JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MUSLIMS
FROM THE ANCIENT TO THE MODERN WORLD

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MIRROR OF HIS BEAUTY

FEMININE IMAGES OF GOD FROM THE BIBLE TO THE EARLY KABBALAH

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nation has been integrated. Jewish Wisdom has lost, so to speak, her innocence. But contrary to widespread assumptions, gnostic Wisdom (at least in her early mythical form) does not "fall" down into the material world and does not become the "lower" counterimage of her spiritual "idea." This is left to the Christianized Valentinian branch of Gnosticism—and even there, according to Irenaeus's testimony, every effort has been made to spiritualize the lower Wisdom and to bring her back to her proper place in the spiritual world. Accordingly, it is Wisdom herself for whom the task of salvation had originally been reserved; only in the Valentinian Gnosis is this function absorbed by Christ, who deprives Wisdom of her salvific qualities. It would be much later in Judaism that Wisdom would return, fully invested with all of her powers, including the release of evil.

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THE RABBINIC SHEKHINAH

AFTER the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE, Rabbinic Judaism established itself as the form of "normative" Judaism that succeeded in defining the Jewish religion during the first six centuries of the common era and would influence the religious and cultural character of the Jews far beyond its heyday. It is named after the Rabbis who, as the leading figures of this period, left their mark in the vast literary corpus they created: Mishnah, Talmud (or rather Talmudim: the Jerusalem Talmud and the Talmud of Babylonia), Midrashim, and Targumim. In fact, with their enormous literary output, the Rabbis absorbed and simultaneously tried to suppress all of the other currents prevalent in the rich pre-Rabbinic Jewish tradition. Through their writings they determined what would and would not be deemed worthy of belonging to the Jewish heritage and of being transmitted to future generations. As we will see, their attempt was so successful that most, if not all, of the competing trends either disappeared or can be reconstructed only from the fragments left after their "digestion" by Rabbinic tradition.

WISDOM

The threads tied by biblical and extrabiblical Wisdom traditions, by Philo, and by the "gnostics" were cut, forgotten, or completely transformed. No doubt, Wisdom remained present among the Rabbis, but mainly in her manifestation in Jesus Sirach, with its emphasis on the Torah as the center of the world and of life. (The Rabbis liked Jesus Sirach so much that they elevated the book to a quasi-canonical status, even though it did not belong to the biblical canon.) In their perception, they alone embodied the classical ideal of Wisdom (*hokhmah*), and appropriately they called themselves *hakhamim*, "sages" (lit. "wise men"). The Torah had become Wisdom, and the Rabbis were her true guard-

ians; it was only through them and their interpretation that ordinary mortals could gain access to her.

What then happened to Wisdom, as the daughter, partner, and spouse of God in the process of creation? The Rabbis developed quite a variety of concepts concerning the comprehensibility and description of God in his different manifestations, and prominent among them is God the creator, in Rabbinic terminology *mi-she-'amar we-hayyah ha-'olam* ("He, who spoke and the world came into existence").[1] Within the context of God's creative activity, they were well aware of the Wisdom tradition starting with Proverbs 8. Yet the way they interpreted it followed precisely the line established by Jesus Sirach. For example, a famous homiletical Midrash relates the first verse of Genesis to Proverbs 8:30.[2] Addressing the exegetical enigma of Wisdom being God's *amon*, the Midrash first explores the whole range of semantic possibilities of the difficult word *amon*:

> "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1).[3] R. Oshaya commenced [his exposition thus]: "I was with Him as an *amon*, a source of delight every day" (Prov. 8:30).
>
> *Amon* means tutor;
> *amon* means covered;
> *amon* means hidden;
> and some say, *amon* means great.
>
> *Amon* is a tutor, as you read: "As an *omen* (male nurse/foster father) carries the sucking child" (Num. 11:12).
>
> *Amon* means covered, as you read: "*Ha-'emunim* (they that were clad; i.e., covered) in scarlet" (Lam. 4:5).
>
> *Amon* means hidden, as you read: "And he concealed (*omen*) Hadassah" (Esther 2:7).[4]
>
> *Amon* means great, as you read: "Are you any better than No-amon?" (Nah. 3:8) which is rendered: "Are you any better than Alexandria the Great, that is situated among the rivers?"[5]

None of these possible meanings of *amon* meets with the approval of our (anonymous) author. Rather he offers the following interpretation, illustrated by a parable:

> Another interpretation: *amon* is a workman (*uman*). The Torah declares: I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He. In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect (*uman*). The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, consulted the Torah[6] and created the world, while the Torah declares: "In the beginning (*be-reshit*) God created" (Gen. 1:1), and [the word] *reshit* refers here to the Torah, as you read [in the verse]: "The Lord created me as the beginning (*reshit*) of His way" (Prov. 8:22).

The final, and accepted, understanding of *amon* is "workman, craftsman, architect." Thus our Midrash follows one of the two possible readings that we discussed in the exegesis of Proverbs 8:30,[7] while implicitly rejecting the second one ("child"). Moreover, the Midrash presupposes Jesus Sirach's identification of Wisdom with Torah, since it is the Torah who speaks and who is the object of the parable. The Torah was at the same time God's architect and the building plan that God consulted when he created the world. Accordingly, the first verse of the Bible does not mean, "In the beginning God created," but rather "By means of *reshit*[8] (sc. the Torah) God created." The Torah was God's *amon*, his architect and building plan, through which God created the world. Whoever looks at the Torah thus sees the building plan of the world. It is through the Torah that God reveals the structure of the world—and himself as the Creator—to all human beings.

God the Only Creator

This is the gist of the Rabbinical concept of Wisdom: the personified Wisdom of previous tradition, the little child/daughter of God, is transformed into the *book* of the Torah that contains all of the possible meanings of creation. A plan, a book, was all that God used, and surely this plan/book was created by him.[9] When interpreting the first verses of Genesis, the Rabbis were at pains to refute the opinion that God, before he started his act of creation, had at his disposal certain "materials" that were already "available"—such as "*tohu*," "*bohu*," "darkness," and the like.[10] Even worse was the insinuation that God might not have been alone when he created heaven and earth: there might have been

other personal "gods" or "powers" at his disposal, who assisted him with the creation. The well-known argument that the Hebrew word for "God" in Genesis 1:1, *elohim*, is in the plural could easily be dismissed on philological grounds (for those who knew Hebrew). Despite the plural ending of *elohim*, the verse's subject, the appropriate verb *bara* ("he created"), is in the singular; hence, "*God* created heaven and earth," and not "*the gods* created heaven and earth."[11] Not everybody knew Hebrew and was convinced by philology, however. The idea that God had helpers or assistants during the process of creation appears to have been persistent and widespread, since the Rabbis must argue against it time and again. One classical answer is the following Midrash:

> When were the angels created? R. Yohanan said: They were created on the second day, as it is written: "Who sets the rafters of His lofts in the waters" (Ps. 104:3), followed by: "Who makes the spirits His angels" (ibid. 4).[12] R. Hanina said: They were created on the fifth day, for it is written: "And let fowl fly above the earth" (Gen. 1:20), and it is written: "And with two he would fly" (Isa. 6:2).[13]
>
> R. Luliani b. Tabri said in R. Isaac's name: Whether we accept the view of R. Hanina or that of R. Yohanan, all agree that none were created on the first day, lest you should say: Michael stretched [the universe] in the south and Gabriel in the north, while the Holy One, blessed be He, measured it in the middle, but: "I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by Myself (*me-'itti*)" (Isa. 44:24): *mi 'itti* ("who was with Me") is written:[14] who was associated with Me in the creation of the world?
>
> Ordinarily, a mortal king is honored in his realm and the great men of the realm are honored with him. Why? Because they bear the burden [of state] with him. The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is not so, because He alone created His world, He alone is glorified in His universe. R. Tanhuma quoted: "For You are great and perform wonders (Ps. 86:10). Why? Because: "You God are alone" (ibid.). You alone did create the world. Hence: "In the beginning *God* created" (Gen. 1:1).[15]

This Midrash makes it unquestionably clear that God is the one and only creator of the world. He had no helper, neither another god nor an angel. Indeed, the Midrash asserts that the angels themselves were created; the later the better. And no one was even present during the process of creation. The play on words *me-'itti/mi 'itti*, which depends on a minor shift in the vocalization, stresses that the angels not only did not participate in the creation, but were not even present when God created the world. Nobody was there; God was alone. There is no hint of another divine power, not even a subordinate divine power that could be interpreted as in any way restricting the omnipotence of God the creator. And there is certainly no hint of a female divine power, who witnessed God's creation or participated in it as his partner. God the creator was alone—and undoubtedly male. This has become the almost dogmatic foundation of Rabbinic Judaism.

