperback edition], 2003), loc. 4733.

32 Ibid. loc. 4905.

33 Levinas gives proper attention to meaning in his work *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. B. Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 152-171.

meaningful is a necessary and sufficient condition for being. That is, being necessarily must confirm thought and knowledge. All these characteristics of fundamental ontology imply that we cannot speak of God outside the framework of onto-theology. However, ethical philosophers raise several objections to the arguments discussed above. For ethical thinking, in general, God must be understood (if we ever can understand God) beyond onto-theology.[34] What is more, according to Levinas, "it is from a certain ethical relationship that one may start out on this search."[35] Deriving from Plato's view that

34 This is a very interesting point that requires further consideration. Even Levinas, who vehemently rejects ontotheology, which gives priority to rationality and teleology of reason (see D.F. Courtney, "The Teleology of Freedom: The Structure of Moral Self-Consciousness in the Analytic," in *The Teleology of Reason: A Study of the Structure of Kant's Critical Philosophy* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014], 248-291), "apologizes" to God and to himself because even outside ontotheology, he attempts to speak about the Infinite (that is God) by expressing his thoughts and insights, even if he provides ethical implications. See Levinas, "The Temptation of Temptation," in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. A. Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 30-50. For instance, in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas uses in the title the relative pronoun *who* (who comes to mind). Thus, even if he wants to provide arguments against ontotheology, he indirectly attributes human definitions to God since the relative pronoun *who* is referring to humans: men and women. In the second chapter of the above work he claims, "not to philosophize is still to philosophize" (*Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 55). Even if Levinas clearly rejects ontotheology by saying that the problem with ontotheology, that is finally a kind of rational theology, is that "in thematizing God [and attributing Him human conditions such as mind, voice, thinking, logic etc.] Theology has brought Him into the course of being" (ibid.), he himself admits that he is obliged by speech to express his opinion that there is no opinion about God. However, he claims that in saying that there is no opinion about God we are already expressing our opinion. This view is expressed by several thinkers who claim that Ontotheology is inseparable to God-talk and God-discussion in order to accept or raise questions about His essence and His relation to human beings. For instance, J.W. Robbins alleges that we cannot escape Ontotheology even though we do not accept it. Ontotheology together with the issue of death of God cannot be overcome in no way since they are necessary and sufficient condition for a possible God-talk. Inventing and using the term "God" in any science, we automatically adopt ontotheology as a subsidiary factor for a God-talk. "For, the endeavor at overcoming remains trapped within ontotheology, and what is worse, it confuses this trap as the problem when in fact it is the very clue needed for thinking otherwise." See J.W. Robbins, *Between Faith and Thought: An Essay on the Ontotheological Condition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 3.

35 See Levinas, *God, Time and Death*, 125.

"Good[36] [by which Levinas presumably means the divine supreme God] is beyond being," Levinas builds up the structure of his "radical alterity."[37] As he points out, there is an urgent need to distinguish philosophy from theology, for "to philosophy belongs being and to Theology there is faith, revelation and God."[38]

It is worth noting that even though this chapter analyses and compares Levinas's and Kierkegaard's views regarding God, and how beings are interrelated to God, we need to begin with Heidegger in order to better understand the vital role of Sameness and Otherness. Onto-theology gives priority to Sameness, tying logic to the relation between God and people. Thinking of God starts from beings and returns to the beings themselves. In this way, the Same presses the Other to be absorbed and return to Sameness, all the while without revealing itself. Thus, the Other depends on the Same, even while it is addicted and integrated into the latter. The Other, according to onto-theology, is trapped by the Same, unable to escape.[39] However, according to Levinas, Otherness is a separate version of one's self which has never been adopted or absorbed by Sameness. In parallel, only through one's relation to the Other can one find God:

> To be oneself is already to know the fault I have committed with regard to the Other. But the fact that I do not quiz myself on the Other's rights paradoxically indicates that the Other is not a new edition of myself; in its Otherness it is situated in a dimension of

36 See below Levinas's definition of Good: "The Good invests freedom - it loves me before I love it. Love is love in this antecedence. The Good could not be the term of a need susceptible of being satisfied, it is not the term of an erotic need, a relationship with the seductive which resembles the Good to the point of being indistinguishable from it, which is not its other, but its imitator. The Good as the infinite has no other, not because it would be the whole, but because it is Good and nothing escapes its goodness." See E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (The Netherlands: Springer, 1991), 187, n. 8.

37 See ibid., 16; J. W. Robbins, "The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the Divine between Theology and Philosophy," *The Heythrop Journal 48* (2002): 142.

38 See J. W. Robbins, "The Problem of Ontotheology," 147. Even though Levinas stops short of admitting that his work is theological, there are several similarities between his work and Karl Barth's "theology of language," especially when he tries to explain the notion of the Saying. See Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 147-170.

39 See Kearney ed., *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, loc. 4790.

> height, in the ideal, the Divine, and through my relation to the Other, I am in touch with God.
>
> (Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, 1)

Levinasian Prioritizing of Ethics as First Philosophy over Onto-Theology[40]

> It is [for Levinas] a question of attaining, via the royal road of ethics, the supreme being, the truly being [...]. And this being is man, determined as face in his essence as man on the basis of his resemblance to God. Is this not what Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of the unity of metaphysics, humanism and onto-theology? [...] 'The Other resembles God.' Man's substantiality, which permits him to be face, is thus founded in his resemblance to God, who is therefore both the Face and absolute substantiality.
>
> (J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 142)

It is crucial to unpack the Levinasian notion of God outside the context of onto-theology. Before discussing Levinas's arguments concerning God and His relation to human beings, we have to understand why he considers ethics as first philosophy[41] and how we can approach the relations among ethics, knowledge and philosophy of religion.

40 Several thinkers who study Levinas agree with this statement. Some of them, however, instead of ethics, use Levinas's phrase "Metaphysics precedes Ontology" to explain the differences between Heideggerian ontology and Levinasian ethics. See E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, tr. A. Lingis (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 42. For instance, J. Grondin maintains that, mistakenly, "driven by its will to power and its egoism, ontology is transformed into first philosophy". He continues with the observation that Levinas, "in order to combat [without infringing – as Levinas's intention is not to infringe on or entirely skip over Heidegger's ontology, but rather to put priorities between ontology and metaphysical ethics] its ontological imperialism proposes a terminological inversion: the primacy of the Same becomes that of the other, and ontology's primacy is transferred to ethics." See Grondin, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 244. Here Grondin analyses metaphysics as ethics and not as a science which investigates Being as Being nor as the fundamental ontological event of our existence.

41 That is to say, "Being only discovers itself by its being called [and not by its will] by the call [and not the will] of the other. Thus, before being comes responsibility, which implies a more originary origin than being itself." See Robbins, "The Problem of Ontotheology," 146.

Levinas, in his renowned article "Ethics as First Philosophy,"[42] raises several objections against traditional classical knowledge, explaining that there are various disadvantages to the ontological basis behind knowledge which is explained by analytical thinkers merely as experience and apprehension. The problem, as he points out, is that the classical notion of knowledge starts from immanence: "The ideal of rationality begins to appear as the immanence of the real to reason."[43] The problem Levinas observes can be traced to a mistaken approach to freedom of knowledge which, according to classical tradition, is *essentially* the inspiration for the mind where (Hegelian) wisdom of first philosophy is reduced to spirit as self-consciousness."[44] "It is to be found in the concept of consciousness with the interpretation of *cogito* given by Descartes,"[45] something that has been described by Husserl as intentionality – "consciousness of something."[46] Also, for Levinas, experience mistakenly expressed by western analytical thought as "collective and religious experience."[47]

42 R. Kearney and M. Rainwater (eds.), *The Continental Philosophy Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 124-135.

43 Ibid.

44 G.L. Aronoff, *Guilt, Persecution and Atonement: Moral Responsibility in Loewald and Lévinas* (unpublished PhD thesis, Concordia University Press, 2010), 148, n. 295.

