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**HOPE AND TRADITION: JEWISH RENEWAL STRATEGIES TO
RECONSTRUCT JEWISH THEOLOGY**

M-Josée Posen

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

Existing scholarly work on the contemporary Jewish Renewal movement focuses largely on its feminist assertions and the general practices and characteristics of adherents. This investigation examines the underlying theology expressed through the written work and authoritative texts of the movement's leadership, especially Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Using an interdisciplinary approach melded with the techniques of rhetorical criticism and qualitative research/grounded theory development, the study identifies and examines five strategies used by the Jewish Renewal movement to reconstruct Jewish theology. Those strategies are: reinterpretation of the fundamental themes of Jewish theology, God/ Torah/ and the people Israel, to suit contemporary sensibilities; deriving authority for that reinterpretation from both traditional and contemporary thinkers; emphasizing the imaginal to achieve redemption; expressing the interpretation in liturgy; and linking the interpretation to the greater purpose of providing a direction for post- Holocaust Judaism. This study demonstrates that Jewish Renewal reconstructs Jewish theology in a way that resonates with the postmodern ethos, yet is profoundly Jewish, being firmly rooted in Jewish sources and texts. While Renewal theology stands in tension with other contemporary Jewish theological trends, it nevertheless is making an important contribution to the development of a postmodern, post- Holocaust Judaism.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: A Theological and Contemporary Context

Judaism and classical Jewish thinking is concerned with three fundamental themes or ideas: creation, revelation and redemption. These are often expressed in terms of the nature of God, the character of Torah, and the meaning of the life and history of the Jewish people, *Israel*.¹ Jacob Neusner calls these themes, God, Torah and *Israel*, “the building -blocks of all Judaic thinking”.²

For almost two millennia, after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, these three themes have been woven together in the rabbinic worldview which guided Jewish life. In adjusting to the modern era over the last three or four centuries, the majority of Jews gradually abandoned the rabbinic for the scientific worldview, in keeping with much of the rest of western culture.³ In the latter half of this period, four general streams of Judaic thought, referred to as denominations, emerged, and each represents a coherent, if internally pluralistic, response to the challenges of modernity. As described by Jacobs, Orthodox Judaism is traditionalist and accepts sacred scripture (Torah) as divinely given and thus unchanging or changing in minor ways only to apply traditional law (*halakhah*) to new situations. Conservative Judaism seeks to reconcile Jewish law with openness to modern critical scholarship. It incorporates traditionalist and

¹ Throughout this paper I will use the italicized form *Israel* to indicate the Jewish people, unless I refer to a specific quote, and I use the form Israel to indicate the contemporary nation, the State of Israel. In addition, Hebrew terms are italicized unless they are so common as to be recognizable as English terms, such as Torah and Talmud.

² Jacob Neusner, *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973), 1.

³ Arthur Green, *Judaism for the Post-Modern Era*. (Samuel H. Goldenson Lecture, Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, December 12, 1994).

mystical perspectives, but sees Torah as subject to interpretation and *halakhah* as precedent-setting but flexible. Reconstructionist Judaism, a 20th century offshoot of Conservatism, considers the Torah and its precepts to be folk customs created by the Jewish people, capable of enriching its spirit, but subject to change as Jewish culture changes. In the Reform view, Judaism is a universal religion centred on a particular people with a mission to encourage humanity to practice justice, love and compassion. The people *Israel* has an ever-growing consciousness of God and moral law. Torah is a repository of these enduring spiritual ideals and must be adapted by each age consonant with the needs of the Jews. As a generalization, “Reform places the stress particularly on God, Orthodoxy on the Torah, and Conservative Judaism on the peoplehood of Israel”.⁴

1.1 Postmodernity and Jewish Theology

At the beginning of the 21st century, most North American Jews have abandoned committed halakhic practice and the traditional Jewish faith.⁵ They live in a western culture that began transitioning to the postmodern era during the last century.⁶ Graham Ward has identified two types of cultural transformation.⁷ One is transformation within the logics of a certain movement and epoch. The other is a radical break with the cultural logic of the past or present. In his view, both forms of cultural transformation are evident in the current postmodern period. Postmodern thinking develops certain themes that are evident in modern thought, but it also “breaks with categories that maintained the

⁴ Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 417.

