Theology and Poetry

Studies in the Medieval Piyyut

JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI

Speaking of God

Few problems have been as perennial for both the believer in, and the critic of, religion as the linguistic problem involved in speaking to and of God. Not only is this problem of great concern to the modern philosopher of religion,[1] but it was already recognized in the Bible itself, when Ecclesiastes (5:1) warned: 'Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your heart be hasty to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few.'

If God is conceived as transcendent, that is, greater than the world and other than man, and if, in the nature of the case, man is limited to human speech, then speaking of God involves us in a twofold problem. On the one hand, if human language and discourse be burdened with the task of expressing something which, by definition, is ineffable and cannot be expressed, then the guardian of language and rational discourse may well conclude that the religionist is talking nonsense. This conclusion has, in fact, been reached by a number of modern linguistic philosophers—those approaching religion sympathetically insisting that they mean 'non-sense,' and not, pejoratively, 'nonsense.' On the other hand, from the religious believer's point of view, the application of mere human descriptive terms to the Deity borders, in its sheer inadequacy, on the blasphemous.

Thus, with some grammatical plausibility but doing violence to the context, a Rabbi in the Talmud can take the words of

Psalm 65:2, *lekha dumiyah tehillah* (commonly rendered as 'Praise befits You'), and understand them in the sense of 'For You, silence is praise.'[2] And, approaching the problem from a totally different angle, the modern linguistic philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, warns: 'Of what cannot be said, thereof one must be silent.'[3] Maimonides, in the twelfth century, endeavors to work out a 'negative theology,' one which would confine itself to saying what God is *not*, rather than what God really *is*. And the twentieth-century psychoanalyst and thinker, Erich Fromm, insists that, 'while it is not possible for man to make valid statements about the positive, about God, it is possible to make such statements about the negative, about idols.'[4]

All such conclusions and advice may be both philosophically and religiously sound. However, the fact remains that most people do feel constrained at times to speak to and of God; and, when they speak, they speak in human language—with all of its inadequacies. They do, of course, differ in the degree of their recognition of those inadequacies.

The Bible itself, in spite of the *caveat* voiced by Ecclesiastes, to which we have already referred, purports to tell us a great deal about God; and, in so doing, it, of necessity, uses the language of man. Man understands no other. This was already realized by the second-century Rabbi Ishmael, who taught: 'The Torah speaks in the language of men.'[5] But the Bible does more than speak in human language. It also does not shy away from investing God with human organs—such as a hand or an arm—and human emotions, such as love and anger.

How much of this was meant by the biblical writers to be taken literally, and how much of it was a conscious metaphorical use of language, is still a matter of scholarly debate. It stands to reason that, when the Bible tells us that God delivered Israel from Egypt 'with a strong hand and an outstretched arm' (Deuteronomy 26:8), we are not meant to infer that God possesses human organs. But what are we to make of 'the Lord God walking in the garden toward the cool of the day' in Genesis 3:8? There can be no doubt that, still within the biblical period itself, that verse was already understood in a metaphorical sense, if not already in

the sense of the later Midrash which connected the word 'walking' with 'the voice of the Lord God,' rather than with the Lord God Himself.[6] We may even grant that the editor who incorporated this verse—and the story in which it figures—into the Pentateuch understood it in a figurative, rather than in a literal, sense. But that still leaves unanswered the question about what was in the mind of him who originally told that story.

What we are dealing with is the problem of anthropomorphism, the representation of God under a human form or with human attributes and affections. Actually, there are two problems involved here. One is the theological justification, if any, for using anthropomorphic language in connection with God. That was one of the chief concerns of the medieval Jewish philosophers. The other has to do with the awareness of the problem itself on the part of the biblical and Rabbinic writers. It should be borne in mind, in this connection, that the Rabbis not only inherited the biblical anthropomorphisms, but that they also added many of their own. When, for example, the Song of Songs, in their interpretation, celebrates God's love for Israel, then all the descriptions of the young lover in that Song *ipso facto* become descriptions and attributes of God Himself.

Whatever modern scholarship may have to say about the literalist or metaphorical intentions of a given biblical writer, and whatever we may conclude about the biblical writers' awareness or lack of awareness of the 'problem' of anthropomorphism, it seems to be quite certain that the 'problem'—as seen by medieval philosophers and modern students—simply did not bother biblical man. Otherwise, we would find at least some indications of reflection and reluctance about this in the biblical text.