Israel, God's Spouse, Daughter, Sister, and Mother

Yet this does not mean that the Rabbis completely eschewed female symbols and metaphors related to the divine world—on the contrary. One of the predominant feminine metaphors already in the Hebrew Bible is the image of Zion—the mountain, city, and Temple of God—as "daughter." Zion, as the holy city Jerusalem, is imagined as a (virgin) daughter who, for instance, despises her enemies[16] or is threatened with destruction by the prophets because she did not obey God.[17] There can be no doubt that this comparison is made on a purely metaphorical level, in no way implying any kind of kinship between God and Zion. This is all the more true for the image of Zion as "mother," which does not occur in the Bible but appears for the first time in the Septuagint[18] and later, with more frequency, in Rabbinic literature.[19] Here, Zion is the personified mother of Israel, who has been exiled because of their sins, and does not signify any particular relationship with God (except that he is the one who punishes her/them).

But the Rabbis like to play with metaphors, and sometimes it is difficult to decide how far they wish to go—in the degree of radicality of their metaphors as well as the degree to which these metaphors blur the line between image and reality. The following

midrash also refers to the mother of Israel, but suddenly establishes a relationship between God as father and Israel as mother:

> R. Hanina b. Papa said: Whoever enjoys this world without a benediction is like robbing the Holy One, blessed be He, and the community of Israel (*kenesset Yisra'el*), as it [Scripture] says: "He who robs his father and his mother and says: 'It is no offense,' is the companion of a destroyer" (Prov. 28:24).
>
> "His father" is none other but the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says: "Is not He your father who created you" (Deut. 32:6). And "his mother" is none other than the community of Israel (*kenesset Yisra'el*), as it says: "Hear, my son, the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother" (Prov. 1:8).[20]

God and the community of Israel are the father and mother of the one who transgresses their instruction, who robs them of that to which they are entitled. On the metaphorical level this comes quite close to the image of God and his spouse (the community of Israel) begetting the individual members of this community. Only on the metaphorical level, however, is the connection made and even there it is conspicuous that only the scriptural proof for God (father) uses the metaphor of procreation; the scriptural proof for the community of Israel (mother) refers to the obedience demanded by both, father and mother. Moreover, and more importantly, the text is not interested at all in pursuing the father/mother metaphor. The message that it wants to convey is that enjoying the world without the proper benediction is a transgression. It robs God as well as the community of Israel: God because he is entitled to benedictions (which is made abundantly clear by the name the Rabbis prefer, "the Holy One, blessed be He") and the community of Israel, not because its members deserve benedictions themselves, but because withholding a benediction from God means withholding God's blessing from Israel.

Another Midrash, explaining the biblical verse Canticles 3:11, plays with the metaphorical meaning of "daughter," "sister," and "mother":

> "[O maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze upon King Solomon,] upon the crown wherewith his mother has crowned him [on his wedding day]" (Cant. 3:11). R. Yohanan said: R. Simeon b. Yohai asked R. Eleazar b. R. Yose: Have you perhaps heard from your father what is the meaning of: "upon the crown wherewith his mother has crowned him" (ibid.)? He replied: Yes. How [did he explain it,] he asked. He said:
>
> By a parable of a king who had an only daughter of whom he was exceedingly fond, so that [at first] he called her "my daughter"; till not satisfied with that expression of his fondness he called her "my sister," and still not satisfied with that expression of his fondness he called her "my mother." So the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Israel exceedingly and called them "my daughter," as it says: "Hearken, O daughter, and consider" (Ps. 45:11); till not satisfied with that expression of his love he called them "sister," as it says: "Open to me, my sister, my love" (Cant. 5:2); and still not satisfied with that expression of his love he called them "my mother," as it says: "Hearken to Me, O My people, and give ear to Me, O My nation (*u-le'ummi*)" (Isa. 51:4)—but it is written *u-l'mi*.[21]
>
> R. Simeon b. Yohai rose and kissed him on his head, saying: Had I come only to hear this explanation from your mouth, it would have repaid me.[22]

The subject of this Midrash is God's abundant love for Israel, a well-known theme in Rabbinic literature. What is remarkable here is the designation of Israel as "daughter," "sister," and "mother"—in all three cases with clearly sexual overtones. The first biblical proof for the designation "daughter" (Ps. 45:11) occurs in the context of the royal wedding between a "king" and a Tyrian princess, here interpreted as the royal wedding of God and Israel. The same is true for the second biblical proof for "sister" (Cant. 5:2). That the "lover" in Canticum is God and his "love" (bride) Israel has become the standard interpretation in Rabbinic Judaism.[23] The real surprise is the third proof for "mother" (Isa. 51:4). The Midrash interprets a biblical text that speaks unequivocally of the people and nation of Israel, as "my mother" (again with a minor shift in the vocalization). Since there is a clear intensification from "daughter" to "sister" and, finally, "mother," the designation of Israel as God's mother represents the climax of his love for Israel. It serves also as the climax of the Midrash because it presents the link with the difficult verse Canticles 3:11, prompting R. Simeon b. Yohai's enthusiastic approval. In the light of this interpretation, Canticles 3:11 has to be understood as follows:

upon the crown wherewith his mother (i.e., Israel, God's mother) has crowned him. Israel, as the beloved daughter, sister, and mother of God, is represented in Solomon's crown, upon which the "daughters of Zion" are asked to gaze. Israel's traditional role as the daughter of God has been completely inverted; it has become God's companion (sister) and his mother. The logical consequence for God is even more disturbing: if Israel is the mother of God, he becomes Israel's child! Of course, the Rabbis were not particularly interested in overstretching logical consequences, at least not in haggadic matters. But the game they play here with metaphors expressing the love between God and Israel goes very far—although in the end they seem to keep the boundaries between metaphor and reality: the love is real, but the embodiment of love is metaphorical. It is certainly not by coincidence that precisely this Midrash has been taken up and explored further in the kabbalistic book Bahir.[24]

Shekhinah

Yet the Rabbinic use of feminine metaphors in the divine realm is not restricted to Israel in its capacity as God's spouse, daughter, sister, and mother. It is God himself for whom the Rabbis have created a term with a clearly feminine gender: Shekhinah. And here the question immediately arises whether or not the feminine gender of Shekhinah implies an allusion to God's female sexuality or rather, to be more cautious, a female aspect of God. The term is derived from the Hebrew root *shakhan*, "to dwell, reside, abide," and its literal meaning is God's "indwelling" or "presence" among the people of Israel at a certain place, particularly and probably originally in the Temple. (The term may have originated from a verse like Exodus 25:8: "And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell (*we-shakhanti*) among them.") Nevertheless, the term "Shekhinah" is distinctively Rabbinic, representing one of the most common designations for God in Rabbinic Judaism.[25]

Let us look now at some selected Midrashim from among the hundreds of texts in which the Shekhinah plays an important role. We will direct our attention particularly to the questions of the gender of the Shekhinah and of her relationship to God.[26]

Most of the relevant Midrashim refer to the triad God/Israel/Torah, and many of them belong to the literary genre of parables of a king. One prominent example:

> What is the meaning of "testimony"?[27] Said R. Simeon, son of R. Ishmael: It is a testimony to the whole world that there is forgiveness for Israel.[28] Another explanation: It is a testimony to the whole world that he [Moses] was appointed by God [to erect] the Tabernacle.
>
> R. Isaac said: It can be compared to a king who took a wife whom he loved very dearly. In the course of time he became angry with her and deserted her, and her neighbors taunted her, saying: He will no longer return to you. Subsequently, the king sent her a message: Prepare my palace and make the beds therein, for I am coming back to you on such-and-such a day; and when that day arrived, the king returned to her and became reconciled to her, entering her chamber and eating and drinking with her. Her neighbors at first would not believe all this; but when they scented the fragrant spices, they at once knew that the king had become reconciled to her.
>
> In like manner did God love Israel, bringing them before Mount Sinai, giving them the Torah, and calling them kings, as it says: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6), but after only forty days they sinned.[29] The heathen nations then said: God will no longer be reconciled to them, as it is said: "Men said among the nations: They shall no more sojourn here" (Lam. 4:15).[30] But as soon as Moses pleaded for mercy on their behalf, God forgave them, for it says: "And the Lord said: I have pardoned according to your word" (Num. 14:20). Moses then said: Master of the World! I personally am quite satisfied because you have forgiven Israel, but do please announce the fact to all the nations that you have no more resentment against Israel in your heart. The divine reply was: Upon your life, I will cause my Shekhinah to dwell in their midst, for it says: "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exod. 25:8). By this shall all nations know that I have forgiven them. This is why it says: "The Tabernacle of the Testimony" (Exod. 38:21), because the Tabernacle was a testimony to the Israelites that God had pardoned their sins.[31]

Again, it is Israel that is presented in metaphorical language as the king's (God's) spouse. The king loves his spouse, dismisses her (for reasons not mentioned in the parable), but later returns to her in his palace and installs her in her proper place. Accordingly, God loves Israel and gives them the Torah, but he withdraws when they sin. On Moses' intercession (which has no equivalent in the parable) he forgives Israel and, as a testimony for both the pagan nations and Israel itself, he has them build a Sanctuary as his dwelling place among them. Indeed, the fragrant spices that the neighbors smell from the palace of the king refer to the incense rising from the sanctuary. The parable and its interpretation are closely interrelated. And, as happens very often, not all of the elements are fully worked out in both parts (although in most cases they can be easily completed).