45 See Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 125. It is important to consider briefly what is the main difference between Levinas and Descartes regarding their views on God, as both affirm the existence of God but within different metaphysical frameworks. Although Descartes admits that there is a God who is absolute and infinite, he "employs causal and ontological arguments to demonstrate that there is a God." See R. Bernasconi and D. Wood (eds.), *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (London-New York: Routledge, 1988), 139. Levinas, who agrees with Descartes on several points, especially on the proposition that a subject has different thinking of his self and different thinking of his finitude, as well as the belief that "infinitude is the positive notion in terms of which the notion of man's finitude is understood" (ibid., 142) underlines that one major difference with Descartes is that Levinas does not care to provide ratiocinative arguments on what it is to be God because we cannot say what God is at all. At this point I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, who patiently gave me specific directions on how I can reflect Levinas's terminology on God, *illeity* and transcendence, as well as differentiating Levinas's perspective on God from other thinkers who, while admitting the existence of God, try to explain His existence with rational exegesis, something that Levinas sees as absolute madness, maintaining that we cannot compare or think of infinity with our finite mind.

46 R. Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 125.

47 Ibid.

Levinas argues that Husserl's claims concerning intentionality and self-consciousness are based on a faulty foundation.[48] According to Husserl, "knowledge is a 'filling out' that gratifies a longing for the being as object causing the world to be rediscovered as *noema*,"[49] where self-consciousness is a necessary and sufficient condition of knowledge. As Husserl points out, "All acts generally — even the acts of feeling and will — are 'objectifying' acts, original factors in the 'constituting' of objects, the necessary sources of different regions of being and of the ontologies that belong therewith."[50] For Levinas, "reduced consciousness rediscovers and masters its own acts of perception and science as objects affirming itself as self-consciousness and remains *a non-intentional* consciousness of itself."[51]

48 Levinas agrees with the Husserlian dyadic relationship as a fundamental locus of concern and responsibility. He also admits that his philosophical thinking on the 'Other' derived from Husserl's idea that "the Other is the condition of correctness of my world and that each transcendence, including the transcendence of the outer world, exists for me and is comprehensible to me only by virtue of the transcendence of the Other." However, for Husserl, "both the Other and Transcendence are constituted in my immanence, whereas Levinas refuses to consider the Other as my *Alter Ego*" (See Dimitrova, *In Levinas' Trace*, 19-20). The Other calls me, teaches me how to transcend my potential into Infinity. Thus, I cannot escape responsibility and morality, which precede both my freedom and my decisions against my neighbor. In parallel, a second major problem with Husserlian phenomenology of the Other, as Levinas claims, is that Husserl insists on the fact that the relation to the human Other be understood as a relation of knowledge; in fact, Levinas argues, the Other can be understood as a relation of being: "our intuitive grasp of the other depicts him or her as a center of intentionality and hence as *alter ego*, as a sensuous-conscious subject" (See H. Jodalen and J. Vetlesen [eds.], *Closeness: An Ethics* [Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997], 5). Levinas discusses Husserl's view on intentionality of consciousness and his method of Intuition by inferring that they provide an overall evaluation of phenomenology: noesis-noemata are revealed through the horizon of intentionality of consciousness, that is, the latter is inseparable from the former. See E. Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. A. Orianne (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 37-52 and 65-96. However, for Levinas, both terms lack an ethical standpoint. Levinas argues that we need to take a step forward, from intuition of essence to the philosophical intuition of existence: "Philosophical intuition must not be more directly characterized without mentioning the phenomenological reduction which introduces into the realm of phenomenology" (ibid., 135).

49 Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 127.

50 E. Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R.B. Dixon (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), section 117.

51 Kearney and Rainwater (eds), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 127.

Thus, Levinas suggests "a consciousness of consciousness, indirect, implicit and aimless without any initiative that might refer back to an ego."[52]

Levinas also discusses another term, duration. By duration, Levinas means "a consciousness that signifies not so much a knowledge of oneself as something that effaces presence or make it discreet."[53] This duration in phenomenological analysis remains "free from the sway of the will,"[54] and the most crucial thing is that which continues to be "absolutely outside all activity of the ego."[55]

Levinas thus initiates, in contrast to Husserl, not an ontological but a transcendental phenomenology of the face where "the proximity of the other is the face's meaning" – there is a "face to face steadfast."[56] In contrast to the classical notion of knowledge, Levinas argues that (ethical) knowledge lies in the Other "*prior* to any knowledge."[57]

> The Other (*l'Autre*) thus presents itself as human Other (*Autrui*); it shows a face and opens the dimension of height, that is to say, it infinitely overflows the bounds of knowledge. Positively, this means that the Other puts in question the freedom which attempts to invest it; the Other lays him — or herself bare to the total negation of murder but forbids it through the original language of his defenseless eyes
>
> (Levinas, *Transcendence and Height*, 12).

52 Ibid., 127.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 130. I would agree with Grondin's claim that "the Other is always a face, which can never be reduced to an idea I may have of it." See Grondin, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 244-245. This statement can be justified if we look carefully at Levinas's phrase: "the way in which the other presents itself, exceeding the idea of the Other in me, we here name *face*." See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50. For Levinas, in parallel, "the Other, *Autrui*, is not simply an *alter ego*, an *appresented* analogue of myself. He and I are not equals, citizens in an intelligible kingdom of ends...There is between us, an absolute difference. The Other is he to whom and in virtue of whom I am subject, with a subjectivity that is heteronomy, not autonomy, and hetero-affection, not auto-affection. The Other is not the object of my concern and solicitude." See Bernasconi and Wood (eds.), *The Provocation of Levinas*, 140.

57 Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 130.

To answer another crucial question concerning the relation between Christian ethics[58] and Levinas's ethics, for Levinas, the Other becomes my neighbor, not in the same manner as the Christian dictum 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' but through a primordial concern about the Other, that is, "the Other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility and calls me into question."[59] For Levinas, responsibility exceeds the notion of Being as we know it in the Heideggerian *Being and Time,* Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* or in other contemporary thinkers.[60] Being according to Levinas is of less worth than people's relations to each other. Responsibility is beyond being and beyond being's immanence.

> Responsibility goes beyond being. In sincerity, in frankness, in the veracity of this saying, in the uncoveredness of suffering, being is altered. But this saying remains, in its activity, a passivity, more passive than all passivity, for it is a sacrifice

58 Even though there are hundreds of discrepancies between Christian ethics and Levinas's ethics, Christian thought derives several principles and aspects from Levinas's thought. See specifically A. Peperzak, "The Significance of Levinas's Work for Christian Work," in J. Bleochl (ed.), *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 184-99. One of the most crucial discrepancies between Levinas and Kierkegaard is the term *kenosis*, that is, abandoning everything and everyone for the sake of the Other. This term is explored in particular by Kierkegaard's Christology. See D.R. Law, *Kierkegaard's Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 64-153.

59 Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 131.

60 For instance, in Descartes the self is the *I* of the *cogito* (cogito ergo sum); the center of consciousness leading to self-awareness and intentionality. In Spinoza and several analytic philosophers, *being* is enriched by additional emotions, desires, autonomy and freedom as well as second-order volitions, something that it lacks in animals. In Hume, the character of beings is like a container of ideas and expression that are expressed in language and self-consciousness. With Husserl the being is embedded in the world within a noematic-noetic framework explored as intentionality. In Heidegger this embeddedness in the world is mainly practical and emotional, with being's attributes and conditions returning to itself. And finally, with Hegel, being is totalized and thematized, taking its power and consciousness to its core and depending on its interiority. With Hegel's notion of the self, history ends. "Hegel explicated the progress of reason in history that coincides with God's self-development toward absolute consciousness. Thus, for him, God becomes Absolute Reason or *Geist*, the totality of reality." See R. Urbano, "Approaching the Divine: Levinas on God, Religion, Idolatry and Atheism," *Logos* 15.1 (2012): 66.

> without reserve, without holding back, and in this non-voluntary – the sacrifice of a hostage designated who has not chosen himself to be hostage, but possibly elected by the Good, in an involuntary election not assumed by the elected one.
>
> (E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 15)

Despite the fact that Levinas agrees with Sartre's expression of "existence precedes essence," he provides a different notion of freedom[61] and responsibility from that of Sartre's "sincerity."[62] Levinas contends that responsibility matters if and only if it goes beyond one's commitment to the Other, before being devoted to oneself, even before being. In short, for Levinas, ethics precedes ontology,[63] and

61 According to Levinas, freedom is a characteristic that is misused, especially in Western contemporary philosophy. By necessity it is related to human rights and free will. If I have freedom, I am free to express my opinion without any coercion. However, Levinas provides a different view on "Westernized" freedom, which is relevant solely to reason and power: "In a civilization which the philosophy of the same reflects, freedom is realized as a wealth. Reason, which reduces the other, is appropriation and power" (Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 50).