As far as the Rabbis are concerned, the question about their awareness of the 'problem' is far more complicated. We have already noted Rabbi Ishmael's recognition of the fact that 'the Torah speaks in the language of men.' Furthermore, many an utterance which strikes the modern reader as highly anthropomorphic is introduced, in the Rabbinic texts, by the word *kibheyakhol*, which means something like 'if one could possibly

say so.'[7] Moreover, in the *Targum*, the Aramaic paraphrase of the Scriptures, biblical statements to the effect that God did something or other are often, but not always, paraphrased to read that it was the *memra*, the Word of God, rather than God Himself, which engaged in that particular activity.

Yet the Rabbis were not unanimous in matters theological. They are, in fact, famous for the diversity of views which prevailed in their circles. It would, therefore, be futile to saddle *the* Rabbis with one particular attitude towards the problem of anthropomorphism, either for or against. That is why Arthur Marmorstein endeavored to show that there were actually two schools of thought among the Rabbis on the matter of anthropomorphism—one embarrassed by biblical passages of an anthropomorphic character, and, therefore, inclined to interpret them as metaphors, and one not so embarrassed, and, therefore, given to a more literalist interpretation. Marmorstein attributes the former position to Rabbi Ishmael and his disciples, and the latter position to Rabbi Akiba and his disciples. Akiba did not share Ishmael's axiom that the Torah speaks in the language of men.[8] Marmorstein's method and conclusions have, more recently, been followed by Abraham Joshua Heschel.[9]

But objections have been raised against the Marmorstein-Heschel approach as well as against the generally prevailing view that the *Targum* uses the figure of the 'Word of God' as a device to soften the anthropomorphism of biblical passages. As long ago as 1912, Joshua Abelson had argued that 'the view commonly taken that the *memra* is an expedient for avoiding the ascription of anthropomorphisms to the Deity, is only half the truth. As a matter of fact, the *Targum* is guilty of many anthropomorphisms.'[10]

Max Kadushin goes even much further than this. Arguing that the Rabbis and the philosophers simply do not inhabit the same universe of discourse, he insists that, for the Rabbis, the very problem of anthropomorphism did not exist. Value-concepts like God's love and His justice are, in any case, anthropomorphic or anthropopathic even as abstract concepts. Ascribing to the Rabbis any sort of stand on anthropomorphism is, according to Kadushin, a distortion of Rabbinic thought. 'When we employ

the terms of classical philosophy even in an attempt to clarify rabbinic ideas, we are no longer within the rabbinic universe of discourse. Rabbinic statements about God arise as a result of interests entirely different from those of philosophic thought, represent human experiences that have nothing to do with speculative ideas.'[11]

It is difficult not to agree with Kadushin about the different origins of Rabbinic statements about God, on the one hand, and of philosophic thought and speculative ideas, on the other. Still, one can also not rule out the likelihood that, here and there, some—though not all—Rabbis may have been confronted by the necessity of examining their religious heritage and personal beliefs from the vantage-point of speculative ideas. Such a necessity would certainly have arisen in the face of doctrinal challenges the occurrence of which, by the Rabbis' own testimony, was not altogether rare in their time. It is, moreover, difficult to see how the Rabbis could have avoided an awareness of the anthropomorphic problem in their dealing with the exegetical claims of prevalent Gnosticism and rising Christianity.

Be that as it may. On the whole, Kadushin's argument, that the problem of anthropomorphism belongs to the realm of philosophical speculation rather than to the daily religious preoccupations of the Rabbis, would seem to be valid. It is for this reason that the problem of anthropomorphism has loomed large whenever there has been a direct confrontation between the religious tradition of Israel and the philosophical tradition of Hellas. This was so in the large Greek-speaking Jewish community of Alexandria in Egypt; and we find the anthropomorphisms emphatically rejected and overcome through allegory by Philo of Alexandria (*ca.* 20 BCE–*ca.* 50 CE).[12] And that was so again when, after the rise of Islam, the Greek philosophical writings, in Arabic translation, became accessible to the Arabic-speaking Jews of the Mediterranean world. Here, the most outstanding Jewish thinker was, of course, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), whose preoccupation with, and rejection of, anthropomorphism was, without doubt, the most thorough-going of all. Indeed, in his introduction to the *Guide of the*

