

MOSHE IDEL

HERMENEUTICS IN HASIDISM

**Moshe Idel**

Department of Jewish Thought  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel.

**Abstract:** The present article argues that the Hasidic exegesis differs dramatically from most of the Kabbalistic schools that preceded it. Symbolic exegesis based upon the importance of a theosophical understanding of divinity was relegated to the margin. One major characteristic of the Hasidic masters is that they preferred binary types of oppositions that in their view shape the discourse of the sacred texts. They became much less interested in the Bible as a reflection of the inner and dynamic life of God, than in the understanding of the text as referring to the inner spiritual development of the mystic. From this point of view, Hasidism was closer to the metaphorical approach of the ecstatic brand of Kabbalah, which also emphasized the paramount importance of inner transformation. What is also characteristic of Hasidic exegesis is the monadization: a combination of the atomization of the biblical text, with both magical and mystical understandings of the verbal human activity related to ritual.

**Key Words:** monadization, Hermeneutics, Hasidic exegesis, The mystical implication, the Hasidic righteous

## From the Oral Community to Written Documents

Hasidism is a revivalist religious movement that started in the regions of Ukraine in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. A paramount popular movement based upon verbal communication, and basically dependent upon the vernacular, Yiddisch, no book authored by a Hasidic master has been printed or even written during the first generation of this movement. This is no doubt part of a preference of the oral contact over the written literature. Indeed in a later Hasidic legend, this oral propensity has been put in relief in connection with the founder of the movement R. Israel Ba`al Shem Tov, known by the acronym *ha-Besht*:

"There was a man who wrote down the Torah [=teaching] of the Besht that he heard from him. Once the Besht saw a demon walking and holding a book in his hand. He said to him: "What is the book that you hold in your hand?" He answered him: "This is the book that you have written." The Besht then understood that there was a person who was writing down his torah. He gathered all his followers and asked them: "Who among you is writing down my Torah?" The man admitted it and he brought the manuscript to the Besht. The Besht examined it and said: "There is not even a single word here that is mine"."<sup>1</sup>

However, since 1780, when the first Hasidic book was printed, numerous Hasidic books started to appear in print and through some decades, Hasidism generated a huge printed literature. Most of those books are sermons delivered in the vernacular but printed in Hebrew, following the pattern of commentaries on the pericopes of the Pentateuch. Hundreds and hundreds of collections of sermons have been published since 1780, imposing Hasidic literature as one of the most productive forms of Jewish creativity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, though elaborating on the oral teaching of the Besht, the formal focus of the literature are the verses of the Bible, radically reinterpreted. This transition from the centrality of oral preaching to printed texts has first to do with competition over the status of the different disciples of the Besht. Later on, it expresses the need of the Hasidic leader to display his knowledge not only to his immediate followers, but also in a more classical manner, by addressing a wider audience in Hebrew. Thereby he could compete with other seminal figures in earlier forms of Judaism, who also interpreted the Bible.

## Exegetical Grids in Hasidism

Hasidic exegesis differs dramatically from most of the Kabbalistic schools that preceded it. Symbolic exegesis based upon the importance of a theosophical understanding of divinity was relegated to the margin. This means that resort to the various nuances of Hebrew words of the Bible as reflecting the characteristics of the ten divine powers, the *sefirot*, or the Lurianic divine countenances, the *partzufin*, was greatly attenuated. In lieu of the tenfold structure, the Hasidic masters conspicuously preferred binary types of oppositions that in their view shape the discourse of the sacred texts: body versus soul, the righteous and the multitude, *gadelut*, grandeur involved in the spiritual state of the mystic, versus *qatenut*, smallness of the spiritual state, God versus nature, study of texts versus devotion, the world of speech versus the world of thought, etc. Often the Hasidic teachers imposed these types of binary relationship upon biblical and Talmudic material, emphasizing the moral and devotional aspects of religion, rather than the theological. By its anthropocentric emphasis, the Hasidic master became much less interested in the Bible as a reflection of the inner and dynamic life of God, than in the understanding of the text as referring to the inner spiritual development of the mystic. From this point of view, Hasidism was closer to the metaphorical approach of the ecstatic brand of Kabbalah, which also emphasized the paramount importance of inner transformation.<sup>2</sup>