There can be no doubt that God, the king, is male and Israel, his spouse, is female. But whereas the parable uses quite explicit sexual imagery—the king disowns his spouse but returns not only to his palace but also to her bed, and the neighbors smell the fragrances of the loving wife expecting the return of her lover—its interpretation is devoid of sexual overtones. Rather, it expounds the *history* between God and Israel: God's love for and election of Israel, the giving of the Torah, Israel's sin with the Golden Calf, Moses' intercession, God's mercy, the building of the Sanctuary, God's dwelling in the Sanctuary, the fragrant smell of the sacrifices as a sign of reconciliation. In the parable's interpretation, nothing remains of the male/female imagery of the parable, of the marriage partnership between the king and his spouse.

This is not (and cannot be) changed by the introduction of the term "Shekhinah" into the text; in the parable, as well as in the interpretation, the feminine role is occupied by the king's spouse and the people of Israel, respectively. Despite her feminine gender, the Shekhinah is clearly equated with the same male God with no allusion to a female aspect whatsoever. The Shekhinah is identical with the one who speaks (in Exod. 25:8, emphasis added): "And let them make *Me* a sanctuary that *I* may dwell among them." God *is* the Shekhinah, and there is no essential difference between him and the Shekhinah. But is there any distinction? There remains the strange phrase: "I will cause My Shekhinah to dwell in their midst," which sounds as if God sends down something of

himself (part of himself?) to dwell in the Sanctuary among Israel. On the other hand, it is he himself who dwells amongs them and who has forgiven them, the same God. The conclusion seems to be unavoidable: As has been reinforced repeatedly by Arnold Goldberg, the Shekhinah is always identical with God,[32] but the term never designates the "undivided divinity," the very essence of God. Rather, it makes a distinction within God's mode of existence ("Daseinsweise") and refers primarily to his presence on earth, as distinct from his presence in heaven.[33] In other words, the concept of the Shekhinah presents a partial idea ("Teilvorstellung") of the divinity that, especially in parables and in poetical dramatization, tends towards a personification of this partial aspect.[34] Although this is certainly true for our midrash, we will have to look carefully whether or not it applies to the whole of Rabbinic Judaism.

The delicate, and momentous, distinction between God's presence in heaven and on earth is made the subject of the following Midrash:

> The Rabbis make a comparison with a king who gave his daughter in marriage to someone in another country. The people of his country said to him: Your majesty, it accords with your honor and it is only right that your daughter should be in the same country with you. He said to them: What does it matter to you? They replied: Perhaps later you will visit her and stay with her on account of your love for her. He then replied: I will give my daughter in marriage out of the country, but I will reside with you in this country.
>
> So when the Holy One, blessed be He, announced His intention of giving the Torah to Israel, the ministering angels said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of the Universe, "You are He whose (*asher*) majesty is over the heaven" (Ps. 8:2); it is Your happiness (*ishureka*),[35] Your majesty, and Your praise that the Torah should be in the heaven. He said to them: What does it matter to you? They said: Perhaps tomorrow You will cause Your Shekhinah to abide in the lower world. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, replied to them: I will give My Torah to the dwellers on earth, but I will abide with the celestial beings. I will give away My daughter with her marriage portion to another country in order that she may pride herself with her husband in her beauty and charm and

be honored as befits a king's daughter. But I will abide with you in the upper world. Who stated this clearly? Habakkuk, as it says: "His majesty (*hodo*) covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise (*tehillato*)" (Hab. 3:3).

R. Simeon said in the name of R. Yoshua b. Levi: Wherever God made His Torah to abide, there He made His Shekhinah to abide. Who stated this clearly? David, as it is written: "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted; His majesty (*hodo*) is on earth and in heaven" (Ps. 148:13)—first on earth and then in heaven.[36]

Here we have another example of female imagery related to God: God's daughter is identified with the Torah, which he is about to give to the daughter's husband, the people of Israel on earth. But this female imagery is not the major topic of the midrash. Rather, it is taken for granted—as is the fact that Israel can be God's spouse, as well as the husband of his daughter. The Midrash is mainly concerned with the question of whether God, whose primary and natural place is in heaven, can also be present on earth. This concern is put into the mouth of the angels who, according to the Rabbis, have a vital interest in God's residence among them and in heaven. This interest collides with the equally vital interest of the people of Israel: that God dwells among them as well and not only among the angels. The suspicious and envious angels[37] suspect (and rightly so, as we shall see) that God's act of giving the Torah to Israel will have the consequence of him following his beloved daughter/Torah to take residence among Israel. But God comforts and calms his angels with a verse from Habakkuk: it is only his praise (*tehillah*; i.e., his Torah) which is on earth; his majesty (*hod*) remains in heaven.[38]

In reality, however, God betrays his angels. The final dictum by R. Simeon in the name of R. Yoshua b. Levi clearly expresses the true opinion of the Rabbis: according to David, of course a more important prophet than Habakkuk, God's majesty (i.e., his presence) is not restricted to the realm of heaven but extends over the earth, as well. Moreover, and worse for the poor angels, in establishing the sequence "on earth and in heaven" David makes clear that God's primary and natural place is among human beings (specifically Israel) and not among the angels! God does in fact

follow his precious gift, his daughter/Torah, and takes residence among Israel; from now on heaven is only his second home.

Again, there can be no doubt that the Shekhinah is identical with God. More precisely, she is his "mode of existence" on earth and among Israel. The Rabbis do not question God's presence on earth; on the contrary, they regard it as superior to his presence in heaven and among the angels. Indeed, this has become one of the predominant characteristics of Rabbinic theology. Yet there is no trace, however hidden, of a female coloring to this concept of the Shekhinah.

The same is true for the many texts in which the Rabbis, following the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible,[39] speak of the "face," "mouth," "back," "feet," and "wings" of the Shekhinah.[40] These are the well-known biblical metaphors that do not amount to any literal, visual representation of God's body, let alone to any female representation. If there are at all hints of a divine body, this body is definitely male.[41] Instead of visualizing the Shekhinah in bodily form, the Rabbis prefer the biblical images of cloud, pillar of cloud and fire, or pillar of fire. It is the pillar of cloud going before the people of Israel during the day and the pillar of fire showing them the way at night[42] that have become the favored visual representations of the Shekhinah:

Aaron shall set them [the lamps] up in the Sanctuary outside the curtain of the testimony (Lev. 24:3). It is a testimony for all humankind that the Shekhinah is in Israel. But did they [Israel] need the light [of the lamps]? For the whole of the forty years that the Israelites travelled in the wilderness they did not need any lamp, as it is said: "For over the Tabernacle a cloud of the Lord rested by day, and fire would appear in it [the Tabernacle][43] by night, (in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys)" (Exod. 40:38). If this is so, why does it [the Bible] say "of the testimony" (Lev. 24:3)? It is a testimony for all humankind that the Shekhinah is in Israel.[44]

Why was the curtain in the Sanctuary called the "curtain of the testimony"? Because the lamps set up in front of the curtain were neither needed nor used as lights, but rather as witnesses: they testified to the presence of the Shekhinah at night in the Sanctuary. The Shekhinah is light, and her splendor illuminated the Sanctuary. The splendor of the Shekhinah is so overwhelming,

another midrash argues quite ironically, that it even blinds sun and moon: when they go out to illuminate the world they are blinded and cannot see anything. In order to help them God fires flashing arrows in front of them to show them their way.[45] The splendor of the Shekhinah even serves as nourishment: the angels do not need any ordinary food but are nourished on the splendor of the Shekhinah, and this is also the destiny that awaits the blissfully happy righteous in the world to come.[46]

The following Midrash, an interpretation of Exodus 2:4 ("And his [Moses'] sister [Miriam] stood afar off to know what was done to him") illustrates just how farfetched any notion of a female quality of the Shekhinah was for the Rabbis:

> And his sister stood afar off (Exod. 2:4). R. Isaac said: The whole of this verse is spoken with reference to the Shekhinah:[47]
>
> "And she stood" (*wa-tetatzev*),[48] as it is written: "And the Lord came and stood (*wa-yityatzev*) etc." (1 Sam. 3:10).
>
> "His sister" (*ahoto*), as it is written: "Say to wisdom, you are my sister (*ahoti*)" (Prov. 7:4).
>
> "Afar off" (*me-rahoq*), as it is written: "The Lord appeared from afar (*me-rahoq*) unto me" (Jer. 31:3).
>
> "To know" (*le-de'ah*), as it is written: "For the Lord is a God of knowledge (*de'ot*)" (1 Sam. 2:3).
>
> "What" (*mah*), as it is written: "What (*mah*) does the Lord demand of you?" (Deut. 10:12).
>
> "Done" (*ye'aseh*), as it is written: "Indeed, my Lord God does (*ya'aseh*) nothing [without having revealed His purpose to His servants the prophets]" (Amos 3:7).
>
> "To him" (*lo*), as it is written: "[So Gideon built there an altar to the Lord] and called it (*lo*)[49] 'Lord is peace'" (Jud. 6:24).[50]

The major statement of this Midrash is the proof that Miriam, Moses' sister, was a prophet because she foresaw what would happen to the infant Moses who was put into the basket on the Nile; namely that he would be saved and become the savior of Israel. Thus the reference to the Shekhinah or the Holy Spirit; the presence of the Shekhinah makes the gift of the Holy Spirit (i.e., the Spirit of Prophecy) possible. The proof is that every single word of Exodus 2:4, which speaks of Miriam, is related to another biblical verse that contains the same term but refers to God. The key verse for this purpose of the Midrash, of course, is Amos 3:7, since it emphasizes the importance of prophecy.

This line of argument is fairly routine. For our purposes, what makes the Midrash interesting is the fact that its subject is the prophetess Miriam, whose female gender might occasion a female counterpart in the prooftexts referring to God. But, of course, the counterpart is the same male God—the Lord or the Lord God, as he is called in all but one of the verses. This again presents definite proof that the Shekhinah is perceived as identical with the one and male God. Yet there is the one exception: "sister" (*ahot*) in Exodus 2:4 and Proverbs 7:4. Proverbs 7:4 is a brilliant prooftext because it relates Miriam, Moses' "sister," to the divine Wisdom, who is the "sister" of all human beings. Just as Wisdom in the biblical prooftext is clearly perceived as female, so also the only logical conclusion seems to be that, among the many manifestations of God, one takes on female form (and this conclusion suggests itself all the more if one considers the biblical and postbiblical Wisdom tradition). But this is precisely *not* what happens. In hiding Wisdom in a sequence of verses that all speak of the Lord God, the author of our Midrash makes it absolutely clear that he does not even ponder the notion of a female aspect of God. Presumably, he could not find another biblical verse that mentions "sister" together with a designation for "God." Hence he takes the risk of equating "God" with "Wisdom"—without making the necessary next step and speculating about the nature of "Wisdom."[51] Our Midrash contains a distant echo of the older Wisdom tradition, but it only reinforces the conclusion that the Rabbis have moved far away from it.

Personification of the Shekhinah

The Rabbis clung to the uniform and standardized masculinity of their God and did not succumb to the "danger" of opening up again to the potentialities inherent in the text of their Bible. But

what about the other "danger" connected with the concept of the Shekhinah, the danger of separating between "God" and "his Shekhinah"? We have already noticed a certain tension between the Shekhinah as being identical with God and simultaneously distinct from him, in so far as the term signifies God's presence on earth, as distinct from his primary place in heaven. The more acute and intense this tension becomes the more difficult it is to maintain the identity, rather than give way to a tendency that aims at turning the Shekhinah into an entity distinct from God. And this is precisely what happens, albeit slowly, becoming apparent only in later midrashic texts (at least in the concurrent opinion of scholars like Goldberg[52] and Scholem[53]). Let us look at some of the relevant texts. The earliest text discussed in this connection is the brief dictum by R. Meir in the Mishnah, with parallels in the Babylonian Talmud:

> R. Meir said: When a man suffers,[54] to what expression does the Shekhinah give utterance? As it were (*kivyakhol*), my head is heavy, my arm is heavy![55] If God (*ha-maqom*) is so grieved over the blood of the wicked that is shed, how much more so over the blood of the righteous.[56]

This is clearly an anthropomorphic personification of the Shekhinah. But nothing indicates that the Shekhinah is conceived as an entity distinct from God; the Shekhinah is God, *ha-maqom* (lit. "the place"), a common Rabbinic designation for the omnipresent God. Neither are anthropomorphic descriptions of God unusual (in either biblical or Rabbinic literature), nor is it exceptional that God is depicted as sharing the human feeling of suffering.[57] That some important and early manuscripts of the Mishnah lack the word "Shekhinah" and instead simply read "When a man suffers, what does the tongue [of God] say?" is no proof to the contrary;[58] it merely shows that some scribes disliked anthropomorphic expressions of God. Precisely for this reason, "Shekhinah" is most likely the correct reading.

A similar case of dramatic personification, which according to Goldberg falls under the category of "poetic personification,"[59] is the following Midrash. It refers to the so-called ten stages of ascent (*ma'alot*) of the Shekhinah when she left the first Temple after its destruction:

> R. Aha said: This may be likened to a king who left his palace in anger. After going out, he came back and embraced and kissed the walls of the palace and its pillars, weeping and exclaiming, "Peace upon you, house of my palace, peace upon you, house of my kingship, peace upon you, house of my Glory! Peace upon you, from now onward let there be peace!" Similarly when the Shekhinah went forth from the Temple, she returned and embraced and kissed the walls and pillars of the Temple, wept and said, "Peace upon you, house of my Temple, peace upon you, house of my kingship, peace upon you, house of my Glory! Peace upon you, (from now onward let there be peace!").[60]

This is a "bold personification,"[61] indeed, but clearly of the same God who is identical with his Shekhinah: God, when he leaves his Sanctuary, is in a distressed state because he is giving up his presence among the people of Israel on earth. And, again, there is no hint of any female personification of God. Rather, the Shekhinah is characteristically compared to the king, an unambiguously male figure.

Quite different, however, is the following Midrash:

> Another interpretation: "See a man skilled at his work (—he shall attend upon kings)" (Prov. 22:29). When the Sanhedrin sought to include him [Solomon] among the three kings and four commoners [who are denied a place in the world to come],[62] the Shekhinah stood up before the Holy, praised be He, and said to Him: Master of both worlds, have You ever seen anyone as diligent in doing Your work?[63] And yet they wish to count him among those consigned to [eternal] darkness! At that moment a heavenly voice came forth, saying to them: "He shall attend upon kings; he shall not attend upon those consigned to [eternal] darkness" (Prov. 22:29).[64]

The Sanhedrin wanted to count Solomon among those to be condemned in the world to come, presumably because of his immoral behavior and because he was regarded as the author of the book of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) with its cynical attitudes.[65] Thanks to the intervention of the Shekhinah, who reminds the members of the Sanhedrin of his diligent building of the Temple, Solomon is saved and counted among those having a share in the world to

come. In depicting the Shekhinah as standing up before God and speaking to him, the Midrash goes very far in its dramatic and bold personification. As a matter of fact, it draws a clear distinction between God and his Shekhinah: the Shekhinah has become a "persona" different and distinct from God—although still with no female features. The problem, however, is that we have another version of this Midrash in the Babylonian Talmud that omits the Shekhinah and reads quite differently:

> Rab Judah said in Rab's name: They [the Sanhedrin] wished to include another one [Solomon], but an apparition of his father's image [David] came and threw itself down [in supplication] before them, which, however, they disregarded. A heavenly fire descended and its flames licked their seats, yet they still disregarded it. Whereupon a heavenly voice came forth and said to them: "See a man skilled at his work—he shall attend upon kings; he shall not attend upon those consigned to [eternal] darkness" (Prov. 22:29).[66]

Here, it is not the Shekhinah who stands up before God, but the image of David, Solomon's father, which throws itself down before the members of the Sanhedrin. Unlike the version in Midrash Mishle, the Sanhedrin must be forced to comply with the decision of the heavenly voice.[67] Hence this version amends the offensive idea of the Shekhinah and God facing one another in a dialogue; the image of David substitutes for the Shekhinah, and the problem is solved. Or is it the other way around? Might the Bavli version retain the original, earlier text that was later turned into the Midrash Mishle version, with its bold substitution of the Shekhinah for the image of David? This is the opinion of Scholem, who simply asserts the dependence of Midrash Mishle on the Bavli: "Indeed, we can see how the talmudic statement was transposed from its originally innocent context to that of the *Shekhinah*."[68] This is possible, in particular if one considers the presumably late date of the final compilation of Midrash Mishle (ninth century,[69] as opposed to the Bavli's final redaction in the seventh century), although, of course, the date of the final compilation of a given Rabbinic work is by no means decisive for the date of a certain tradition or literary unit within that respective work. And one can quite reasonably argue for the priority of the Midrash Mishle version.