62 Concerning similarities and discrepancies between Levinas and Sartre on God, subjectivity and politics, see C. Howells, "Sartre and Levinas," in Bernasconi and Wood (eds.) *The Provocation of Levinas*, 91-99. The most profound discrepancy between Levinas and Sartre is that the latter, in his work *Being and Nothingness,* as an Atheist, prefers the Greek model of knowing, in which he contends that the encounter between the *I* and the other person is an event of cognition, where selfhood becomes another piece of "furniture" in a mere procedure of intentional objects. See J-P Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H.E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 344-58). On the contrary, Levinas, as a Jew, comes from the Biblical tradition where the Other is quite relevant and important to ethical subjectivity of the pace of my life. The Other appears as a "naked image" where she eternally seeks me to heal her wounds. As G.L. Bruns correctly puts it, "for Levinas, the ethical subject is defined by a responsibility that is *prior* to any rational deliberation executive decision; it is an anarchic responsibility prior to the kind of commitments that rational subjects [...] know how to contract or refuse or hedge with loopholes and provisos." See G.L. Bruns., "On the Coherence of Hermeneutics and Ethics: An Essay on Gadamer and Levinas," in B. Krajewski (ed.), *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics* (California: California University Press, 2004), 34.

63 As M. Ruti correctly states, "this [relational] way of envisioning subjectivity is one reason that Levinasian phenomenology has played such a crucial role in recent ethical theory, for Levinas sought to understand precisely what it means to proceed from ethics to ontology rather than the other way around." See M.

transcendence[64] precedes immanence.[65] In contrast to Sartre, responsibility for Levinas is "stemming from a time before my freedom".[66] It is the excellence of ethical proximity[67] — before any

Ruti, *Between Levinas and Lacan: Self, Other, Ethics* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 2.

64 According to Levinas, "the transcendence of God is his actual effacement, but this obligates us to men." See W. Large, "The Name of God: Kripke, Levinas and Rozenweig on Proper Names," *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 44.3 (2013): 331.

65 At this point, I raise objections to those who believe that there are two different meanings of the Other in Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*. For instance, Large insists that immanence is related to transcendence, and that there would not have been transcendence without first analyze immanence. And this is necessary and sufficient condition to understand both God and human beings. See William Large, "The Two Meanings of the Other in Lévinas' *Totality and Infinity*," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 42 (2011): 243-254. Large claims that "the other meaning, which is much less well-known, but which I believe is its true meaning, is the Other of immanence and interiority" (ibid., 243). Levinas, however, makes it clear in his work *Entre Nous* what he means by asymmetrical relationship: "The relationship from me to the other is thus asymmetrical, without noematic correlation of any thematizable presence. An awakening to the other man, which is not knowledge" (Levinas, *Entre Nous* ,168). Thus, from my point of view, immanence has nothing to do with ethical transcendence, as the former is about rational beings and knowledge, and the latter about infinite God. They cannot be related to or considered together. Immanence, as an ontological term, deals with beings *qua* beings and knowledge of beings. Transcendence, as an ethical term, deals with God. I agree with A. Kin, who notes that for Levinas, "it is especially the encounter of a particular kind of Other, the hungry, that shakes up our ordinary ontotheological consciousness in its complacency, closure, and arrogance, break the circle of immanence that imprisons us in mystification, deception, and ideology, and open a break or fissure in the epic of being in the direction of the beyond where another mode of transcendence can appear" (Kin 2006: 101). I would also agree with Grondin's statement that for Levinas, all ontological thought is one of immanence, of the same present in all individuals, leveling over differences. But [on the other hand metaphysical [ethical] thought is one that discovers the transcendence of the Other which exceeds all my effort to understand it" (Grondin, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 244).

66 Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 131.

67 Proximity is a crucial term in Levinas's thought. It is related to sensibility in accordance with the matter of surprise. It has nothing to do with knowledge and cognition since it strives to get to know the other not through experience but mainly as a trace. Levinas states that sensibility "is itself exposed to alterity [...] is the *for-the-other* of one's own materiality; it is the immediacy or the proximity of the other [...] a relation not of knowing but of proximity," where the latter is defined as an "anarchic relationship with a singularity without the mediation of any principle, any ideality" (Levinas *Otherwise Than Being*, xxvi, 74, 100).

present. The most crucial and vital difference between Levinas and Sartre (and the above Christian dictum) is that, for Levinas, "responsibility for my neighbor dates from before my freedom in an immemorial past [...] to which nothing in the rigorously ontological order binds me [...] an immemorial freedom that is even older than being."[68]

Though Levinas started his philosophical thought from phenomenology, he abandoned the Husserlian observation of beings that focused mainly on a metaphysical transcendence of what he calls "Ethics as first philosophy".[69] For Levinas, philosophy of the Other echoes to infinity and the idea of the divine Other, whether or not this Other is God or the other person. However, Levinas insists that we can only see God and communicate with Him through his trace, that is, the promise of openness to the other. R. Urbano correctly states that for Levinas, "God is disclosed to man at the moment the person responds to the call of the Other. This responsibility for the Other attests to the presence of God."[70] However, I would add that this "presence" must be considered as indirect, since God's presence is impossible to our finite minds. "This is why the face, in contrast to Hegel, is primordial and irreducible and it cannot be totalized, as the infinite, i.e. God comes to epiphany there."[71] What matters at all for Levinas is not onto-theology but "the vulnerability of the eye of the other,"[72] who commands you "Thou shalt not kill."

> The first word of the face is "Thou shalt not kill." It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face of the Other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. And me, whoever I may be, but as a "first person" I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call.
>
> (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 89)

> Responsibility for the other – the face signifying to me "thou shalt not kill," and consequently also you are responsible for the life of this absolutely other – is responsibility for the one and

68 Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 131-32. For a study of immense importance concerning the immemorial time, see Dimitrova, *In Levinas' Trace*, 37-48.

69 Kearney (ed.), *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, loc. 4718.

70 Urbano, "Approaching the Divine," 59.

71 Kearney (ed.), *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, loc. 4902.

72 Ibid., 4902.

> only. The one and only means the loved one, love being the condition of the very possibility of uniqueness [...] The alterity of the other is the extreme point of the "thou shalt not kill" and, in me, the fear of all the violence and usurpation that my existing, despite the innocence of its intentions, risks committing.
>
> (Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 168-169)

According to Levinas, "to separate God from onto-theology" is to reexamine the notion of meaning.[73] As Levinas states (alongside several postmodernist French thinkers such as Derrida[74] and Jean-Luc Marion),[75] in order to escape from onto-theology and its quasi-

73 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 127.

74 Concerning similarities and discrepancies between Levinas and Derrida, see J.D. Caputo, "Adieu-sans Dieu: Derrida and Levinas," in Bloechl (ed.) *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God*, 276-312. A variety of secondary literature is dedicated to discussions on God, infinity, metaphysics and selfhood between Levinas and Derrida (Baird, "Whose *Kenosis*?," 423-37; R. Bernasconi, "'Only the Persecuted': Language of the Oppressor, Language of the Oppressed," in A. Peperzak (ed.), *Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1995), 77-86; idem, "Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics," in R.A. Cohen (ed.), *Face to Face with Levinas* (New York: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1986), 181-202; D. Boothroyd, "Off the Record: Levinas, Derrida and the Secret of Responsibility," *Theory Culture and Society 28* (2011): 41-59; A.K. Min, "Naming the Unnamable God: Levinas, Derrida and Marion," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60.3 (2006): 99-116; M. Papastephanou, "Onto-Theology and the Incrimination of Ontology in Levinas and Derrida," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 31.4 (2005): 461-485; H. Zaborowski, "On Freedom and Responsibility: Remarks on Sartre, Levinas and Derrida," *The Heythrop Journal* 41 (2000): 147-165.