Perplexed, his philosophical *magnum opus,* Maimonides states explicitly:[13]

> The first purpose of this treatise is to explain the meanings of certain terms occurring in the books of prophecy. Some of these terms are equivocal; hence the ignorant attribute to them only one or some of the meanings in which the term in question is used. Others are derivative terms; hence they attribute to them only the original meaning from which the other meaning is derived. Others are amphibolous terms, so that at times they are believed to be univocal and at other times equivocal . . . This treatise also has a second purpose: namely, the explanation of very obscure parables occurring in the books of the prophets, but not explicitly identified there as such.

The various terms and parables which Maimonides set out to explain are those fraught with anthropomorphism.

Maimonides had his predecessors, both Muslim and Jewish. First among the latter was Saadya Gaon (882–942), who may be considered to have initiated the systematic presentation of Jewish theology in the middle ages. Saadya devoted the second chapter of his *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* to an exposition of the Unity of God. Stressing the absolute incorporeality of God, Saadya described the anthropomorphisms of the Bible as metaphors which must not be understood literally. As for the 'visions of God' reported by the biblical Prophets, Saadya argued that the Prophets did not see God Himself, but only the 'Glory' of God, which was itself *created* by God. This 'created Glory' (*kabhod nibhra*) Saadya identified with the *Shekhinah* (God's Presence) in Rabbinic literature. For Saadya, the sole function of that 'created Glory' was in revelation. It was not connected with the creation or the governance of the world.[14]

While, in his *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs,* Saadya made a distinction, in principle, between the 'created Glory' and the 'created Word,' he had combined the two into one inseparable whole in his earlier commentary on the mystical *Book of Creation* (*Sepher Yetzirah*).[15] Both that commentary and a paraphrase of the chapter on the Unity of God were to find their way to the Jews of Germany, where, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a mystical and pietistic movement came into being, known as the *Ḥasidé Ashkenaz,* i.e., the German Pietists.[16]

The German Pietists represented a rather unusual mixture of mysticism and rationalism. On the one hand, in their devotional life, their stress on the number of letters in the statutory prayers from which they allowed no deviation almost bordered on the magical.[17] On the other hand, their fight against assigning any corporeal attributes to the Deity paralleled that of Maimonides himself.[18] And yet, their speculative and liturgical creations are the repository of an abundance of anthropomorphisms!

This was accomplished by the use which the German Pietists made of the Saadya materials which circulated among them, as well as on the basis of some other philosophical influences.[19] They distinguished between the 'Hidden God,' to whom they referred as the 'Creator,' and of whom they denied all corporeal attributes, and the 'Revealing God,' whom they identified with Saadya's 'created Glory,' and about whom they considered it legitimate to speak in anthropomorphic terms.[20]

While, therefore, the Hidden God was, by definition, unknowable, and His existence could not be inferred even from the order of nature (but only from the super-natural miracles through which He manifested Himself),[21] the intense devotional life of the German Pietists concentrated on the 'Glory.' Indeed, they created what has been called a 'Glory theology.'

It is from the circles of the German Pietists that poem no. 2 has come down to us. The unabashed anthropomorphisms in which this poem wallows, and which have usually been toned down somewhat by previous translators into English, may shock the religious susceptibilities of the modern reader. What has to be borne in mind, however, is the fact that the German Pietists were obviously not addressing their hymn to a philosophical 'God concept,' such a concept being quite beyond anthropomorphic description even in their theological system, but to the God of religious experience, i.e., the 'Glory.' Here was the realization that, if one were to speak to and of God at all, one could not avoid the use of human language; and, once one had settled for the use of human language, it stood to reason that the more intense the religious experience, the more concrete that language tended to be.

Henry Slonimsky has reminded us that 'anthropomorphisms are the device of our intelligence to say mythologically what we are afraid or unable to say in bald abstract prose.'[22] Perhaps that is the reason why, in spite of the ultimate disappearance of the peculiar 'Glory theology,' with its Gnostic overtones, from the religious consciousness of the Jew, the Hymn of the Glory has maintained its honored place (sung as it is while the Holy Ark is open) in the liturgy of the Ashkenazi rite to this day.