Indeed, the talmudic version, with the *image* of David interven-

ing and throwing itself down before the members of the Sanhedrin, is not as "innocent" as Scholem maintains. It may well be that the Shekhinah defending Solomon before God represents the original version, which was changed into the image of David when the scene was transferred from the heavenly court to the court of the Sanhedrin on earth. Not only could the Shekhinah not prostrate herself before the Sanhedrin, as has been observed by Goldberg,[70] but the emphasis in the earthly scene is put on the Sanhedrin's (the Rabbis')[71] independence of the heavenly voice (a point that has nothing to do with Solomon's fate and could easily be a later elaboration of the original story). Whichever version can claim priority, we nevertheless have here an unambiguous example within Rabbinic literature of a clear distinction between the Shekhinah and God, which goes beyond mere poetic personification. Moreover, there can be no doubt that we are dealing with a later evolution in the process of the formation of the idea of the Shekhinah—whatever this "later" means in terms of time (certainly at the end of the classical Rabbinic period, if not later; that is, not before the seventh century).

There are some more examples of this separation between God and his Shekhinah that Goldberg tends to view as text corruptions. In one version of the discussion between God and his angels about God's appropriate place—in heaven or on earth—God says to the angels: "Upon your life, the Shekhinah, she is with me (*etzli hi'*), as it is said: '(His majesty covereth the heavens,) and the earth is full of His praise' (Hab. 3:3)."[72] Here again the Shekhinah seems to become independent, an entity separate from God, and one may well doubt whether this is only because the text is "unreliable."[73] In the above quotation from Midrash Ekha Rabba, we saw how the distressed Shekhinah leaves the Temple immediately before its destruction.

Another Midrash is more complicated. It explains—with *kivyakhol* ("as it were"), the usual caution when expressing some unexpected opinion—that God in heaven joined Israel on earth in their weeping for the destruction of the Temple: "As it were, there is weeping before me[74] because I have deserted my Shekhinah."[75] This strange phrase "because I have deserted my Shekhinah" can either be a corruption (Goldberg asks as rhetorically as emphatically, "How could God desert his Shekhinah?")[76] or another example of the "drifting apart" of God and his She-

khinah: in giving up his presence on earth God has not just left the earth but rather, *kivyakhol*, has abandoned his Shekhinah, who perhaps even remains on earth. This is a far-reaching conclusion, but by no means inconceivable.

The following Midrash, also from Pesiqta Rabbati, seems to play with the terms "Glory" and "Shekhinah," both substitutes for God himself—or more:

> Another comment: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem" (Ps. 137:5). When Israel went into exile, the Shekhinah went into exile along with them. The ministering angels said to him [God]: Master of the universe, Your Glory (*kevodkha*) instead of You/in place of You (*bimqomkha*)—don't despise Your Shekhinah! The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Were not certain things stipulated between Me and Israel? I stipulated with their fathers that at the time they were well off I would be with them, and if they were not well off My Glory (*kevodi*) would be with them, as it is said: "I will be with him in trouble" (Ps. 91:15).[77]

This is another common topic: God, equated with the Shekhinah, follows Israel into exile wherever they go, and he will return with them to Jerusalem at the end of days.[78] The protest of the angels against God's suffering and exile with Israel is also routine; their envy of Israel is proverbial. What is unusual here, however, and difficult, is the strange phrase that translates literally as: "Your Glory (is?) instead of You (or: in place of You)—don't despise your Shekhinah!" Braude translates "[L]et the glory of Thy presence remain in its proper place. Demean not Thy presence." This smoothing translation resorts to the traditional interpretation: the Glory of thy presence (i.e., the Glory of your Shekhinah) shall remain in its (the Glory's, the Shekhinah's) proper place, which is in heaven. The Shekhinah must not stay with Israel in exile! But unfortunately the Hebrew text neither reads "the Glory of your Shekhinah" nor "in its proper place," but rather precisely as translated above.[79] Taken seriously this strange phrase means: your Glory/Shekhinah[80] is on earth instead of you. If you leave her on earth, together with the exiled people of Israel (i.e., outside the land of Israel and outside the Temple), you despise and humiliate her; you must let her return to you in heaven. Needless to say, this presupposes a distinction between God and his Shekhinah. The Shekhinah has become God's deputy on earth, acting

on his behalf. Goldberg again doubts the reliability of the textual tradition and ponders the possibility that the author of our midrash simply wanted to say "your Shekhinah, that is you,"[81] but this again only smoothes away the textual problem.

The more radical interpretation can be readily supported by a literal reading of God's answer to the angels: when Israel is doing well, I (God) am with them, but when they are not, my Glory (the Shekhinah) is with them. Here we have the same distinction between God and his Shekhinah. When Israel is in their land, God is present among them in his Temple; when Israel is in exile, it is "only" his Shekhinah who is with them. But there remains a certain ambiguity that cannot be resolved. The prooftext that God's Glory is with Israel (instead of God himself) has again the divine "I": "I will be with him in trouble"; that is, I am my Glory/Shekhinah, I am identical with her. Thus it appears that the author of our Midrash deliberately plays with the possibility of distinguishing between God and the Shekhinah, but simultaneously tries (or rather pretends) to maintain the identity. In doing so, he clearly moves forward toward a decisive distinction.

This final step is taken in an unquestionably late Midrash, Seder Eliyyahu Rabba, which includes God, together with his people Israel, in the process of redemption:

> Nay more, of him who acts justly, [gives] charity, and thus preserves many lives, Scripture says: "He has redeemed My soul through peace" (Ps. 55:19). When such acts are performed, the Holy One, blessed be He, says: Who is the man who redeems Me and My Shekhinah (*oti u-shekhinati*) and Israel from among the worshippers of idols?[82] It is the man exercising justice and giving charity.[83]

The notion that God is redeemed, together with Israel, from exile is a direct consequence of the idea that the Shekhinah stays with Israel even in exile. It is not uncommon in Rabbinic literature, although the Rabbis were aware that it could be regarded as offensive.[84] But what is extremely uncommon is the clear threefold distinction between God, his Shekhinah, and Israel. In fact, this is the only case in Rabbinic literature where God speaks of himself *and* his Shekhinah.[85] Yet we have another version of the difficult phrase, again in the Babylonian Talmud, which reads: "The Holy One, blessed be He, says: If a man occupies himself with the

study of the Torah and with works of charity and prays with the congregation, I account it to him as if he had redeemed Me, Me and My children, from among the nations of the world."[86] This reading is much smoother, and its implications fall completely within the confines of the traditional concept. In this particular case, I am inclined to see the Bavli version as the earlier and the Seder Eliyyahu Rabba version as the later stage of development, not only because of the late date of Seder Eliyyahu Rabba but also (and primarily) because of the clear-cut distinction, "Me and My Shekhinah." A similar phrase can be found only in the very late Midrash compilation Bereshit Rabbati by R. Moshe ha-Darshan of Narbonne (first half of the eleventh century),[87] which states that when God saw the horrible deeds of the generation of the Flood, "He withdrew Himself and His Shekhinah (*'atzmo u-shekhinato*) from among them" and ascended to heaven.[88] The unquestionably earlier versions of this text in *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*, as well as in the Third Book of Enoch, both have the much more "innocent" rendering: "I withdrew my Shekhinah from among them"—clearly avoiding the offensive doubling of God and his Shekhinah.[89]