75 Derrida and Marion also raise several objections concerning the God of onto-theology. For instance, Marion claims that "the God of ontotheology is only an idol." See J-L Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. T.A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); idem, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. T.A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). However, Marion applied a different theoretical framework in discussing the philosophy of the other and selfhood, criticizing Levinas that he did not escape from ontology (or ontotheology) even if he provided an alternative to the phenomenology of Husserl's egology and Heidegger's Ontotheology. On this issue, see C.M. Gschwandtner, "The Neighbor and the Infinite: Marion and Levinas on the Encounter between Self, Human Other, and God," *Continental Philosophical Review* 40 (2007): 231-249, esp. 233-37, where Marion expounds a vehement critique of Levinas's endeavor to destroy the self by giving absolute dominance to the other. Gschwandtner on p. 234 cites Marion's phrase that Levinas's "[insistent] sincerity phenomenologically destroys the terms of the ontological difference," imposing such a dramatic reduction of the Self that it is placed in danger of elimination. For Marion, therefore, this "obedience to the ethical

immanent characteristics, we need to decenter the subject from fundamental ontology and take into consideration "forms of thought different from intentionality."[76] Levinas observes that "to think God outside of onto-theology [is] to think no longer on the basis of positivity."[77] Otherness must be separated from Sameness so that the former is not continuously absorbed by the latter. In this way, ethical relationship is no longer subjugated by onto-theology or "from the thinking of being".[78] Levinas calls for reconsidering knowledge and the manifestation of thinking beings. Unlike the Greeks, who categorized knowledge within a tautological framework, Levinas considers that meaning does not need manifestation of being; i.e. not merely to be, but to *become*, since Levinas does not want to erase or reject being (ontology), but he insists on giving priority to the ethical term *becoming*, where the "I," as subject, needs the Other to become. Levinas raises objections to the onto-theological idea which prioritizes a power of being that invites God to come to our minds through logic and comprehension. Levinas opposes this concept with a metaphysics of the good and the face-to-face intersubjective relationship[79] "wherein a nameless universal Being does not have final sway."[80] Levinas sees Heideggerian ontology as an "ontology of power which is tempted to relate to the other by murder."[81] Instead,

infinite would identify, in the new phenomenological reduction, he who oversteps the ontological difference" (ibid.). Thus, for Marion, this insistence in Levinasian ethics that "the self is defined by its responsibility to the neighbor who is always prior to the self" (ibid., 243), increases the danger of Self's elimination.

76 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 149.

77 Ibid., 167.

78 Ibid., 127.

79 Even though Levinas's concept of the face-to-face relationship derives from Husserl and Heidegger (his predecessors and mentors), it has nothing to do with reciprocal and symmetrical intersubjectivity (Dimitrova, *In Levinas' Trace*, 27). We may assume that Husserl's phenomenology is an ontology, and Heidegger's fundamental ontology is a phenomenology, both trying to thoroughly analyze the Greek term *physical*. Levinas contends that he has taken a step forward, proposing that the main topic of his thinking is metaphysical. As J. Llewellyn correctly infers in his article "Levinas, Derrida and Others Vis-à-Vis," in Bernasconi and Wood (eds.), *The Provocation of Levinas*, 136: "It is metaphysical because it is ethical. And it is ethical not because he aims to present a code or a metaphysics of ethics." Llewellyn also adds that "ethical is older than justice... [and] prior to all structures of being-with" (ibid., 137).

80 Kearney (ed.), *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, loc. 4737.

81 Ibid., loc. 4759.

Levinas proposes a different dialectic, focused on defending the ethical community of the other. Levinas insists on the phrase 'thou shalt not commit no murder':

> To kill is not to dominate but to annihilate; it is to renounce comprehension absolutely. Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible. The alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique 'matter' possible for total negation. I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill.
>
> (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198)

However, killing in Levinas's work is not real or pragmatist but ethical. He is not interested in criminology or facts related to the penal system. Levinas focuses on the ethical crime of the Other:

> If the resistance to murder were not ethical but real, we would have a perception of it, with all that reverts to the subjective in perception. We would remain within the idealism of a consciousness of struggle, and not in relationship with the Other, a relationship that can turn into struggle, but already overflows the consciousness of struggle. The epiphany of the face is ethical. The struggle this face can threaten presupposes the transcendence of expression.
>
> (E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199)

Ethically speaking, Levinas claims that we need to escape onto-theology by reconsidering meaning. However, the question that demands further consideration is this: How can we approach meaning without infringing on it in order to speak of God outside of onto-theology? In analytic philosophy, a number of thinkers give priority to immanence where meaning seems to be *doxic,* expressing a logical exposition. In the Western tradition, logical thinking is fundamental, characterized by the verb 'to be.' Everything which is logical, *thetic* and analytical posits itself as reflecting to immanence and is in itself presence, therefore revealing onto-theology. This tradition derives from the Greeks, who focused on profound and fundamental experience, bringing God into onto-theology through a logical being

qua being. The meaning of philosophical thought is drawn from *cosmos*. In Heidegger, the Same, which is the rational and the meaningful, is what really matters.[82]

Levinas, on the other hand, tries to manifest whether Ethics is a necessary and sufficient condition to justify God outside onto-theology. The answer is yes, if and only if we find a means to speak about meaning "without reference to the world, to being, to knowledge, to the Same."[83] Ethics can provide this means, signifying a *transcendence* that would not be interpreted with analytical, *thetic* and *doxic* arguments in presence. Levinas considers the possibility, "to transcend oneself toward the other, to go from the Same to the Other without the Other being absorbed and adopted by the Same. If the same can contain the Other then the Same has triumphed over the Other."[84] However, Levinas contends that if transcendence is focused on appropriation (as Husserl claimed), it remains phenomenological immanence. The in-itself indicates the triumphant truth of the Same over the Other, suppressing all ethical transcendence.[85] For Levinas,

82 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 135.

83 Ibid., 137.

84 Ibid., 141.

85 It is worth noting that for Levinas there are two different views of subjective truth: (a) the triumphant truth and (b) the persecuted truth. Both terms are invented and discussed by Kierkegaard, as Levinas notes in his work *Proper Names*, ch. 8: "Kierkegaard: Existence and Ethics," 1996b, pp. 66-74. Levinas explains that the triumphant truth, as Kierkegaard calls it, derives from idealism, and especially from the Hegelian dialectic of egocentric orientation of the subject. Truth triumphs, as Hegel explains, by "letting the human subject be absorbed by the Being that this subject uncovered. Idealism claimed that the unfolding of Being by thought allowed the subject to rise above itself and hand over its last secrets to Reason" (ibid. 66). This line of thought, in brief, culminates in the triumph of absolute Being and Reason, which both empower the self to be nominated as the core center of meaning and all reality. The self is universal and alone controls and commands everything through totalization and apprehension of Being: "Being was the correlate of thought" (ibid., 67). On the other hand, Levinas credits Kierkegaard's contribution in presenting a counter-argument against the above idealistic proposition. He proposes that subjectivity is irreducible to objective being (ibid., 68). Hence, truth must not be considered as a triumphant perfect realization of Being which totalizes experience, but as a "belief linked to a truth that suffers" (ibid., 69): as truth persecuted. By persecution, Kierkegaard means that "it is through suffering truth that one can describe the very manifestation of the divine: simultaneity of All and Nothingness, Relation to a Person both present and absent -- to a humiliated God who suffers, dies and leaves those whom he saves in despair. A certainty that coexists with an absolute uncertainty-to the point that one may

the phenomenon of transcendence (of the infinite) is based on "the responsibility of the neighbor," an aimless meaning without vision.[86] Levinasian ethics gives priority not to *doxic* ontological criteria but to paradoxical transcendence toward the Other and not toward the Self. Levinas strongly favored the subversion of phenomenological immanence, turning to the phenomenon of enjoyment which does not credit "self-constituting or the primacy of the same over the other" but rather "the privilege of the other over the self."[87] For Levinas, "paradox inscribes the glory of the infinite in the relationship called intersubjective."[88] Hence, Levinas states that we can speak of God escaping onto-theology if and only if the Other as a nonthematizable, invisible interlocutor reveals prior freedom and essence in our intersubjective self. Ethics cannot be interpreted as knowledge of being and comprehension; instead, it is the relationship between me and the other, the neighbor. However, in contrast to the Christian Triadic God,[89] the neighbor comes to me first without any

wonder whether that Revelation itself is not contrary to the essence of that crucified truth, whether God's suffering and the lack of recognition of the truth would not reach their highest degree in a total *incognito*" (ibid., 69). However, Levinas notes a problematic point in Kierkegaard's discussion of the distinction between triumphant and persecuted truth. He contends that Kierkegaard's contribution to existential philosophy and his correct critique on Hegel and Idealism leaves out something crucial: responsibility. Levinas underlines that "[True] Subjectivity is in that responsibility and only irreducible subjectivity can assume a responsibility. That is what constitutes the ethical. To be myself means, then, to be unable to escape responsibility" (ibid., 73), an idea that is marginal in Kierkegaard's thought. Thus, persecuted truth for Levinas starts from Kierkegaard but ends with responsibility for the Other who chases me, eternally driving me into infinity. And the Other "is the poor, the destitute, and nothing about that Stranger can be indifferent to it [...and] I am responsible for the very one who commands me." (ibid., 74).