## The Divinity within and between the Torah-Letters or Represented by Them

A major development in Jewish mysticism that culminated in Hasidism is the vision of the Torah-text as a direct, non-semantic representation of God. According to a teaching of the Great Maggid:

"He [God] blessed be He, concentrated Himself into the Torah; therefore, when someone speaks on issues of Torah or prayer, let him do it with all his power, since by it [i.e. the utterance] he united himself with Him, may He be blessed, since all his power is in the pronounced letter, and He, may He be blessed, dwells in the pronounced letter."<sup>3</sup>

The mystical implication of the divine presence within letters will be dealt with below. Here it is important to highlight the sharp formulation of the process of concentration of the divine within letters as part of a cosmogonic event. Moreover, the power mentioned here implies a certain proportion between the loudness of the sound and the amount of divine

presence that may enter such a linguistic container. On the other hand, elsewhere in his book he asserts that

"The Torah in its entirety is collected from [the deeds of] righteous men, from Adam, and the forefathers, and Moses, who caused the dwelling of the *Shekhinah* on their deeds, and this is the complete Torah. However, the luminosity of the essence has not been revealed yet, until the Messiah will come and they will understand the luminosity of His essence. And this is the new Torah that goes forth from me, whose meaning is 'From My essence'."<sup>4</sup>

The Great Maggid argues that the revealed Torah deals with human deeds, and their interaction with the divine. The forefather had been able to cause the descent of the divine presence here below. However, the divine essence in itself is not expounded in the Torah that recounts their deeds, perfect as it is. The luminosity, the new Torah and the divine essence are explicitly related to each other. It is not a new text that is revealed but the depths of the canonical document already in the possession of the Jews. The view that the white letters are the esoteric aspect of the revealed Torah, which consists of the black letters, is found in many earlier sources.

One of his followers, R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev, was reported to have said that

"We can see by the eye of our intellect why in the Torah handed down to us one letter should not touch the other. The matter is that also the whiteness constitutes letters but we do not know how to read them as [we know] the blackness of the letters. But in the future God, blessed be He, will reveal to us even the whiteness of the Torah. Namely we will [then] understand the white letter in our Torah, and this is the meaning of 'A new Torah will go forth from me' that it stands for the whiteness of the Torah, that all the sons of Israel will understand also the letters that are white in our Torah, which was delivered to Moses. But nowadays, the letters of whiteness are concealed from us. But in the song of the Sea, when it has been said 'This is my Lord, I shall praise Him' [Exodus 15:2] It is written in [the writings of] Isaac Luria that 'their soul had fled when they heard the song of the angels' and God had opened their ear to hear etc., and this is the reason why the maidservant had

seen on the sea [more than Ezekiel] - the whiteness of the letters she saw what has not been seen etc., because the matter has been concealed the advent of the Messiah."<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, according to a tradition found in the student of one of the main disciples of the Great Maggid, R. Shneur Zalman of Liady's follower R. Aharon ha-Levi of Staroselye, the 'new Torah' that has not been revealed at the time of creation, is revealed by the performance of the commandments and the study of the Torah in this world, and they will cause the revelation of the secrets of the acts of generation. This is quite a traditional view, that is, in principle, consonant to the Great Maggid's passage. In his own book R. Levi Isaac writes that

"It is known that the letters of the Torah have the aspect of inner lights which are revealed according to the order of the emanation of the worlds. And the boundary of the white that encompasses the letters possesses the aspect of the encompassing lights, which are not revealed but are found in a hiddenness, in the aspect of the encompassing light. From this we may understand that also the white boundaries possess also the aspect of letters but they are hidden letters, higher than the revealed letters ... because the aspect of the whiteness which is [identical with] the hidden letters is derived from the revelation of the aspect of the revealed letters and that is the meaning of what has been written:<sup>6</sup> 'The maidservant had seen on the [Red] Sea [more than what Ezekiel has seen]' because the revelation of the divinity was so great that even the maidservant was capable of understanding. This is the meaning of the verse 'A new Torah will go forth from me:' That in the future, when the revelation of the divinity and the Glory of God will be disclosed, and all men will see etc., it means that the revelation of the aspect of the encompassing and the revelation of the aspect of the whiteness, namely the white letters which encompass the revealed letters of the Torah, [will take place] this being the meaning of 'A new Torah will go forth from me'.<sup>7</sup>"<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly enough the theory of the existence of the white letters had an impact on some philosophies of text in recent decades.<sup>9</sup>