<div dir="rtl">

שיר הכבוד

מאת ר׳ יהודה בן שמואל החסיד

1 אַנְעִים זְמִירוֹת וְשִׁירִים אֶאֱרֹג
כִּי אֵלֶיךָ נַפְשִׁי תַעֲרֹג:

2 נַפְשִׁי חָמְדָה בְּצֵל יָדֶךָ
לָדַעַת כָּל־רָז סוֹדֶךָ:

3 מִדֵּי דַבְּרִי בִּכְבוֹדֶךָ
הוֹמֶה לִבִּי אֶל דּוֹדֶיךָ:

4 עַל־כֵּן אֲדַבֵּר בְּךָ נִכְבָּדוֹת
וְשִׁמְךָ אֲכַבֵּד בְּשִׁירֵי יְדִידוֹת:

5 אֲסַפְּרָה כְבוֹדְךָ וְלֹא רְאִיתִיךָ
אֲדַמְּךָ אֲכַנְּךָ וְלֹא יְדַעְתִּיךָ:

6 בְּיַד נְבִיאֶיךָ בְּסוֹד עֲבָדֶיךָ
דִּמִּיתָ הֲדַר כְּבוֹד הוֹדֶךָ:

7 גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וּגְבוּרָתֶךָ
כִּנּוּ לְתֹקֶף פְּעֻלָּתֶךָ:

</div>

<div dir="rtl">

8 דִּמּוּ אוֹתְךָ וְלֹא כְּפִי יֶשְׁךָ
וַיְשַׁוּוּךָ לְפִי מַעֲשֶׂיךָ:

9 הִמְשִׁילוּךָ בְּרֹב חֶזְיוֹנוֹת
הִנְּךָ אֶחָד בְּכָל־דִּמְיוֹנוֹת:

10 וַיֶּחֱזוּ בְךָ זִקְנָה וּבַחֲרוּת
וּשְׂעַר רֹאשְׁךָ בְּשֵׂיבָה וְשַׁחֲרוּת:

11 זִקְנָה בְּיוֹם דִּין וּבַחֲרוּת בְּיוֹם קְרָב
כְּאִישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת יָדָיו לוֹ רָב:

12 חָבַשׁ כּוֹבַע יְשׁוּעָה בְּרֹאשׁוֹ
הוֹשִׁיעָה לּוֹ יְמִינוֹ וּזְרוֹעַ קָדְשׁוֹ:

13 טַלְלֵי אוֹרוֹת רֹאשׁוֹ נִמְלָא
וּקְוֻצּוֹתָיו רְסִיסֵי לָיְלָה:

14 יִתְפָּאֵר בִּי כִּי חָפֵץ בִּי
וְהוּא יִהְיֶה לִי לַעֲטֶרֶת צְבִי:

15 כֶּתֶם טָהוֹר פָּז דְּמוּת רֹאשׁוֹ
וְחַק עַל מֵצַח כְּבוֹד שֵׁם קָדְשׁוֹ:

16 לְחֵן וּלְכָבוֹד צְבִי תִפְאָרָה
אֻמָּתוֹ לוֹ עִטְּרָה עֲטָרָה:

17 מַחְלְפוֹת רֹאשׁוֹ כְּבִימֵי בְחֻרוֹת
קְוֻצּוֹתָיו תַּלְתַּלִּים שְׁחוֹרוֹת:

18 נְוֵה הַצֶּדֶק בֵּית תִּפְאַרְתּוֹ
יַעֲלֶה נָא עַל רֹאשׁ שִׂמְחָתוֹ:

</div>

19 סְגֻלָּתוֹ תְּהִי בְיָדוֹ עֲטֶרֶת
וּצְנִיף מְלוּכָה צְבִי תִפְאָרֶת:

20 עֲמוּסִים נְשָׂאָם עֲטֶרֶת עִנְּדָם
מֵאֲשֶׁר יָקְרוּ בְּעֵינָיו כִּבְּדָם:

21 פְּאֵרוֹ עָלַי וּפְאֵרִי עָלָיו
וְקָרוֹב אֵלַי בְּקָרְאִי אֵלָיו:

22 צַח וְאָדוֹם לִלְבוּשׁוֹ אָדֹם
פּוּרָה בְּדָרְכוֹ בְּבוֹאוֹ מֵאֱדוֹם:

23 קֶשֶׁר תְּפִלִּין הֶרְאָה לֶעָנָו
תְּמוּנַת יְיָ לְנֶגֶד עֵינָיו:

24 רוֹצֶה בְעַמּוֹ עֲנָוִים יְפָאֵר
יוֹשֵׁב תְּהִלּוֹת בָּם לְהִתְפָּאֵר:

25 רֹאשׁ דְּבָרְךָ אֱמֶת קוֹרֵא מֵרֹאשׁ דּוֹר וָדוֹר
עַם דּוֹרֶשְׁךָ דְּרוֹשׁ:

26 שִׁית הֲמוֹן שִׁירַי נָא עָלֶיךָ
וְרִנָּתִי תִּקְרַב אֵלֶיךָ:

27 תְּהִלָּתִי תְּהִי לְרֹאשְׁךָ עֲטֶרֶת
וּתְפִלָּתִי תִּכּוֹן קְטֹרֶת:

28 תִּיקַר שִׁירַת רָשׁ בְּעֵינֶיךָ
כַּשִּׁיר יוּשַׁר עַל קָרְבָּנֶיךָ:

29 בִּרְכָתִי תַעֲלֶה לְרֹאשׁ מַשְׁבִּיר
מְחוֹלֵל וּמוֹלִיד צַדִּיק כַּבִּיר:

30 וּבְבִרְכָתִי תְנַעֲנַע לִי רֹאשׁ
וְאוֹתָהּ קַח־לְךָ כִּבְשָׂמִים רֹאשׁ:

31 יֶעֱרַב נָא שִׂיחִי עָלֶיךָ
כִּי נַפְשִׁי תַעֲרֹג אֵלֶיךָ:

2 HYMN OF THE GLORY
by Judah ben Samuel Heḥasid

1 I sing sweet hymns and weave together songs,
Since but for You my panting soul still longs.

2 My soul desires to be under the shadow of Your hand
That it may of all Your secrets the meaning understand.

3 When of Your glory I but speak
My heart is stirred Your love to seek.

4 Thus while some weighty things of You I shall proclaim,
It is with songs of love that I honor Your name.

5 Your glory I shall tell, though I have never seen You.
I know not what You are, but image can describe You.

6 Through Your prophets and in Your servants' mystic speech
You let us a mere likeness of Your glory reach.

7 Your greatness and Your power, too, they named
But after Your works for which You are famed.

8 They visioned You not in Your absolute.
Your deeds alone vouchsafed them Your similitude.

9 In different visions their analogies came.
But, for all their similes, You remain the same.

10 They saw You ancient, and they saw You young.
As both white hair and black upon Your head was hung.

11 Old age in judgment, youth on a fighting day
When, as a warrior, His hands the battle sway.

12 Salvation's helmet on His head He wore;
   His right hand and His holy arm the victory Him bore.

13 His head replete with saving dew of light,
   His curls still wet with dewdrops of the night.

14 Glorified by me since He delights in me,
   A crown of beauty He'll ever be for me.

15 The image of His head appears like fine pure gold;
   Engraved upon His brow, His holy name is told.

16 For grace and glory, for splendor and renown
   His chosen people made for Him a crown.

17 His head of plaited hair like that of youthful time;
   His locks flow in black curls as they do in one's prime.

18 The place of justice, His Temple's glorious site,
   O may He set it above His chief delight.

19 A diadem in His hand His treasured folk shall be,
   Of beauty and of splendor a crown for royalty.

20 The people that were borne by Him, a crown for them He
      bound.
   He honored them, for in His sight so precious they were found.

21 His glory rests on me, my glory upon Him;
   And He is near to me when I call out to Him.

22 He is bright and ruddy, all red appears His dress,
   When He comes home from Edom, from treading the
      winepress.

23 The knot of the *tephillin* to Moses He has shown.
   The meek one had this vision as he stood there alone.

24 Delighting in His people, He glorifies the meek,
   Enthroned above their praises, His glory there to seek.

25 Truth is Your word's beginning, thence every age's call;
   The people for You questing, You, too, quest for them all!