86 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 142.

87 Kearney (ed.), *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, loc. 4815, 4819.

88 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 162.

89 Levinas would strongly reject views such as: "the clearest personal expression of religion and the view of God as Trinity (*Τριάς*) exists in the relations that make us persons [...] The search for meaning in Christian spirituality is enacted primarily by entering into relationship with Christ and the Blessed Trinity [...] God the Father corresponds to our carbon relations because the Father is the creator of the carbon universe" (K.A. Bryson, "The Ways of Spirituality," *Sophia Philosophical Review* X.2 (2017): 11). Such a direct communication with God reduces God to our minds and therefore we then speak of onto-theology. For Levinas, the 'face of God' is irreducible to finite human beings. The structure of spirituality depends neither on rational theology (as in several Christian

specific criteria or preconditions. Levinasian ethics is beyond freedom and essence; rather, it is about responsibility and reciprocal authenticity. Ethical relationship is a responsibility for the other. "It is not a disclosure of something given but the exposure of the me to another, prior to any decision."[90] In parallel Levinas states that ethical relationship, in contrast to onto-theology, is "a responsibility that obsesses, one that is an obsession, for the other besieges me, to the point where he puts in question my for-me, my in-itself, to the point where he makes me a hostage."[91] Thus we can infer that autonomy, in Levinas's view, can be marginalized. What matters in this sense is heteronomy.[92] The latter is ultimate the former is not, as

doctrines such as Catholics and Protestants) nor on ascetic contemplation (i.e., Orthodoxy). For Levinas, when the Holy is reduced to the Sacred, we are left with idolatry and rational theology which are both unacceptable. See Levinas, Part II: "Transcendence, Idolatry and Secularization," in his work *God, Death and Time*, 163-66.

90 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 187.

91 Ibid., 138. The term 'hostage' is mistakenly construed by some thinkers as they confuse it with the modern term imprisoner or being taken violently by someone, i.e. slavery or servitude. By saying that 'I am eternally hostage toward the Other', Levinas means that responsibility precedes freedom and autonomy: "a responsibility that obsesses, one that is an obsession, for the other besieges me, to the point he makes me a hostage" (ibid.). As Saracino correctly underlines, "as hostage for-the-Other, the subject is called to care for the Other in non-totalizing ways, that is, by the way of gestures of justice, generosity and sacrifice" (M. Saracino, *On Being Human: A Conversation with Lonergan and Levinas* [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003], 96).

92 Concerning the difference between autonomy and heteronomy, Levinas gives priority to heteronomy: he states that "subjectivity, as responsible, is a subjectivity which is commanded at the outset; heteronomy is somehow stronger than autonomy here, except that this heteronomy is not slavery, is not bondage [...] The responsibility for the other comes from the hither side of my freedom" (Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 111, 114). See further comments in A. Strhan, *Levinas, Subjectivity, Education*, 2012, 73-94. J. Raz, in addition, defines autonomy by claiming that "the autonomous person is a (part) author of his own life. The ideal of personal autonomy is the vision of people controlling, to some degree, their own destiny, fashioning it through successive decisions throughout their lives" (J. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986], 369). For Levinas, this statement would be correct to define autonomy, but lacks ethical content. If the autonomous person is the author of his life, controlling his own destiny, egology and ontology appear to a high degree. If all my thought is focused on how to build and maintain my personal pursuit of happiness above all, this is for Levinas Ontology. Autonomy produces an equal-to-thought status (Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 180) whereas the Other is inevitably marginalized for the sake of self-interest and

heteronomous ethics is assumed in infinite responsibility. In parallel, *eros* and *agape* (love)[93] are "breaking out of monadism and the egocentric predicament, where the self *agapeically* goes towards the other as other."[94] The self is for the other and not the other for the self. In this sense, difference or *différance*[95] of the other as hostage[96] gives priority to religion and ethics to speak of God outside onto-theology, since the I (ὁ ὢν) depends on the Other as an interlocutor, and not the Other on the I. Thus the I, according to Levinas, must be transformed into the accusative case: "me." "Me" needs someone else in order to exist; it cannot be alone. "Me" (in accusative case)[97] needs

Sameness. Levinas develops his thought concerning autonomy and its integration into reason in his work *Entre Nous*, ch. 15: "Uniqueness," 190-91.

93 When Levinas was asked about the difference between Eros/love and *Agape*, he confessed: "I do not think that Agape comes from Eros [...] Eros is definitely not Agape, that Agape is neither a derivative nor the extinction of love-Eros. Before Eros there was the Face; Eros itself is possible only between Faces. The problem of Eros is philosophical and concerns otherness [...] I have a grave view of Agape in terms of responsibility for the other" (Levinas *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 113). Eros has a dramatic nostalgia which remains to presence. Levinas contends that love as *agape* has more ethical and metaphysical repercussions. For Levinas, "love [as *agape*] desires not a nostalgic return to stasis but reaches out instead towards the other and ultimately towards a future: the impossibility or failure of fusion is the very positivity of love" (S. Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* [London: The Athlone Press, 2000], 97).

94 Kearney (ed.), *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, loc. 4924, 4932. Concerning the phenomenology of *Eros*, see P. Moyaert, "The Phenomenology of Eros: A Reading of Totality and Infinity," in Bloechl (ed.) *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God*, 30-42.

95 The term *différance* is developed by J. Derrida and it is adopted also by Levinas in order to explain the importance of transcendence over immanence. In deconstruction and post-modern philosophy, according to Derrida, subject must be decentered and must be replaced by intersubjective conditions beyond knowledge and logic. Differ, according to Derrida, means to differ from itself. For Derrida, *différance* is not an analytical concept or even a word. It is not what we represent to ourselves as beings. "It is the nonfull, nonsimple origin: it is the structured and differing origin of differences" (Kearney and Rainwater [eds.], *Continental Philosophy Reader*, 449). "It is a trace of something that can never present itself; It is a trace that lies beyond what profoundly ties fundamental ontology to phenomenology" (ibid., 459). Levinas insists that in this way we can speak of God outside onto-theology.

96 As Levinas states, "for all eternity, the *I* were the first one called to this responsibility; non-transferable and thus unique, thus *I*, the chosen hostage, the chosen one. An ethics of the meeting—sociality. For all eternity, one man is answerable for another" (Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 227).

97 Levinas writes, "Everything is from the start in the accusative. Such is the exceptional condition or unconditionality of the self, the signification of the

the Other as an equal interlocutor[98] in order to be meaningful. According to Levinas, "pre-reflective, non-intentional consciousness would never be able to return to a moral realization of this passivity. The non-intentional is from the start passivity and the accusative [is] its first case (me and not I)."[99] One must speak in me and not in I. As Blaise Pascal observes, the I is "hateful";[100] "one has to respond to one's right to be."[101] We can assume that Levinas is in favor of a transcendence, in the sense of "the awaiting without something awaited."[102] Such a transcendence "without aiming and without vision" tends to speak of God or to see God outside onto-theology.[103]

In this sub-chapter, I do not intend to delve into the ontological sphere. Rather, I seek to explain Levinas's ethics through criticism of fundamental ontology and onto-theology. In ethics, as Levinas observes, the concept of the ontological "I" urgently needs to be changed to the accusative case "me"; and as Levinas states, "no one could replace me."[104] An ethical *I-Thou* relationship, as well as the relationship between an individual and God, needs not to be systematized. Instead, each one relates to the other through responsibility. However, a relation between two people is direct, while the relation between a human and God is indirect. According to Levinas, "the absolutely other is the Other (Autrui). He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say *you* or *we* is not a plural of the *I*. I, you - these are not individuals of a common concept [...] Alterity is possible only starting from me [and not from "I" or *ego*]."[105]

pronoun self for which our Latin grammars themselves know no nominative form." (Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being,* 112).

98 Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 4-9. By the term "ethical interlocutor," I do not mean a procedure where the other will be absorbed by sameness. Dialogue and equal response in Levinasian ethics is not the same as the connection of *parole* and *langue* to language. In Levinas's ethics, by saying that the other must be equal interlocutor we mean that the Same allows the Other to show her otherness in an equal procedure without coercion, [Hegelian] power or [Husserlian] noematic-horizontal intentionality.

99 Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, 129.

100 B. Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1958), Part I, 1, 2, c. 1, section 4.[44], v. 455.

101 Kearney and Rainwater (eds.), *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, 130.

102 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 139.