An immediate follower of R. Levi Isaac, insisted upon the light as divine presence within the Torah-letters:

"even now, when a righteous person pronounces the letters in a state of devotion... he unites the letters to the light of the Infinite... and ascends higher than all the worlds to the place where the letters are white and are not combined and then he can perform there whatever combination he wants."<sup>10</sup>

Much more graphic is the approach found in other Hasidic masters. R. Aharon Kohen of Apta, a late 18th century compiler of Hasidic traditions asserted that

"The name 'Eheyeh shows His divinity which emanated and caused the emergence of everything, in order to announce His divinity which is announced by 'Eheyeh. This is similar to someone who sees the form of the king, which is inscribed on a paper, and he very much enjoys seeing the form and its beauty. And whoever is [found in the state of] *qatenut ha-sekhel*, enjoys and delights in the inscribed form. But whoever has a wise heart says that because there is such a great joy which is derived from the inscribed form, I shall be more glad and I shall delight [more] from the light of the face of the king, namely when seeing the form of the king himself. Therewith he makes an effort to enter the palace of the king. Thus whoever is in [the state of] *qatenut ha-sekhel* is enjoying the study of the Torah or the prayer whose letters are the inscribed form of the king of the world... But whoever is [in the state of] *gadelut [ha-sekhel]* says that it is good to enjoy the light of the face of the king, namely he causes the adherence of his thought to the light of 'Ein Sof which is found within the letters, by directing [his thought] that in each letter there are three hundreds and ten worlds, souls and divinity, and man has to integrate his soul in each and every one of the aspects etc."<sup>11</sup>

## Atomization of the Text and the Monadization of the Letters/Sounds

What is also characteristic of Hasidic exegesis is a combination of the atomization of the biblical text, with both magical and mystical understandings of the verbal human activity related to ritual, which I propose to call monadization. Each of the individual letters of the biblical verses in their oral form were conceived not only as representing the divine as mentioned above but also as comprising the 'divinity, the souls and the worlds' altogether. This maximalist understanding of individual letters is based upon the importance of an intimate relationship of the performer of the verbal activity with the vocal aspects of the letters. According to Hasidic masters, the efficacy of the verbal performance is independent of the understanding of the performed text. Letters are conceived of as consisting of an external aspect, understood as palace or box, within which the luminous, vital, spiritual or even divine aspect is present. Thus, the semantic aspects of the text are reduced in favor of a mystical event: cleaving to the divinity found within the sounds related to the liturgical or biblical texts on the one hand, and overlaid by the magical aspects involved in the fact that a supernal power is imagined to be inherent within, or attracted by the Hasidic masters, within the pronounced letters. Following some earlier Kabbalistic views, found especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> century famous Kabbalist Moses Cordovero and his followers' theories, the semantic aspects of the classical texts are subordinated to the experiential moments. This approach is found already in R. Meir Harif Margoliot of Ostrog, a Rabbinic authority who may be the earliest and most widely quoted reported in the name of the founder of Hasidism, by one of his companions. The Besht is quoted to the effect that

"whoever prepares himself to study for its own sake, without any alien intention, as I was warned by my great teachers in matters of Torah and Hasidism, included [among them] being my friend, the Hasid and the Rabbi, who is the paragon of the generation, our teachers and Rabbi Israel the Besht, blessed be his memory, let his desirable intention concerning study for its own sake be to attach himself in holiness and purity to the letters, *in potentia* and *in actu*, in speech and in thought, [so that he will] link part of [his] [lower] soul, spirit, [higher] soul, *Hayah* and *Yehidah* to the holiness of the candle of the commandment and Torah, [to] the enlightening letters, which cause the emanation of the influx of lights and vitality, that are true and eternal."<sup>12</sup>

Here the interpretation of the text is conceived of as much less important than its vocal performance and the cleaving to the sounds.