⁵ Arthur Green, *Judaism For the Postmodern Era*, 1994

⁶ Steven Kepnes, “Postmodern Interpretations of Judaism: Deconstructive and Constructive Approaches, pp. 1-20 in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, Steven Kepnes (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

⁷ Graham Ward, “Introduction: Where We Stand”, pp. xiii-xviii in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Graham Ward (ed.) Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

hegemony of modernity (its naturalisms, positivisms, essentialisms, dualisms and humanisms, for example)".⁸

Steven Kepnes defines postmodernism as the convergence of several philosophical, social and cultural transformations, which together include "a movement away from the modern ideal of a universal rational culture and toward a multicultural reality that celebrates the value of the local and the particular and attempts a new openness to premodern forms and motifs".⁹ In North America, Judaic thought is struggling to develop a postmodern Judaism that can provide meaning to liberal or heterodox Jews, who find the anomie and rootlessness of modernity made worse by the fast pace at which life today is lived, but who do not find solace in Judaism as classically expressed or practiced.¹⁰ Contemporary attempts at spiritual revival include new forms of community study and worship, new types of synagogues, new kinds of Jewish education and music, and new interpretations, based on mysticism and hasidism, to heighten Jewish spirituality.¹¹

But what of Jewish theology? How does it, or can it, contribute to shaping a postmodern Judaism? To explore this question, it is important to dwell for a moment on the nature of Jewish theology, and its differentiation from the more familiar Christian manifestation of thinking about God, which has dominated Western culture for two millennia. At the same time, it is also important to understand that "just as theologies of

⁸ Ward, "Introduction: Where We Stand", xiii.

⁹ Kepnes, "Postmodern Interpretations of Judaism", 1.

¹⁰ Arthur Green, *Judaism For the Postmodern Era*, 1994. It should be noted that the terms liberal and heterodox refer broadly to non-orthodox Jews, including both those who identify with a non-orthodox denomination and those who prefer to remain secular.

¹¹ Jeffrey K. Salkin, "New Age Judaism", pp.355-370 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery- Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

Judaism differ, so do understandings of the very nature of the Jewish theological enterprise”.¹²

Louis Jacobs maintains that since biblical times there has existed a Jewish theology, which, while not as systematic as Christian theology, nevertheless can be traced through various evolutions in the biblical, rabbinic, medieval and modern periods.¹³ Writing late in the 20th century, he pointed out that contemporary Jewish theologians maintain as their central theme the defence of traditional theism – the idea that a transcendent and immanent God exists, is involved in, yet beyond, all the processes of the universe. Theism thus rejects deism, polytheism, dualism, atheism and agnosticism. Many Jewish thinkers hold that the truth of God’s existence can only be accepted through mystical intuition, tradition or an existentialist “leap of faith”.¹⁴ In Jacobs’ view, since Jewish thinking about God has traditionally always been linked to its ideas of Torah and the people Israel, any theological considerations must address all three themes.

Both Arthur Cohen and Byron Sherwin point out that Jewish theology is manifested not only in elaboration of *halakhah* but also in the development of the literary form, *aggadah*, or narrative.¹⁵ “Theological premises not only underlie *halakhah*; theological ideas are also compressed within *halakhah*.”¹⁶ At the same time, Torah is central to Jewish theology, and Torah here refers to the full body of literary works and oral traditions that comprise the sacred canon of Jewish literature.

¹² Byron Sherwin, *Toward a Jewish Theology: Methods, Problems and Possibilities* (New York: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1991), 3.

¹³ Louis Jacobs, “Theology”, in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (CD ROM Edition, Version 1.0 (Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia Ltd. ,1997), 17

¹⁴ Louis Jacobs, “Theology”, 17.

¹⁵ Arthur Cohen, “Theology”, pp. 971-979 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, Arthur Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.) (New York: The Free Press, 1987); Byron L. Sherwin, *Towards a Jewish Theology*.

¹⁶ Sherwin, *Towards a Jewish Theology*, 11.