103 Ibid., 139.

104 Ibid., 152.

105 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39-40.

The "Holiness of the Holy": Otherness Precedes Asceticism

Levinas speaks about the Other in the context of the "ethics of holiness." The holy is a significant concept in Levinas's thought. Derrida reports a short conversation with Levinas where the latter said: "You know, one often speaks of ethics to describe what I do, but what really interests me in the end is not ethics, not ethics alone, but the holy, the holiness of the holy."[106] The idea of sanctity or holiness has not often been discussed by scholars interested in Levinasian ethics.[107] Yet throughout his works, Levinas insists on distinguishing the holy from the sacred.[108] In his usage, the term "holiness" is similar to "desacralization." His intention was to deconstruct the meaning of the term "sacred," since he saw it as reduced to mystical theology, something unacceptable in his eyes.[109] Levinas criticizes several

106 J. Derrida, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. P-A., Brault and M. Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 4.

107 Two articles of immense importance on Levinas's interest in sanctity can be found in J. Hansel, "Utopia and Reality: The Concept of Sanctity in Kant and Levinas," *Philosophy Today* 43.2 (1999): 168–75 and J. Caruana, "Levinas's Critique of the Sacred," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 42.4 (2002) 519–34. For Levinas, sanctity has an allegoric meaning and has nothing to do with idolatry. Levinas integrates the concept of sanctity with death. As he himself mentions, sanctity appears metaphysically and ethically when "the death of the other can have priority over my own death," precisely when "the death of the other matters more than my own." Thus we can call this procedure sanctity, which derives from biblical ethical law (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbGaXEqxSvU: 46:40-47:04).

108 Levinas rejects the notion of religion as sacred for the same reason that he abhors mysticism. Both terms support immanence and ignore the direct separation of God and humans.

109 For Levinas, God is neither an idea nor a being, not because there is a kind of mystical knowledge that we (as humans) do not have the rational ability to surpass, but mainly because there is a "brick wall" between me as a finite human and God as infinite transcendence. Beyond this wall there is something I cannot think of, I cannot see, because of my "personal stupidity" (Large, "The Name of God: Kripke, Levinas and Rozenweig on Proper Names," 322). However, when Large says "stupidity," he does not mean that humans are stupid or disabled, but he means that humans' rational and finitude *logos* cannot explain what it is to be God because they are of different essences. According to Large, there are three possible ways to think of God: as an idea, as a being or as a word. He then claims that the first two alternatives for Levinas are impossible since God is transcendence and cannot be reduced to immanence. However, according to Large, Levinas accepts the fact that God can be named as a word. It would seem quite absurd to allege that God is a word, but what Large means by the phrase "God is a word" is that God is a name and not a description. In

sociologists who were unable to distinguish between the notions *le sacré* and *le saint*.[110] Additionally, he refers to Plato[111] in order to show that holiness is of immense importance for ethics, not as a theological term but as an ethical one.[112] Levinas defends the thesis that the sacred, as well as mysticism, strengthen immanence and the ego's conditions, thus slipping away from transcendence and infinity.

> The rigorous affirmation of human independence, of its intelligent presence to an intelligible reality, the destruction of the numinous concept of the Sacred, entail the risk of atheism. That risk must be run. Only through it can man be raised to the spiritual notion of the Transcendent. It is a great glory for the Creator to have set up a being who affirms Him after having contested and denied Him in the glamorous areas of myth and enthusiasm; it is a great glory for God to have created a being

Judaism, the word God cannot be described by presenting ritual attributes to God. Rather, the safest path to approach God is the prohibition of decorating His essence with cosmic attributes. Thus, we can infer that the allegoric reference to God as a word can only be construed as responsibility for the Other. Levinas queries: "Does not the transcendence of the name of God in comparison to all thematization become effacement and is not this effacement the very commandment that obligates me to the other man?" (Levinas Levinas, "The Name of God According to a Few Talmudic Texts," 124). To express God's name, what matters is the Other; when I address the Other – even someone lowly – I address God. "As the stranger passes, so too does God" (Large, "The Name of God," 331). Therefore, I would strongly agree with Large's implication that "the word 'God' names for Levinas is the ethical responsibility for the Other. It does not name a being with certain properties or attributes, nor an idea necessary for human freedom" (ibid. 332). The terms stranger, meek, humble and hostage are used a number of times by Levinas. On the crucial role of and encounter with the stranger, see particularly R. Bernet, "The Encounter with the Stranger: Two Interpretations of the Vulnerability of the Skin," in Bloechl (ed.), *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God*, 43-61; R. Bernasconi, "The Alterity of the Stranger and the Experience of the Alien," in Bloechl (ed.) *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God*, 62-62-89.

110 E. Levinas, "Secularism and the Thought of Israel," trans. N. Poller. in *Unforeseen History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004) 113; idem, *Otherwise Than Being*, 11-14.

111 It is worth noting that Levinas was a great admirer of Plato's philosophy, expressing his gratitude for how he had developed the history of philosophy, theology and ethics by saying that "Philosophy is Platonic." (Levinas *Alterity and Transcendence*, ix).

112 See comments on Plato in Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 23.

> capable of seeking Him or hearing Him from afar, having experienced separation and atheism.
>
> (Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 15-16)

Levinas shares with Plato and Kant a distrust of any religious experience for the sake of the uniting of transcendence. For Levinas, reconciling the sacred with the holy is a ridiculous endeavor, as the former relates to ritual concepts and the latter to transcendence. According to the analytic thinker Durkheim, the sacred is a "catchword meant to capture the totality of religious experience."[113] In parallel, another analytic thinker, Bataille, contends that "everything leads us to the conclusion that in essence the sacramental quality of primitive sacrifices is analogous to the comparable element in contemporary religions."[114] Levinas reproves both of these scholars by promoting a more ethical intuition. He explains, as a Jewish thinker,[115] that Judaism "consists in understanding this holiness of God in a [different] sense [than analytic thinkers] that stands in sharp contrast to the numinous meaning of this term, as it appears in the primitive religions wherein the moderns have often wished to see the source of all religion."[116] In ordinary speech, according to Levinas and Buber,[117] the meaning of sacred is imbued with power and cosmic

113 J. Caruana, "'Not Ethics, Not Ethics Alone, but the Holy': Levinas on Ethics and Holiness," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 34.4 (2006): 563.

114 G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. M. Dalwood, (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1962), 22.

115 It is worth noting that Levinas never proclaimed himself as a Jewish theologian, but rather a thinker who comes from a Judaic and Talmudic angle, where his texts run parallel with his philosophical (not religious) works. Scholars such as S. Rosenberg, S. Wygoda, C. Chalier and D. Banon have revealed the importance of Levinas's thought for the understanding of Judaism today. Concerning the contribution of the above thinkers as regards Levinas's Jewish thought throughout his works, see E. Meir, "Hellenic and Jewish in Levinas' Writings," *Veritas* 51.2 (2006): 79-88.

116 E. Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. S. Hand (Baltimore: Athlone Press and John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 14.

117 A comprehensive article on Buber and Levinas is R. Bernasconi's "'Failure of Communication' as a Surplus: Dialogue and Lack of Dialogue between Buber and Levinas," in Bernasconi and Wood (eds.), *The Provocation of Levinas*, 100-135. It is obvious that Levinas disagrees with Buber's enthusiastic intention to imbue reciprocity to the I-Thou relation. Levinas intends to link heteronomy and transcendence, claiming that the autonomous is primarily linked to ontology, isolating the subject to itself absorbing otherness and the face of the other is being subordinated to Hegelian totalization. See Levinas, *Of God who Comes to*

religious experience, something that God does not welcome.[118] It is only with sanctification as holiness that religion can find genuine expression. Rational individuation must be transformed into moral separateness through the holiness which can only be found in ethics. Levinas hence insists on the transformation of the sacred through an ethical perspective into holiness or sanctification:

> The numinous or the sacred envelops and transports man beyond his powers and wishes. ...The numinous annuls the links between persons by making beings participate, albeit ecstatically, in a drama not brought about willingly by them, an order in which they lose themselves.
>
> (Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 14)

Levinas thus tries to argue that what matters is not a ritual sacred experience, which is merely an action in the world, but rather an ethical holiness which h exceeds ontological practices. On the one hand, holiness for Levinas is the only way to access (genuine) religion. On the other hand, the sacred consists of "a seething subjective mass of forces, passions and imaginings."[119] Once the sacred rite separates the finite self from the divine, there is no possibility for the self to be called from the other as she loses her identity. This dissolution affects the relationship between the 'me' and the other and thus the ego/being returns into itself.