The issue of manipulating the letters is a central theme in Hasidism, and includes some magical aspects, as we learn, for example, from an early 19<sup>th</sup> century figure, R. Aharon of Zhitomir:

“Sometimes, the letters rule over man, and sometimes man rules over the letters. This means that when man utters speeches with power and devotion, the speeches then rule over him, because the light within the letters confer upon him vitality and delight so that he may utter speeches to the Creator, but this man cannot abolish anything bad, by performing other combinations [of letters]. But when someone utters speeches with devotion and brings all his power within the letters and cleaves to the light of the Infinite, blessed be He, that dwells within the letters, this person is higher than the letters and he combines letters as he likes... and he will be able to draw down the influx, the blessing and the good things.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the sacred text is conceived of as divine since the divinity is immanent within its letters, a phenomenon that can be described as “linguistic immanence”. The emphasis upon the role played by discrete linguistic units holds good also insofar as Hasidic interpretations were not interested in the larger context of a certain chapter, but refer more to single words or locutions found in a verse. Those units have been reified, by understanding the sounds produced by the worshiper as if being entities possessing some form of objective existence. This reification is evident in the most frequently recurring Hasidic pun, which comments upon the verse from Genesis 6:16, “A window shall you make to the ark [=teivah]” as if the last word points to “word” another meaning of the Hebrew *teivah*. According to many Hasidic commentators, it is a linguistic rather than architectural building that Noah was commanded to make, and to enter. Someone should enter the word within which the divinity is dwelling.

The maximalization of the divine power and presence within the letters/sounds constituting the canonical discourse diminishes the importance of the semantic valence of the text. If for the main Kabbalistic schools the assumption was that reference - namely the theosophical structure - is found outside the text, in Hasidism the divine is found either in the letters of the Bible, or between them, as we shall see below.

Following an older tradition the term *Teva`* - nature - is interpreted as pointing the divine name *'Elohim*, (as both amount in gematria to 86)<sup>14</sup>, when this external garment of reality is broken, someone may arrive at



the core, represented by the Tetragrammaton, which is related to the light of the face of God. Therefore, the immanence is understood to relate to the most revered divine name, the Tetragrammaton, while the external aspects of reality are designated by the name 'Elohim. The Tetragrammaton is related to the state of *Gadelut* while 'Elohim to that of *Qatenut*, all this in a context related to the hiding of the face of God and its shining. There is a form of affinity between the hiding of God, which means some form of retraction and withdrawal, and a form of divine *Qatenut*, understood as the condition of man's attaining *Gadelut*. We may discern a shift from the manner in which the two terms have been used in Lurianic material and Hasidism. This shift is not so much a matter of a conceptual change, as claimed neither it is a simple continuation of Lurianism in Hasidism, since only in the later type of thought do these two terms become part of a more comprehensive hermeneutical grid related to ritual performance. Simplifying the more complex theosophy of Luria, by disregarding for example the importance of the concept of 'Ibbur 'impregnation' that precedes *Qatenut*, Hasidic masters turned the two terms into a scheme that shapes the understanding of two main modes of worship. This is done in a manner that has no parallel in Lurianism, and it becomes an interpretive grid.

Again following many Kabbalists, Hasidic masters envisioned the Torah as made up of divine names, which means that the text and the author are identical. So, for example, R. Moses Hayyim Ephrayyim of Sudytkov, writes that

"How is it possible to take the Holy One, may He be blessed, as if He will dwell upon man? It is by means of the Torah which is indeed the names of God, since He and His name are one unity, and when someone studies the Torah for the sake of God and in order to keep His commandments and he abstains from what is prohibited, and he pronounces the letters of the Torah, which are the names of God, by these [activities] he takes God indeed and it is as if the Divine Presence dwells upon him, as it is written: 'in all places where I pronounce the name of God', which is the holy Torah, which is in its entirety His names, then 'I will come unto thee and I will bless thee'."<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere in his book he writes that

"since the Torah and God and Israel - all them are one unity only when they [namely Israel] study the Torah for its own sake [or name]. Then there is in her [i.e. the Torah] the power of God and she

becomes the secret of emanation, to vivify and heal."<sup>16</sup>

The magical element is quite evident, and so is the mystical one. According to many Hasidic sources, the author, namely God, the text, namely the Torah, and the interpreter, are conceived to be one, an experience of mystical union grounded in the view that