Finally a few remarks on the Targumim, the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible. The Targumim are well-known for their various circumlocutions for the name of God, among which are the "Memra" (the Word of God), the "Iqar/a" (the Glory of God, the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *kavod*), and the "Shekhinah" or the "Glory of the Shekhinah." Several of these designations are commonly combined, as in the Targum to Deuteronomy 31:3–8, one of the examples quoted by Scholem.[90] Scholem was intrigued by the translation of verse 3, which reads in Hebrew: "The Lord, your God, He will go over [the Jordan] before you." In the Targum Jonathan to the Torah (the so-called Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) this is translated (emphasis added): "The Lord, your God, *and* His Shekhinah go before you," suggesting a pronounced distinction between God and the Shekhinah. As Scholem also observes, however, this distinction is not kept as clearly in the following verses. In verse 6, the Hebrew, "For the Lord, your God, it is He who goes with you," is translated: "For the Lord, your God, His Shekhinah leads before you." Similarly in verse 8, "And the Lord, it is He who goes before you," is rendered in the Targum as: "And the Word of the Lord, His Shekhinah, leads before you."[91] Here the Word of God and his Shekhinah are equated, but both are identical with God. This speaks in favor, pace Scholem, of not taking the distinctive "and" in verse 3 too literally, although more research considering all of the evidence, including the respective targumic manuscripts, is necessary in order to get a decisive picture. Nevertheless, a look at the other known versions of the targumic tradition on Deuteronomy 31:3–8 corroborates this preliminary result. Targum Onkelos reads "the Lord, your God, His Word" (v. 3), just "the Lord, your God" (v. 6), and "the Lord, it is he who leads before you" (v. 8), with no further addition. And the so-called Codex Neofiti, the earliest Palestinian Targum, renders "the Lord, your God, the Glory of whose Shekhinah leads before you" (vv. 3, 6) and "the Word of God, the Glory of whose Shekhinah is leading before you" (v. 8), combining "Word," "Glory," and "Shekhinah," and making very clear—through the complicated relative clause *de*—that all of these designations are attributes of God and not, by any means, distinct entities.[92]

But still, Scholem is correct to argue that the wealth of targumic circumlocutions for God can be an easy temptation to understand these various designations as different ("hypostatized") divine entities. That this indeed happened can be proven from the very late midrash compilation Midrash ha-Gadol, dated by most scholars to the thirteenth century[93] (although, again, this particular tradition may be earlier).[94] The Midrash refers to a targumic translation of Exodus 24:10, which is preserved in the so-called Fragment Targum. Here the biblical verse ("And they saw the God of Israel") is rendered "And they saw the Glory of the Shekhinah (*iqar shekhinteh*) of the God of Israel"[95]—quite a common combination, as we have seen. But the unknown author of the following comment did take offense at this translation:

> R. Eliezer said: Whoever translates a verse [from the Hebrew Bible] literally is a liar, and whoever adds to it commits blasphemy. For instance, one who translates [the Hebrew verse Exod. 24:10 literally into Aramaic] "And they saw the God of Israel" is a liar, for the Holy One, blessed be He, sees but is not seen. Yet one who translates [the same Hebrew verse into] "And they saw the Glory of the Shekhinah of the God of Israel" commits blasphemy, for he makes here three (a Trinity): the Glory, the Shekhinah, and God![96]

Whatever the precise date of this polemic is, it certainly does not derive from R. Eliezer (b. Hyrkanos), a Rabbi from the second generation of the Tannaim (ca. 90–130 CE). A parallel in the Babylonian Talmud ascribes its origin to R. Judah (the Patriarch?): "R. Judah said: Whoever translates a verse literally is a liar, and whoever adds to it commits blasphemy"[97]—thus making clear that the verdict against too literal as well as too free translations is Rabbinic and that the concrete example is from a later, most probably post-Rabbinic, period. This provides definite proof that the Aramaic Bible translations did serve as evidence for a division between God and some other subordinate, but nevertheless divine, entities. That our author evidently polemicizes against a possible trinitarian understanding of the Aramaic Bible translation does not necessarily imply that his polemics are directed against Christians. On the contrary, they aim at Jews who, in his view, come dangerously close to the Christian attitude of dissolving the unity of the one and only God into a diversity of several Gods.

In conclusion, the classical concept of the Shekhinah represents an attempt to express God's presence among his people Israel on earth in one specific term. Originally the identity between "God" and the "Shekhinah" is maintained: God is his Shekhinah, and the Shekhinah is God. Yet in Rabbinic Judaism we do find a clear tendency toward a personification of the Shekhinah, at first in the form of a poetic dramatization with no particular theological consequences, but later taking the form of a separate entity next to God. The process of distinction begins within Rabbinic literature, albeit in a playful and ambiguous way, and comes to fuller force in the late Rabbinic and post-Rabbinic periods. At this stage, the question of theological "correctness" also arises. But at no point during the development of the concept of the Shekhinah can an inclination be observed to take seriously the feminine gender of the term "Shekhinah." Even when referring to the biblical Wisdom, the Midrash is at pains to ignore any possible female aspect. We do find female metaphors in Rabbinic literature, but these refer to Israel as God's "partner" rather than to the Shekhinah. The Shekhinah, whether identical with God or becoming increasingly distinct from him, remains male. Yet, the more distinct the Shekhinah becomes the greater the possibility that she gains (or rather regains) a female personality.

5

THE SHEKHINAH OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

THE MOST EXTREME STEP in distancing the Shekhinah from God was taken by the emerging Jewish philosophy of the early Middle Ages. Its representatives have been labeled "rationalistic," because one of their major concerns was to maintain—or rather restore—the integrity of the monotheistic and abstract concept of God. Much more than the Rabbis of the talmudic period they were worried about the blunt anthropomorphisms in the Bible, which crudely describe God in human form. They regarded these as a threat not only to God's otherness and uniqueness, inconceivable by human imagination, but also to his undivided unity—a threat that led, they feared, back into the horrors of polytheism, against which the Bible and the Rabbis both fought. They were at great pains to "cleanse" the Bible, and hence God, from all anthropomorphic tendencies and to restore what they believed was the original and pure form of Jewish monotheism.

To do so, they took up the Rabbinic concept of the Shekhinah and equated it with the biblical concept of the Glory of God (*kavod*), claiming that the Shekhinah and the Kavod respectively were not identical with God, but rather *created* entities or powers. The first assumption, the equation of the Shekhinah with the Kavod, has some historical precedent, since the Rabbis could easily use the term Shekhinah for the biblical Kavod. The second assumption, the assertion that the Shekhinah/Kavod was created by God, as a power distinct from God, clearly runs against both the Rabbinic and biblical tradition. We have seen that, in the classical talmudic literature, the Shekhinah is always identical with God and that only in the late talmudic and post-talmudic periods does a tendency emerge to distance the Shekhinah from God, giving her a personality of her own. But none of these later texts suggests that the Shekhinah is created. Although none of them takes the trouble either to define how precisely this divine

52. Compare also Isa. 45:21.

53. NHC II 14:12f. The "ninth heaven" seems to be the ninth from the bottom of the twelve aeons; that is, the fourth from the top: the place of "Reflection" or "Afterthought" (Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 39, n. 14c); but see La Porta, "Sophia-Mētēr," p. 200.

54. With the translation of *epinoia* by "Afterthought" I follow Layton; Waldstein and Wisse have "reflection" (see above notes 42 and 53).

55. Waldstein and Wisse have "him," and Layton has "it." Since "Afterthought/Reflection" belongs to the twelve aeons which originate from Barbelo, I have substituted "her" for "him/it."

56. Following Layton; Waldstein and Wisse have "it."

57. NHC II:20:9–28.

58. NHC II 10:18.

59. NHC II 23:20–25.

60. NHC II 4:32: *pronoia*, the realization of the invisible Spirit's thought (*ennoia*), translated by Waldstein and Wisse as "Providence."

61. See also La Porta, "Sophia-Mētēr," pp. 195ff.

62. Cf. Prov. 2:16–19; 5:1–23; 6:20–26.

63. La Porta, "Sophia-Mētēr," pp. 195–207.

64. See Michael A. Williams's response in the same volume, pp. 217–220.

65. La Porta, "Sophia-Mētēr," p. 201.

66. It may not be by coincidence that the poem is missing in the shorter version of the book.

67. Following Layton; Waldstein and Wisse have "wickedness."

68. NHC II 30:11–31:28.

69. See Chapter 7, n. 9, below.

70. NHC II 14:9–13.

71. As to Ialdabaoth in the Apocryphon of John, there is no compelling reason to identify him with the Platonic demiurge (Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, p. 15, n. 4), neither to argue in favor of his equation with the Jewish God as opposed to the First Principle. To be sure he calls himself a "jealous god" and boasts that there is no other god apart from him (NHC II 13:8f.), but this does not mean that there is an absolute caesura between him and the upper world. He is the source of evil but still, he also remains to be the son of Sophia. The Kabbalah will show that and how even evil can be integrated into the realm of the divinity.

72. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.1.1–1.8.5. I follow, with some variations, the translation by Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, pp. 281ff.

73. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.1.3.

74. Also called "First-Father" (*propatōr*) and "Deep" (*bythos*).

75. Also called "Grace" (*charis*) or "Silence" (*sigē*).

76. *Apeskēpse*, literally "was hurled from above."