What we need, in Levinas's eyes, is a massive return to desacralization through ethics. For Levinas, the ethical character of the holy is the nonrational surplus that emerges not from ontological practices but from anarchy. Holiness and ethics stem from the same anarchic source.[120] As Levinas points out, "To say of God that he is the God of the poor, the God of justice, involves a claim not on his

Mind, 150: "[...] in Buber, the I-Thou relationship is frequently also described as the pure face-to-face of the encounter, as a harmonious co-presence as an eye to eye [...] In this extreme formalization the Relation empties itself of its 'heteronomy' and of its transcendence of association [...] There would be an inequality, a dissymmetry, in the Relation, contrary to the reciprocity upon which Buber insists, no doubt in error".

118 M. Buber, "Dialogue," in *Between Man and Man*, trans. R.G. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 15.

119 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 102.

120 Caruana, "'Not Ethics, Not Ethics Alone, but the Holy': Levinas on Ethics and Holiness," 569.

attributes but on his essence."[121] Here Levinas means that the sacred is connected to attributes of God while the holy relates to His essence. In other words, it is holy that is transcendent and not the sacred. As Levinas states, on the basis of the Torah, we can assume that the sacred is equal to idolatry where, in contrast, holiness represents "the absolute opposite to idolatry".[122] For Levinas, idolatry has increased not because of the intervention of other gods, but because of moral indifference, as well as worship of the being itself. This is the reason that monotheism is so strictly observed in Judaism, because God in the Old Testament "does not give Himself over to human fantasies."[123]

From the Old Testament, however, we also learn that people become moral objects, not through their response and obedience to God's commandments, but by violating them. Man became a moral being after eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge and began to distinguish good from evil. Since then, he began imitating God and wanted to become the master of human fate. Levinas blames both Christianity and paganism for one and the same sin of idolatry. As paganism created its gods according to the norms of the time and began to pray to the forces of nature as gods, so Christianity created an image of God to befit human representations and began to pray in front of icons that replaced God or the Absolute Other. While in Christianity, man is the image and likeness of God and prayers begin with 'my God', the Hebrew God retains his position of exteriority – God is the Absolute Other, God is Transcendence that even could not be named. Levinas insisted that Transcendence could not be contained within the ideas of it, nor could it be embodied. For Levinas, true monotheism is not compatible with my belief in myths or with idolatry. [124]

Does holiness affect us in our contact with the divine? In short, is holiness a channel in between the human and God? The answer,

121 Levinas, "Secularism and the Thought of Israel," 116.
122 Idem, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, 58.
123 Idem, *Difficult Freedom*, 102.
124 Dimitrova, *Sociality and Justice*, 79.

according to Levinas, comes through negation[125] – neither/nor.[126] Levinas states that "the infinite who orders me is neither a cause acting straight on, nor a theme, already dominated, if only retrospectively, by freedom."[127] He adds that "this detour is the enigma[128] of a trace we have called *illeity*."[129] Illeity is a term coined by Levinas to indicate a special symbolic allegory. It contains three different words or endings in one word: il (he), ille (she) and -ty (it, as an object). Levinas's use of this term aims at indicating "a way of concerning me (and not *I*) without entering into conjunction with me."[130] In my view, the neologism *illeity* constitutes a counter to the Buberian I-Thou dyadic scheme,[131] since, as Levinas says, "*illeity* lies outside the 'thou'

125 Negation for Levinas plays a decisive role in understanding the subjectivity of persons. Not as Hegel understands negation, that is, as power and totalization through the dialectic of Master and Slave, but as "total negation, which spans the infinity of that attempt and its impossibility – is the presence of the face. To be in relation with the other face to face – is to be unable to kill" (Levinas *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 10). This inability to deny the other, the incapacity to negate her "noumenal glory [...] makes the face-to-face situation possible. The face-to-face situation is thus an impossibility of denying, a negation of negation" (ibid., 34-35).

126 See D. Braine, "Negative Theology," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Taylor and Francis, viewed 15 October 2019).

127 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 12.

128 Levinas prefers the term *enigma* over than Kierkegaard's *silence*, to develop his argument regarding God's trace in the world. For Levinas, the interconnection between God and humans is an *enigma*, that is, God's trace which can be found only through the face of the other: "The semantics of the enigma breaks out of the order of autonomous thought, whereby the enigmatic as such becomes visible only as a trace – which means that it cannot be expressed by a direct representation of language (i.e., the sign or the signifier). The enigma is, according to Levinas, always older than, it is presupposed by, the intellectual cognition; but it cannot be reduced to a coherent system" (M.T. Mjaaland, *Autopsia: Self, Death and God after Kierkegaard and Derrida*, trans. B. McNeil [Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008], 127). Concerning Levinas's view on enigma as an ethical phenomenon, see Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, 1987, 61-73.

129 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 12.

130 Ibid., 12.

131 From my point of view, A.K. Min correctly points out that "the true Infinite is revealed and accessible only as *illeity*, neither as a [Buberian] *Thou* of unmediated dialogue nor as an [Husserlian horizon] object of thematization" (Min 2006: 102). Concerning the notion of Husserl's concept of horizon, see J. Mensch, "Life and Horizon", *Sophia Philosophical Review* XI.2 (2018), 7-18. Min borrows two phrases from Levinas's work *God, Death and Time:* that the true Infinite is revealed only as "a way of concerning me without entering into

and the thematization of objects."[132] Levinas goes on to say that "the *illeity* in the beyond-being is the fact that its coming toward me is a departure which lets me accomplish a movement toward a neighbor".[133] In parallel, Levinas contends that *illeity* "is excluded from being, but orders it in relation to a responsibility, in relation to its pure passivity, a pure 'susceptibility': an obligation to answer preceding any questioning which would recall a prior commitment, extending beyond any question, any problem and any representation, and where obedience precedes the order that has furtively infiltrated the soul that obeys."[134]

Ultimately, what is the connection between holiness and *illeity*? Levinas claims that "*illeity* overflows both cognition and the enigma through which the Infinite leaves a trace in cognition. Its distance from a theme, its reclusion, its holiness, is not its way to effect its being (since its past is anachronous and anarchic, leaving a trace which is not the trace of any presence), but is its glory, quite different from being and knowing."[135]

The call of the other is holy and dramatic. The drama of being can be overcome by holiness through the face of the other. Levinas tries to present a "battle" between me, the Other, and God outside ontotheology,[136] between an ontological drama and an eschatological

conjunction with me" (Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 285) or as "the non-phenomenality of the Other who affects me beyond representation, unbeknownst to me and like a thief" (ibid. 201). Thus, Min clearly separates his thesis from Husserl's Ontology. In parallel, contrary to Buber's *I-Thou*, Levinas stresses that "there is no initial equality [...] Ethical inequality: subordination to the other, original diacony: the first person accusative and not nominative" (H. Jodalen and J. Vetlesen [eds.], *Closeness: An Ethics* [Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997], 48, 52, n. 2). Another reproach that Levinas has against the Buberian I-Thou relationship is that it seems quite symmetrical and reciprocal; those two terms are unacceptable in Levinas's philosophical approach.

132 Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 12.

133 Ibid., 13.

134 Idem, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, 128.

135 Levinas, *God, Death and Time*, 183.

136 Levinas, as a Jewish thinker, derives several times from Talmudic aspects. Levinas underlines that "monotheism would thus be asserted in its absolute vigour without it being from the onto-theological perspective" (Levinas, *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, 164), but the essence of God (*En-Sof* in Talmudic writings, which means infinity, God) "is hidden away more than any secret, and no name must name it" [...] "not even the end of the smallest letter"

one, where both dramas can only be surpassed by an ethical 'intrigue' — not an ethical experience[137] — where holiness (as ethical sanctification) tries to escape from the ritual-cosmic sacred. In parallel, in order to understand the holiness of the other, we can say that it is not me who knocks on the door of the other human so he will open it to me; rather, the other already finds me prior to freedom and autonomy. The other's presence "hits me straight on with the straightest, shortest, and most direct movement".[138] In parallel, Levinas connects the prohibition of the sacred with the directness of the face of the other with its proximity.