“Man’ is God, as the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton when spelled fully is forty five, like the value of Adam ("man"), and the Torah is [constituted] of 248 positive commandments and 365 interdictions... And when man studies Torah for its own sake, to keep it and perform it, then he brings all his limbs close to their source whence they originated and were generated, namely, to the Torah. Each of his limbs becomes a substratum of a particular commandment pertinent to this particular limb, and he becomes identical with the Torah in a unification and a complete union, like the unification of man and woman.”<sup>17</sup>

There is a great amount of isomorphism between Torah, Man [in fact only Israel] and God. By performing the Torah by means of a limb, a person attracts a divine power upon it. How is this triple union imagined to take place according to other Hasidic masters?

### Letters/ Sounds as Palaces and Light

A leitmotif of Hasidic understanding of the Torah-letters is the vision that each of them is a palace or a chamber inhabited by divine presence, described as light or vitality. There are innumerable discussions illustrating this view in Hasidism. So, for example R. Mordekhai of Chernobyl, a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Ukrainian master, offered an interesting view of letters as palaces where the King, God, is dwelling. He describes the letters of Torah and prayer as monads:

"palaces for the revelation of the light of 'Eiyin Sof, [= Infinity] blessed be He and blessed His Name, that is clothed within them. When someone studies the Torah and prays, then they [!] take them out of the secret places and their light is revealed here below....By the cleaving of man to the letters of the Torah and of the prayer, he draws down onto himself the revelation of the light of 'Eiyin Sof."<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the more conspicuously magical drawing of the influx within the letters, the letters were conceived also as palaces full of divine light from the very beginning and the study is the way to extract that light and reach an experience of union with the divine. Thus, in lieu of the talismanic view of the sounds in the great majority of Hasidic texts, namely the capacity to bring down the higher forces by uttering the letters, in some of the texts of R. Mordekhai of Chernobyl it is only the passage of these forces from their hidden status within the canonical texts to the performer.

The letters/sounds as containers are imagined to contain the divine light, and the moment of illumination is, therefore, connected to penetrating the linguistic palaces and enter there just as in the case of the ark-word. In the school of the Great Maggid, in a collection of Hasidic teachings entitled *Liqqutei Yeqarim*, the Besht is reported as saying that:

"a person who [orally] reads the Torah, and sees the lights of the letters/sounds which are in the Torah, even if he does not properly know the cantillation [of the biblical text], because of his reading with great love and with enthusiasm, God does not deal with him strictly even if he does not properly pronounce them [i.e. the cantillations]."<sup>19</sup>

Also in this case, study is an oral activity whose final aim is to achieve union with God. The light as divine dwelling in the Torah was understood as active power that can be put in the service of man, and the Besht has been portrayed as using the text of the Torah for magical purposes. His grandson, R. Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudylkov wrote that

"by study and involvement with the Torah for its own sake [or name], he can vivify his soul and amend his 248 limbs and 365 sinews, [and] join himself [sic] to their root, and to the root of their root which are the Torah and the Tetragrammaton, blessed be He,...all of this is [achieved] by the study of Torah for its own sake [or name] and for the sake of asking from the letters themselves. And I heard the interpretation of the Besht...from 'the secret of God' that is in them, which ['the secret of God'] will help them [the students of Torah] to speak the letters with a firm interpretation 'for its own sake!'"<sup>20</sup>

Here we have psychosomatic approach, that assume that the spiritual teachings affect the soul and then the corporeal limbs related to the soul.

## Hasidism and Strong Interpreters

The ascent of the importance of a strong personality as the center of religion, as it is the case of the Hasidic righteous, the *tzaddiq*, is certainly related to the vision that the righteous is also a strong interpreter. According to a later legend, reported in Jacob Kaidaner's *Sippurim Nora'im*, the Besht was given the authority from above to do whatever he wished with the letters of the Torah.<sup>21</sup> The view of R. Barukh of Medzibush, another grandson of the Besht, that the Hasidic interpretations "Touch and [at the same time] do not touch" the text, because of the implicit assumption that it is the effect of the divine spirit that informs the interpreter.<sup>22</sup> His brother, the author of *Degel Mahaneh Efrayim* speaks about the revelation of the secrets of the Torah by means of the divine spirit. Moreover, the above-mentioned R. Levi Isaac of Berdichev, indicates that the *Tzaddiqim*, "now have the power to interpret the Torah in the way they like"<sup>23</sup> even if in heaven this interpretation is not accepted. Another prominent Hasidic master, R. Menahem Mendel of Rimanov, argues in the introduction to his *Ilana' de-Hayyei*, that if someone studies the Torah for its sake, he is allowed to introduce in the Torah his thoughts.<sup>24</sup>