26 My many songs, I pray, place on Yourself on high,
   And let my cry of joy approach You very nigh.

27 My praise shall be for You a crown upon Your head,
   And as the incense was of old, the prayer I have said.

28 As precious as in days of yore the song of priestly rite
   So may my own poor song appear as precious in Your sight.

29 My blessing, may it now ascend to God who all sustains,
   Creator, Father, Righteous One, Almighty He remains.

30 And, at my humble blessing, to me Your head incline,
   And grant it Your acceptance as though to spices fine.

31 O let this prayerful musing be sweet to You as songs,
   Since only for Your nearness my panting soul yet longs.

Commentary

The text of this poem may be found in *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, ed. Simeon Singer, 15th ed., London, 1935, pp. 78–80. Its listing in Davidson's *Thesaurus* is in vol. 1, p. 310, no. 6827. Its author is generally taken to be Rabbi Judah ben Samuel Heḥasid of Regensburg (*ca.* 1150–1217). See the sources quoted in S. Baer, ed., *Seder 'Abhodath Yisrael*, Berlin, 1937, p. 250; and cf. Abraham Berliner, *Der Einheitsgesang*, Berlin, 1910, p. 13. Elie Munk (*The World of Prayer*, vol. 2, New York, 1963, p. 60), among others, would attribute the poem to Judah's father, Samuel. He bases himself on stanza 28 where, in the word *rash*, he sees an abbreviation of Rabbi *Shemuel*. But this seems somewhat far-fetched, since the poet would hardly refer to himself by his honorific title while omitting his patronymic.

Stanzas 5 through 27 form a complete alphabetical acrostic. The poem has meter and rhyme, the latter being achieved by having the two stichoi of each stanza end with the same syllable.

Issachar Jacobson (*Nethibh Binah*, vol. 2, Tel-Aviv, 1968, pp. 262ff.) has pointed out that, while stanzas 1 through 10

address God in the second person, stanzas 11 through 24 refer to God in the third person, the rest of the poem, stanzas 25 through 31, reverting to the second person. Jacobson tries to explain this grammatical peculiarity by saying, on the basis of the 'Glory theology' of the German Pietists, that the stanzas in the second person are addressed to God Himself, while the stanzas in the third person speak about the 'Glory.' In this manner, according to Jacobson, the poet wanted to reduce the force of the anthropomorphisms. There is something suggestive about this view, since something seems obviously to be intended by the change from the second person to the third person, and back again to the second person. But it may be argued against Jacobson that, in the first place, given the general orientation of the German Pietists, the author of the poem would have felt no need to 'reduce' the force of the anthropomorphisms. Moreover, stanzas 10, 27, and 30 are hardly any less anthropomorphic in content and expression than stanzas 11 through 24.

1 *for You my panting soul still longs.* Based on Psalm 42:2, 'As the hart pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after You, O God.'

10-13 If the Song of Songs be understood as describing the love between God and Israel, and the Rabbis so understood it, then the qualities and attributes of the young lover in the Song of Songs must be regarded as the attributes of God. That would include such descriptions as the 'head filled with dew . . . locks with the drops of the night' (Song 5:2), and 'locks are curled, and black as a raven' (Song 5:10). On the other hand, the author of the Book of Daniel also purports to give an intimation of the Divine when he describes the 'Ancient of Days' as having hair 'like pure wool,' i.e., white (Daniel 7:9). The Rabbis, in such passages as *Mekhilta, Baḥodesh,* par. 5 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, pp. 219–20) and b. *Ḥagigah* 14a, insist that the descriptions of 'youth' and 'old age' refer to the same One God, and that this One God reveals Himself under different aspects, depending upon the circumstances. God waging Israel's battles conjures up the image of youth, whereas God functioning as a teaching elder, as at Sinai, or as a judge in Daniel's

vision, is seen under the aspect of old age. The poet here affirms both aspects of the Deity, following in the tradition of the Rabbinic passages mentioned.

12 *Salvation's helmet.* Cf. Isaiah 59:17.

His right hand, etc. A direct quotation from Psalm 98:1.

13 *saving dew of light.* Based on Isaiah 26:19—a very difficult verse linguistically. This much, however, is certain: that the verse links 'dew,' 'light,' and an eschatological Resurrection.

15 *like fine pure gold.* Cf. Song of Songs 5:11—again, part of the description of the young lover.