> The comprehension of God taken as participation in his sacred life, an allegedly direct comprehension, is impossible, because participation is a denial of the divine and because nothing is more direct than the face to face, which is straightforwardness itself [....] There can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men.
>
> (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78)

> The straight line between me and the Other's uprightness forbids me to participate in the sacred; it sobers me.
>
> (Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, 94)

In conclusion, we can infer that holiness is an ethical tool for Levinas to shape his intuition about the indirect connection between humans and God and humans with the Other. In contrast to the materialistic experience of the sacred, holiness awakes the self, outside of the subject, in a process of ethical individuation. One of the most difficult things for the self is to achieve awareness of his holiness towards God and towards the Other. We come closer to meeting this challenge only through the progressive paradox of Ethics.

(ibid.). For Levinas only the "act of thinking of the Absolute which never reaches the Absolute is infinite and never-ending" (ibid.).

137 J. Caruana, "The Drama of Being: Levinas and the History of Philosophy," *Continental Philosophical Review* 40 (2007): 251-73.

138 Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, 95.

Is Asceticism a Necessary and Sufficient Condition in Levinasian Ethics?

In this paper I argue that the term "asceticism" in Levinas's thought differs from the use of the term in the Patristic and Thomistic traditions. While Aquinas and several orthodox Fathers of Eastern Christianity contend that asceticism begins and derives from a Man-God affirmation, Levinas raises severe objections to this approach. For Levinas, *kenosis*[139] has its starting point not with God's direct mediation between subjectivity and human beings, nor the Greek *μίμησις* (imitation), but with the movement towards dispossession. This movement is revealed in the Biblical kenotic approbation from me (in the accusative) to the Other, who appears as a trace of God before my freedom and my subjectivity.

For Levinas, we can speak of asceticism only regarding human affairs when a person, emptying herself for the sake of the other, sacrifices her inner narcissism in favor of the otherness which precedes freedom and autonomy.[140] Thus, we can infer that asceticism is necessary and sufficient condition if and only if it is focused on the face-to-face relation without absorbing otherness into itself.[141] As R. Cohen correctly states, "the only alterity sufficiently other to provoke response, to subject the subject to the subjection of response is the absolute alterity of the other person encountered in the excessive immediacy of the face-to-face".[142] In brief, asceticism is useless and empty of spiritual concreteness if it returns to the subject.

At the same time, Levinas rejects any conversation about asceticism and self-emptiness related to infinity and

139 Baird, "Whose *Kenosis*?," 423-37.

140 Levinas, in his work *Entre Nous*, chapter four, *A Man-God?*, 60, wonders: "How can I expect another to sacrifice himself for me without requiring the sacrifice of others? How can I admit his responsibility for me without immediately finding myself, through my condition as hostage, responsible for his responsibility itself. To be me is always to have one more responsibility."

141 Ibid., 58, in which he reminds us, through a Biblical verse (Jeremiah 22:16) that what matters, in approaching God, can be achieved only through the face of the Other: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy... Was not this to know me? saith the Lord." Ben-Pazi's view on forgiveness and reconciliation among human beings is quite connected to individuals' *kenosis* for the sake of the other. See H. Ben-Pazi, "Levinasian Thoughts on Witnessing: Forgiveness, Guilt, and Reconciliation," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 35.3 (2016): 345-58.

142 R.A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139.

Transcendence.[143] It is impossible, philosophically speaking, to develop or predict an "idea of a self-inflicted humiliation on the part of the Supreme Being, of a descent of the Creator to the level of the Creature; that is to say, an absorption of the most active activity into the most passive passivity".[144] Levinas also wonders whether God, who manifests Himself in the world through his covenant, can Himself become present in the time of the world? Levinas's answer is no, because time in God's essence is immemorial, and we can seek Him only through the face of the Other as a trace and proximity. Moreover, Levinas rejects divine ascetic onto-theology of Western tradition because "the Infinite cannot incarnate itself in a *Desirable*, cannot, being infinite, enclose itself in an end. It solicits through a face. A *Thou* is inserted between the *I* and the absolute He. It is not history's present that is the enigmatic interval of a humiliated and transcendent God, but the face of the Other."[145]

The meaning of ascetic *kenosis* in Levinas's thought, as opposed to onto-theological and Christological perspectives, can be grasped only if we construe Levinas's ethics from an anthropological angle. As R.D.N. van Riessen correctly contends, "as a Jewish thinker Levinas relates the *kenosis* of God and the self-emptying of the subject to each other without reference to the figure of Christ".[146] Similarly, A. Wells underlines that for Levinas a "non-immanental ethical interaction can occur without the Absolute Paradox (i.e., the God-man, Christ). One need not be Christian to recognize the Other's transcendence. Every Other, on Levinas's reading, is sufficiently enigmatic to force a break with immanence."[147]

143 In this case, Transcendence is God, an absent God, which has no direct involvement with human affairs. E. Meir, in his work "Hellenic and Jewish in Levinas's Writings," 83, states characteristically that "direct contact with Him is absent; the mediation of reasons and of a teaching, of the Torah, is required. In this way, a place is created for consciousness and knowledge. The idea of a God who does not forgive in place of the other man is parallel with the Cartesian idea of the infinite, much appreciated by Levinas. God is not powerful, but powerless, His *kenosis* is the humility of leaving His trace in the Other, without forcing man to respond."

144 Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 53.

145 Ibid., 58.

146 Van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis*, 174.

147 See A. Wells, "On Ethics and Christianity: Kierkegaard and Levinas," *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2012): 71. In addition, Wells continues his discussion about Levinas's exteriority of the subject by saying that "Levinas has shown that one does not need the Absolute Paradox (i.e., Christ) to establish ethical relations

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that asceticism begins with the ethical metaphysics of Otherness. On the one hand, Levinas agrees that humility is a starting point for decentering the subject, but he holds that what is crucial is to begin with the other and not with the self. In contrast, onto-theology, which derives from ancient Greek tradition, insists on consciousness and intentionality, that is, placing individualism prior to relationalism. Therefore, in analytic and continental philosophical traditions, as well as contemporary religious tradition, asceticism gives priority to consciousness as well as to the dominance of the subject, who reflects and apprehends its own validity through its esotericism. Thus, historicity of the subject as an enclosed-self unit echoes narcissism and its capability to comprehend the essence of God within the self alone.

Following Hegelian totality and Heideggerian manifestation of being *qua* being, subjectivity became cemented within an epistemological framework, which seems quite sufficient to proclaim itself absolute. In addition, Descartes's *cogito* has been considered as the culmination of cognitive dominance over metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics. On the other hand, post-Hegelian critique on the thinking subject influenced various analytic and continental thinkers across Europe. Postmodernity offers another view based on ethical metaphysics and intersubjectivity as well as on faith and religion. Emmanuel Levinas, for his part, introduced a new understanding of ethics, arguing that it is the Other who gives meaning to the ascetic self and not the opposite. Overcoming the notion of self-reflection of the thinking subject, Levinas proposed an alternative notion of subjectivity, claiming that what really matters is the moral responsibility for the Other. For Levinas, God commands me through the face of the Other, but it is my responsibility to understand and answer. I suggest that Levinas initiated a new dialectic on asceticism: an infinite intersubjective called by the Other as the trace of God.[148]

with others. Every Other, according to Levinas, is enough of an enigma, enough of a paradox, to force a break with immanence – i.e., every Other has the power to force the subject to relate to something outside itself" (ibid., 58).

148 R. Gibbs, in his monograph *Correlations in Levinas and Rosenzweig* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), chapter 4: "God speaks with Human Language," 92-100, analyzes the above argument, that is, that God's presence-in-the-world cannot be sustained or adopted in Levinasian Ethics, but can be seen, through the unseen, only as a trace, through human intervention as "the

Let us conclude with the words of R.D.N. van Riessen, who noted that to grasp Levinas's notion of ascetic *kenosis*, we need to recall Jewish tradition: "the concept of *kenosis* [in the Jewish tradition] sees God's absence as an event which is painful but at the same time creates space for human action."[149]

language of the meek, the orphan and the humble." This concept has been called by other scholars "Levinas's a-theism". They do not mean necessarily a lack of a Supreme Being outside universal norms, but mainly, as W. Large points out in his article "Atheism of the Word: Narrated Speech and the Origin of Language in Cohen, Rosenzweig and Levinas," *Religions* 9 (2018): 1, that "God is no longer interpreted as a being necessary to understand the existence of a rational universe; the monotheistic God is neither a being nor an idea, but the living reality of speech. What menaces the reality of God is not whether God exists, or is intelligible, but the externality of language without a subject."

149 See Van Riessen, *Man as a Place of God: Levinas' Hermeneutics of Kenosis*, 11.

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