R. Gedalyah of Lunitz, a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Hasidic master, quotes the Besht to the effect that dealing with the study of the Torah by the Messiah, in a combinatory manner:

"When the Messiah comes, let it be soon in our time, he will interpret [*yidrosh*] the entire Torah, from its beginning to the end, according to all the combinations [found] in each and every word. Afterwards, he will construe the Torah as one word and the combinations will amount to infinity, and he will interpret all these combinations."<sup>25</sup>

This master is not only following the theory of linguistic substantiality, that secures the presence of all the letters of the Torah in the newly combined forms, but adds a perspective which seems to be new, at least in its explicit manner: all the letters of the Torah are to be combined in all their possible combinations, which means an exhaustion of the potential found in those letters. The end of the exploitation of the linguistic substance coincides with the eschaton. An actualization of the potential coincides with the fulfillment of time. It seems plausible that nothing apocalyptic is involved in this vision of messianism in the thought of the Besht, and this is the case also in some other instances in which the Besht mentioned the advent of the Messiah.

On the other hand, the famous R. Nahman of Bratzlav, the great-grandson of the Besht, conceives the righteous of the generation, presumably he himself in his generation, as the pipeline through which

interpretations are pouring into the world. In one of the most remarkable descriptions of the interpreter he writes:

“Know that there is a soul in the world through which all interpretations of the Torah are revealed... All interpreters of Torah receive [their words] from this soul.... And when this soul falls from its rung, and its words become cold, it dies. When it dies, the interpretations that had come through it also disappear. Then all the interpreters are unable to find any meaning in the Torah.... He who wants to interpret the Torah has to begin by drawing unto himself words as hot as burning coals. Speech comes out of the upper heart... The interpreter first has to pour out his words to God in prayer, seeking to arouse His mercies, so that the heart will open. Speech then flows from the heart, and interpretation of the Torah flows from that speech... On this heart are inscribed all the interpretations of the Torah.”<sup>26</sup>

These statements prove, in their theoretical formulations, that the Hasidic masters were aware of the radical exegetical moves they implemented in their writings. They either project their thoughts into the divine text as if interpreting it, or they receive some form of revelation. In both cases, the exegetical enterprise is much less a matter of listening attentively to the specificity of the message found in a certain given text. The divinity of the text and the anthropology of the righteous person as a semi-divine being,<sup>27</sup> allowed radical forms of exegesis, hardly matched by postmodern hermeneutics. In several Hasidic discussions the sermons of the righteous were conceived as identical with Torah, as noted above, which should be fathomed and interpreted in seventy ways, just as the divine Torah.<sup>28</sup>

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *In the Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, trs. Dan ben Amos and J. R. Mintz, (Aronson, Northvale, 1993), 179.

<sup>2</sup> See Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 227-238.

<sup>3</sup> *Or ha-'Emet*, fols. 15b-17a. Compare also to R. Aharon Kohen of Apta, *'Orha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim*, (Zolkiew, 1800), fol. 30ab. On other aspects of this text and its context see Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism, Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 180-182. See also his disciple R. Zeev Wolf of Zhitomir, *'Or ha-Me'ir*, fol. 240c and see also *ibidem*, fol. 247cd. For the view that light is found in the letters see now M. Idel, “From the ‘Hidden

Light' to the 'Light within the Torah': A Chapter in the Phenomenology of Jewish Mysticism," *On Light, Migvvan De'ot be-Yisrael*, vol. 11 (2002), 46-60 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> *Maggid Devarav Le-Ya'aqov*, ed. R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1976), 17-18. Compare also to the discussion of the same author *ibidem*, on pp. 201-203, and especially p. 326, and see also R. Aharon of Zhitomir's *Toledot 'Aharon*, (Lemberg, 1985), I, fol. 5c where an interesting passage on the forefathers is found. See also R. Dov Baer of Medzerich, *'Or Torah*, (Jerusalem, 1968), 47, where the phrase *behirut ha-Torah*, the luminosity of the Torah, occurs.