77. The perfect "First-Father."

78. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.2.2.

79. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.2.4.

80. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.2.5.

81. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.4.2.

82. It is called the "midpoint"; that is, "above the demiurge but below or outside the fullness"; *Adversus Haereses*, 1.5.3.

83. *Adversus Haereses*, 1.7.1.

Chapter Four

1. On this designation of God, see Arthur Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, vol. 1, *The Names and Attributes of God*, London: Milford, Oxford University Press, 1927 (reprint New York: Ktav, 1968), p. 89.

2. Bereshit Rabba 1:1; all translations from Bereshit Rabba follow *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. H. Freedman, London: Soncino Press, 1939. On the interpretation of the Midrash, see, for example, Alexander Samely, "Between Scripture and its Rewording: Towards a Classification of Rabbinic Exegesis," *JJS* 42, 1991, pp. 39–67; Philip S. Alexander, "Pre-Emptive Exegesis: Genesis Rabbah's Reading of the Story of Creation," *JJS* 43, 1992, pp. 230–245.

3. This is the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1. As we will see, the Midrash understands the Hebrew text (*bereshit bara' elohim*) differently.

4. JPS translation: "He was foster father to Hadassah," but this comes close to Numbers 11:12. The Midrash probably understands the verse to mean that Mordecai concealed her from the public gaze.

5. This is the translation of the Aramaic Targum of Nahum 3:8 which renders "No-amon" by "Alexandria the Great."

6. Literally, "looked into the Torah."

7. See Chapter 1, p. 26, above.

8. *Be* in *be-reshit* can be temporal ("in the beginning") as well as instrumental ("by means of, through").

9. See the use of Proverbs 8:22 in the parable and other midrashim that make clear that the Torah was created before the creation of the world (e.g., Bereshit Rabba 1:4).

10. Bereshit Rabba 1:5. This interpretation presupposes the following reading of the first three verses of Genesis that is, following Rashi, the translation of the Jewish Publication Society: "(1) When God began to create heaven and earth—(2) the earth being unformed (*tohu*) and void (*bohu*), with darkness over the surface of the deep (*tehom*) and a wind from God sweeping over the water—(3) God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." According to this translation/interpretation the first "thing" God created is the light; what is mentioned in the parenthesis (*tohu*, *bohu*, darkness, and *tehom*) was already present

and therefore "available." The (or rather, most) Rabbis in Bereshit Rabba of course refute this interpretation.

11. Bereshit Rabba 1:7.

12. Psalms 104:3 refers to the firmament that was created on the second day (Gen. 1:6–8); since it is followed in Psalms 104:4 by the angels, this is taken as proof that the angels were created on the same day as the firmament.

13. All winged creatures were created on the fifth day (Gen. 1:20–23); since according to Isaiah 6:2 the angels have wings they must have been created on the fifth day, too.

14. The Midrash vocalizes *mi 'itti* instead of *me-'itti* in the Masoretic text.

15. Bereshit Rabba 1:3.

16. Isaiah 37:22; 2 Kings 19:21.

17. In particular in the Book of Lamentations (2:1,8,10,13,18; 4:22).

18. Septuagint Psalms 86:5.

19. Compare, for example, Pesikta Rabbati 26, ed. Friedmann, fol. 129a–132a; Targum Canticles 8:5.

20. b Berakhot 35b.

21. That is, defectively (without the *waw*), and therefore can be read as *u-le'immi* ("and to my mother").

22. Shir ha-Shirim Rabba 3,11:2; the translation follows *Midrash Rabbah: Song of Songs*, trans. Maurice Simon, London: Soncino Press, 1939, ^{3}1961.

23. See, for example, the Rabbinic interpretation of the Song of Songs in Shir ha-Shirim Rabba and in the Targum: devoid of any sexual implications, so characteristic of the biblical text, it expounds the *history* of God and the people of Israel.

24. See Chapter 6, p. 131, below.

25. The most comprehensive and unsurpassed evaluation of the concept of the Shekhinah is Arnold Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Schekhinah in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969. Unfortunately, the book has not been translated into English, and the English reader is still confined to the outdated monograph by Joshua Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature*, London: Macmillan, 1912 (reprint New York: Hermon Press, 1969).

26. Interestingly and characteristically enough, there is no discussion at all in Goldberg's book of the gender of the Shekhinah.

27. In the verse Exodus 38:21: "These are the records of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of the Testimony."

28. The Tabernacle was to serve as an atonement to Israel after having made the Golden Calf.

29. And made the Golden Calf.

30. The next verse in Lamentations reads: "The Lord's countenance has turned away from them."

31. Shemot Rabba 51:4 (see also Tanhuma Buber, *pequde* 2, p. 127); the translation follows *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*, trans. S.M. Lehrman, London: Soncino Press, 1939, ^{3}1961.

32. Goldberg speaks of the "Subjektsidentität von Schekhinah und Gottheit"; that is, of the identity of the subject of the Shekhinah and God (*Untersuchungen*, pp. 457f.; 534ff.).

33. Ibid., 534.

34. Ibid., 536.

35. A play of words with the root *'shr*.

36. Shir ha-Shirim Rabba 8:11.

37. On this topic, see my monograph *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen. Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1975.

38. This implies another dig at the angels: it is only human beings, not the angels, who can praise God properly!

39. For example, Exodus 33:20 (face); Numbers 12:8 (mouth and face); Exodus 33:23 (back and face); Psalms 17:8 (wings); Isaiah 66:1 (feet).

40. See the summary in Goldberg, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 463f.

41. Even the later, prekabbalistic *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations, that is, the descriptions of the measurement of the divine body and its limbs that follow the depiction of the lover in Canticles 5:10–16, leave no doubt that this is a male body. Cf. Peter Schäfer (with Margarete Schlüter and Hans Georg von Mutius), *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1981, §§ 695ff.; 948ff.

42. Exodus 13:21ff.

43. This is apparently how the midrash understand the verse. In the Bible, "in it" most likely refers to the cloud.

44. Sifra *emor* 17, p. 103d.

45. Wayyikra Rabba 31:9.

46. See the texts in Goldberg, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 281ff.

47. The parallels in y Sota and Shemot Rabba have "Holy Spirit" instead of "Shekhinah."

48. The interpretation follows the sequence of the Hebrew text.

49. Literally, "called to him/it."

50. b Sota 11a; y Sota 1:9; Shemot Rabba 1:22. The translation follows *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Nashim*, vol. 3, trans. Isidore Epstein, London: Soncino Press, 1936.

51. This is left to the English translator of our Midrash, who adds the note: "Wisdom is an emanation from God" (p. 52, n. 4). This is obviously a possibility to solve the problem, but most certainly not the one our Midrash would have chosen.

52. *Untersuchungen*, pp. 458, 462.

53. "Shekhinah," pp. 147–154.

54. Capital punishment.

55. Literally, "I am lighter than my head, I am lighter than my arm," a euphemistic expression for feeling grief and weakness.

56. m Sanhedrin 6:5; b Sanhedrin 46a/b; b Hagiga 15b.

57. See Peter Kuhn, *Gottes Trauer und Klage in der Rabbinischen Überlieferung*, Leiden: Brill, 1978.

58. Compare Scholem, "Shekhinah," p. 150.

59. *Untersuchungen*, p. 462.

60. Ekha Rabba, Pet. 25, ed. Buber, fol. 15a; Pesiqta deRav Kahana, 13:11, ed. Mandelbaum, p. 235. The translation follows *Midrash Rabbah: Lamentations*, trans. A. Cohen, London: Soncino Press, 1939, ^{3}1961.

61. Scholem, "Shekhinah," p. 150.

62. The three kings are Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh; the four commoners are Balaam, Doeg, Ahitophel, and Gehazi; compare m Sanhedrin 10:2.

63. Solomon was diligent in doing God's work because he built the Temple in seven years, although it took him thirteen years to build his own house: this is the interpretation immediately preceding our Midrash in Midrash Mishle.

64. Midrash Mishle 22, ed. Visotzky, p. 156. The translation follows *The Midrash on Proverbs*, trans. from the Hebrew with an introduction and annotations by Burton L. Visotzky, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 99f.

65. Cf. Wayyiqra Rabba 19:2 and Visotzky, *Midrash on Proverbs*, p. 145, n. 9.

66. b Sanhedrin 104b. The translation follows I. Epstein, ed., *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin*, London: Soncino Press, 1969.

67. This is in line with the Rabbinic attitude to the heavenly voice (*bat qol*): the Rabbis don't regard the decision of the heavenly voice as superior to their own decision. On the heavenly voice, see Peter Kuhn, *Offenbarungsstimmen im Antiken Judentum. Untersuchungen zur Bat Qol und verwandten Phänomenen*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1989.