Engraved upon His brow. Gerald Friedlander (*Pirké de Rabbi Eliezer,* London, 1916, p. 22, n. 12) finds the source of that somewhat obscure statement in *Pirqé deRabbi Eliezer,* chapter 4, where God is described as wearing a crown on His head, 'and the Ineffable Name is upon His forehead.'

16 *His chosen people made for Him a crown.* The 'crown' which the poet has in mind is the 'crown' wrought out of Israel's prayers. Cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 21:4. The particular terminology here used by the poet is based upon a rather involved piece of Rabbinic exegesis found in *Pesiqta deRabh Kahana, pisqa* 1 (ed. Buber, pp. 4a, b). Commenting on the words, 'the crown wherewith his mother has crowned him' (Song of Songs 3:11), Rabbi Isaac said that there was no indication in the Bible that Bathsheba had made a crown for Solomon. Consequently, the verse cannot refer to Solomon and his mother, which—if Solomon stands for God—leaves the implication that the crown was made for God. But by whom? Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Rabbi Yosé, attempts to solve this difficulty by quoting an explanation he had heard from his father. It is based upon the defective spelling of *le-ummi* ('my nation') in Isaiah 51:4. The word can, therefore, be read as *le-immi* ('to my mother')—'mother' and 'nation' thus becoming identified. If, then, it be granted that the 'Solomon' of Song of Songs is God, it would follow from Song of Songs 3:11 that Israel, God's nation, had made a crown for Him. And that is the terminology here employed by the poet.

17 Cf. the commentary on stanzas 10–13.

18 *The place of justice.* Cf. Jeremiah 31:23, where the 'habitation

of righteousness' is in apposition to the 'mountain of holiness,' i.e., the Temple mount.

His Temple's glorious site. The current editions of the prayerbook read *tzebhi thiph-arto,* i.e., 'the beauty of His glory,' which, in this context, would in any case refer to the Temple. However, S. Baer (op. cit., p. 251) quotes an old printed edition which reads *beth tiph-arto,* i.e., 'the house of His glory,' which makes the reference to the Temple even more explicit. We have adopted that reading.

O may He set it. For the wording and the sentiment, see Psalm 137:6.

19 *A diadem in His hand.* Cf. Isaiah 62:3.

22 *He is bright and ruddy.* Cf. Song of Songs 5:10. The rest of this stanza uses the terminology of Isaiah 63:1–3, where God's vengeance against Edom, Israel's arch-enemy, is expressed in the imagery of God's treading the winepress of Edom.

23 *The knot of the* tephillin, *etc.* The Hebrew original does not mention Moses by name, but speaks of 'the meek one'. Cf. Numbers 12:3. The image itself is based on b. *Berakhoth* 7a. Commenting on Exodus 33:20–3 ('And He said: "You cannot see My face . . . And I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back . . ." '), R. Hama bar Bizana said in the name of R. Simeon Hasida: 'This teaches us that the Holy One, praised be He, showed Moses the knot of the phylacteries.' Since, on the same page of the Talmud, God is described as actually wearing phylacteries Himself, the reference to the 'knot of the *tephillin*' could almost be taken literally—once allowance for that kind of anthropomorphism is made. However, there was a tendency among the medieval commentators to soften the impact of that particular anthropomorphism by interpreting the 'knot of the *tephillin*' as the 'interrelatedness of all existing things ·and their dependence upon divine providence.' See Jacob Ibn Habib's commentary on his *'Eyn Ya'aqobh,* ad loc.

25 *Truth is Your word's beginning.* A quotation from Psalm 119:160.

26 *place on Yourself.* Since the prayers and the praises constitute the 'crown' (see stanzas 16 and 27), the poet's Hebrew, *shith* . . .

'alekha, can be rendered only in this way—although practically all modern translators shy away from this literalism.

28 *the song of priestly rite.* Literally: 'the song which was sung at Your sacrifices.'

my own poor song. Literally: 'the song of the poor man.' Munk's suggestion that *rash,* the Hebrew word for 'poor man,' is an abbreviation for 'Rabbi Samuel' (Judah Hehasid's father) has already been noted.

30 *to me Your head incline.* For the image of 'God inclining His head' as a sign of divine approval, see b. *Berakhoth* 7a.

31 *Since only for Your nearness, etc.* The identical Hebrew words from Psalm 42:2, though differently arranged, as in the second line of the first stanza. The poem thus ends as it begins with the mystical longing of the poet.