<sup>5</sup> *'Imrei Tzaddiqim*, (Zhitomir, 1900), fol. 5b. Here a different translation of a larger portion of the discussion, which was already analyzed by Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, tr. R. Manheim, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 81-82, has been adduced.

<sup>6</sup> *Mekhilta'*, Beshalah, II. A list of mainly Rabbinic sources dealing with this issue is found in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Theology of Ancient Judaism*, (London: Soncino, 1962), vol. I, 283-284 (Hebrew).

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 51:4.

<sup>8</sup> *Qedushat Levi*, (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 327-328. Interestingly enough, this passage is closest to the presentation of one of the most learned among the Kabbalists belonging to the camp of the *Mitnaggedim*, R. Isaac Aizik Haver, *'Or Torah*, printed in ed. R. Shmuel Mayevski, *'Amudei ha-Torah*, (Jerusalem, 1971), 219-220.

<sup>9</sup> See Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors, On Jewish Mysticism and Twenty-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2009), 234-247.

<sup>10</sup> R. Aharon ha-Levi Horowitz, *Toledot Aharon*, I fol. 18c.

<sup>11</sup> R. Aharon ha-Cohen of Apta, *'Or ha-Ganuz la-Tzaddiqim*, col. 8, fol. 3ab. On this book see, e.g., Hayyim Lieberman, *'Ohel RaHeL*, (New York, 1980), 8-11 (Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> *Sefer Yakhin w-Vo'az* (Ostraha, 1795), fol. 6bc. For a detailed analysis of this quote see Weiss, "Talmud Torah", 162-167 and Idel, "From the 'Hidden Light,'" 47-49.

<sup>13</sup> *Toledot 'Aharon*. I, fol. 40ab.

<sup>14</sup> M. Idel, "Deus sive Natura, The Metamorphosis of a Dictum from Maimonides to Spinoza," *Maimonides and the Sciences*, eds. S. Cohen and H. Levine, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 87-110.

<sup>15</sup> *Degel Mahaneh Ephrayyim*, (Jerusalem, 1995), 108.

<sup>16</sup> *ibidem*, 93-94.

<sup>17</sup> *ibidem*, 242.

<sup>18</sup> *Liqutei Torah*, (Benei Beraq, 1983), fol. 29d.

<sup>19</sup> *Liqqutim Yeqarim*, (Jerusalem, 1981), fol. 1a; *idem*, *'Or ha-'Emmet*, (Zhitomir, rpr. Benei Beraq, 1967), fol. 83d. See Joseph Weiss, "Talmud-Torah le-Shitat R. Israel Besht," *Essays Presented to the Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie Israel*, (London, 1967), 161 (Hebrew part).

<sup>20</sup> *Degel Mahaneh Ephrayyim*, 94.

<sup>21</sup> *ed.*, *Gedalyah Nigal*, (Jerusalem, 1992), 34.

<sup>22</sup> *Botzina' di-Nehora'* (NP. 1985), 73.

<sup>23</sup> *Pirquei 'Avot*, [Jerusalem, 1972], fol. 25b.

<sup>24</sup> Introduction, fol. 3a

PT<sup>25</sup> *TPSefer Teshu'ot Hen*, (Brooklyn, 1982), p. 82. See also *ibidem*, pp. 32-33. See also Heschel, *Theology of Ancient Judaism*, vol. 3, 72.

<sup>26</sup> *Liqutei Moharan*, Cf. the translation of Arthur Green, *Tormented Master, A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav*, (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979), 200-201; see also his "The Zaddik as Axis Mundi in Later Judaism," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, vol. 45 (1977), 341.

<sup>27</sup> See Ada Rapoport-Albert, "God and the Zaddik as the two Focal Points of Hasidic Worship," *History of Religions*, vol. 18 (1979), 296-325.

<sup>28</sup> See Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 470-481.