68. Scholem, "Shekhinah," p. 152. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen*, p. 350, follows him somewhat hesitantly and ambiguously.

69. Visotzky, *Midrash on Proverbs*, p. 10.

70. *Untersuchungen*, p. 350. But even this could become possible, although much later. Scholem, "Shekhinah," p. 152, quotes the version transmitted by Judah he-Hasid of Regensburg (d. 1217): "The Shekhinah threw herself down before the Holy One blessed be He," which is clearly a secondary combination of the Midrash Mishle and Bavli Sanhedrin versions.

71. According to the Rabbinic view the Sanhedrin is controlled by Rabbis.

72. Midrash Tehillim 8:2, ed. Buber, p. 76.

73. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen*, p. 67.

74. This awkward circumlocution means that God wept.

75. Pesiqta Rabbati 29, ed. Friedmann, p. 136b.

76. *Untersuchungen*, p. 184, n. 1.

77. Pesiqta Rabbati 31, ed. Friedmann, p. 144b. The translation follows *Pesikta Rabbati*, trans. from the Hebrew by William G. Braude, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968, vol. 2, p. 609.

78. Compare Goldberg, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 160ff., 493ff.

79. Scholem, too, translates "Your Glory is in its place," ignoring the suffix *bimqomkha*. Of the two possible translations of *kevodkha bimqomkha* suggested by Goldberg (*Untersuchungen*, p. 165, n. 2), namely either "the Glory is like you" or "on behalf of you," I can follow only the second one. Israel Yuval draws my attention to b Bekhorot 30b (*kevod zaqen yehe munah bimqomo*), where *bimqomo* clearly means "in its [proper] place" (as Braude translates). The problem, however, remains that Pesiqta Rabbati reads *bimqomkha* and not *bimqomo* ("Your Glory shall remain in Your place"). Thus even if this translation is correct, the text suggests a distinction between God and his Glory/Shekhinah.

80. The equation of "Glory" (*kavod*) and "Shekhinah" is fairly routine in Rabbinic literature; compare Goldberg, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 468–470.

81. *Untersuchungen*, p. 166: "deine Schekhinah, das bis du."

82. My translation follows what I regard as the *lectio difficilior* in the printed edition; Friedmann's edition has: "Who redeems Him from the place of His Shekhinah, and redeems Israel from among the nations of the world," which doesn't make any sense. Braude and Kapstein in their translation (*Tanna debe Eliyyahu: The Lore of the School of Elijah*, trans. from the Hebrew by William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981, p. 162) try to combine both readings and arrive at the following hybrid version: "Who is the man who ransoms Me from whatever place of exile [My] presence abides in, and ransoms Israel from exile among the peoples of the world."

83. Seder Eliyyahu Rabba, ed. Jerusalem 1962–63, p. 129; ed. Friedmann, p. 53. The translation follows Braude and Kapstein, *Tanna debe Eliyyahu*, p. 162.

84. Compare, for example, Mekhilta deRabbi Yishmael, ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 51: God redeems himself, together with Israel, from exile and returns with them to Jerusalem. This "dangerous" idea is couched in the cautious formula *kivyakhol*, "as it were." See Goldberg, *Untersuchungen*, pp. 160ff.

85. Pace Scholem who declares: "God frequently speaks about the *Shekhinah*, but never to it; never does the expression 'I and My *Shekhinah*' appear" ("Shekhinah," p. 149). We have already seen that the first part of his assertion is incorrect (since at least the Shekhinah speaks to God), and we now see that the second part is also problematic—although, admittedly, this applies to later Midrashim only, and Scholem correctly distinguishes between what he calls "the ancient exoteric aggadah" and "later midrash."

86. b Berakhot 8a.

87. Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, München: C. H. Beck, ^{8}1992, p. 345.

88. Chanoch Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabbati ex libro R. Mosis Haddarshan collectus . . .*, Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim 1940, p. 27.

89. *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*, in: Shlomo A. Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot*, second ed. . . . by Abraham J. Wertheimer, vol. 2, Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, [2]1954, p. 351; Third Enoch, in: *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 72. On the date of *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva* and its relationship to the Hekhalot literature, see Stemberger, *Einleitung*, pp. 339f.

90. Scholem, "Shekhinah," p. 154.

91. Scholem, who was always extremely critical with regard to other scholars' knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic, falls into the typical lapse of confusing the Aramaic Pa'el *dabbar* ("to lead, guide") with the Hebrew Pi'el *dibber* ("to speak") and translates in both verses "speaks" instead of "leads."

92. Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan are translated from the text in the Biblia Rabbinica; Codex Neofiti is translated from the edition by Alejandro Díez Macho, *Neophyti 1. Targum Palestinense MS de la Bibliotheca Vaticana*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1978 (the translation follows Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Deuteronomy*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997).

93. Stemberger, *Einleitung*, p. 344.

94. Scholem, who quotes this tradition ("Shekhinah," p. 157), dates the passage itself to the "eighth to tenth century?".

95. Translated from the edition by Michael L. Klein, *The Fragment Targums of the Pentateuch According to their Extant Sources*, vol. 1, Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980, p. 87.

96. Midrash ha-Gadol Exodus 24:10, ed. Mordecai Margulies, Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, [2]1966, p. 555. The first to quote this Midrash was Solomon Schechter in his *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, London: Black, 1909, p. 40, n. 1.

97. b Qiddushin 49a.

Chapter Five

1. Literally, "the semblance (*demut*) in appearance (*mar'eh*) like a man."

2. JPS translation: "Presence."

3. Here I deviate from Rosenblatt's translation (see n. 8, below), which reads: "were all of them produced for the first time by the Creator out of fire." Rosenblatt unfortunately translates *zohar* sometimes by "fire" and sometimes by "light."

4. Or "more sublime," as Scholem translates in "Shekhinah," p. 154.

5. Scholem, ibid., translates: "more enormous in its creation, bearing splendor and light." Literally it means, "powerful in its creation being the splendor of light."

6. Here I follow the JPS translation rather than Rosenblatt's somehow awkward rendering.

7. Literally, "to hear the vision."

8. Saadia, *Emunot we-De'ot*, Chap. III, ed. Yosef D. Kafach, Jerusalem: Sura, 1970, pp. 103f.; translation Samuel Rosenblatt, *Saadia Gaon. The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, [4]1958, pp. 120f.

9. It is not clear whether *ha-moshav ha-nissa* actually refers to "firmament" (*raqia'*), as has been translated already by Yehuda ibn Tibbon.

10. See, for example, Bereshit Rabba 3:6.

11. See Chapter 4, pp. 91f., above.

12. Genesis 1:26.

13. *Emunot we-De'ot*, p. 104; translation Rosenblatt, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, p. 122.

14. Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History*, New York and London: New York University Press, 1987, p. 88.

15. Scholem has "in its primal existence," which is certainly correct, but does not follow the play on words with "beginning" and "end."

16. Salomon J. Halberstam, ed., Yehūda Ben-Barzillay, *Perush Sefer Yesīra*, Berlin: M'kize Nirdamim, 1885 (reprint Jerusalem: Maqor, 1970), pp. 16f.; partly translated in Scholem, "Shekhinah," p. 155.

17. See Peter Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung vom Heiligen Geist in der Rabbinischen Literatur*, München: Kösel-Verlag, 1972, p. 62: although never directly identified with God, the Holy Spirit is nevertheless the mode through which *God* reveals himself.

18. *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:9 (ed. Gruenwald 1:10, p. 144).

19. See Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 11ff.

20. In the translation by Judah ibn Tibbon: *Sefer ha-hokhahah weha-re'ayah le-hagganat ha-dat ha-bezuyah*.

21. The Hebrew word he uses for "intermediary" is *mitzua'*, from the root *matza'*, "to place in the middle."

22. *Kuzari*, IV:3.

23. *Kuzari*, ibid. The translation follows *Sefer ha-Kuzari. Book of Kuzari by Judah Hallevi*, trans. from the Arabic by Hartwig Hirschfeld, New York: Pardes, 1946, pp. 184f.

24. A play on words with *kavod* ("Glory") and *kevudah* in Judges 18:21 (the "retinue" or "household"). *Kuzari* IV:3; Hirschfeld, p. 186.

25. BerR 78:1.

26. See *Kuzari*, ibid.: "Some angels are only created for the time being from fine elementary substances, others are lasting angels, and are perhaps those spiritual beings of which the prophets speak. We have neither to refute nor to adopt their views."

27. *Kuzari*, ibid. (Hirschfeld, pp. 186f.).

28. This distinction between the prophet's and ordinary people's vision be-