In the early twentieth century, the Hebrew poet Haim Bialik argued that halakhah and aggadah are not opposing forms; they exist in creative tension, each causing the other to develop.¹⁷ This encompassing of the entire sacred canon enables Jewish theology to embrace Judaism “in its uniqueness, on its own terms”.¹⁸ That uniqueness recognizes that Jewish theological speculation, unlike the Aristotelian-based Christian or Western theology, does not see a need for systematic formulation of theological ideas or rational demonstration of theological convictions, nor does it demand reconciliation of religious and philosophical truth, although some medieval Jewish thinkers certainly made such attempts.¹⁹ Yet, Jewish theology is not considered valid if it is incoherent - “loose and wooly thinking in the area of religion can lead to a glorification of the absurd... Holy nonsense is still nonsense”.²⁰ Rather, as Sherwin points out, coherence can be found if it is understood that “Jewish thought, especially Jewish mystical thought, perceives reality as being characterized by polarity, contradiction and tension”.²¹

Arthur Cohen holds that “theology in Judaism is an intellectual discipline with a continuous history but a discontinuous tradition”.²² While over the centuries there has been a continuous production of works that address theological questions, the issues they have raised have, at certain times in Jewish history, not always been considered central to the conduct of Jewish life. Cohen underscores the consistent characteristic of Jewish religion, and thus theology, as being the manifestation of the relationship between a Jew and God as an interconnected structure of acts, beliefs, gestures and words. The classical, rabbinic Jew did not require an understanding of the nature of God; more important was the affirmation of tradition through observance to the law and instruction. In contrast to

¹⁷ Haim Bialik, *Revelment and Concealment: Five Essays* (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2000), 45-88.

¹⁸ Sherwin, *Towards a Jewish Theology*, 13.

¹⁹ For discussions of this, see Sherwin, *Towards a Jewish Theology*, 16-19, and Cohen, “Theology”, 971-975.

²⁰ Louis Jacobs, quoted in Sherwin, *Towards a Jewish Theology*, 19.

²¹ Sherwin, *Towards a Jewish Theology*, 17.

²² Cohen, “Theology”, 971.

practice among the Christian contemporaries, for rabbinic Jews theological reflection was always posterior to act, rather than prior, as for Christians. Rabbinic Judaism did not incarnate prior beliefs in sacramental acts; rather, it interpreted the beliefs through the mystery of acts themselves, deriving the justification of the acts not to logic but to the will of God.

Medieval Jewish theological expression, according to Cohen, survived mainly in its nonmystical formulation. Jewish thinkers were preoccupied with establishing coherence between key Jewish beliefs and the employment of reason. Less important to them was the transmission of a normative mythos of the divine-human interaction, and they recognized but suppressed the mystical tradition. In part this was due to their perception of the need to master concrete, exoteric Judaism in order to ground any esoteric interpretations. The mystical tradition was not one of solitary contemplation, but “an esoteric excursus upon the fundamental problems of the universe and Jewish existence within it”.²³

Faced with the challenge of the Enlightenment, mainstream Jewish theological speculation became episodic, and a complementary mystical tradition which supplied an original narrative metaphysics to Jewish existence began to flourish. By the 20th century, the end of classical Judaism and the beginning of the waning of the modern age, many Jewish thinkers saw Jewish theology either as the history of Jewish ideas whose importance had waned, or a set of ideas about the universe that were either outdated or in need of transformation into the secular language of Zionist politics and social vision. Committed orthodox Eastern European Jews continued to be concerned with the reality of God, as did some Western European Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, who delved into particular theological problems in order to update them.²⁴

In tracing the evolution of Judaism within modernity, Eugene Borowitz points out that since the Enlightenment, Jews have had the opportunity to retain any or all aspects of their Jewishness. He holds that the criteria Jews chose to guide them in this decision were

²³ Cohen, “Theology”, 975.

²⁴ Cohen, “Theology”, 975-76.

not those of traditional rabbinic sources, but those offered by the Enlightenment: separation of public and private spheres, relegating religion to the private, and in the public sphere adopting the principles of scientific reason, modern statehood, individual rights and universal ethics.²⁵

The Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel were the decisive events that marked the beginning of the postmodern era for the Jewish people.²⁶ Cohen maintains that, post-Holocaust, “there can be no Jewish theology ... unless it is prepared to ask: What do we know *now* about the creator God in whose universe such horror is permitted.”²⁷ He points out that, post-Holocaust, the task of Jewish theology is no longer secondary, but unavoidably primary, in order to sustain Judaism.

In his description of postmodernity, Kepnes points out that it is a transitional period, a time of creative conflict in which voices of the previously marginalized are being heard, deep uncertainty exists with regard to the adequacy of the rational structures of modernity, and premodern thought is being re-examined.²⁸ Borowitz suggests that the postmodern perspective is congenial to Judaism since “its emphasis on the linguisticity of thought does not create impenetrable barriers for the assertion of religious truth, as positivism and many forms of rationalism did”.²⁹ He points out that postmodernity’s concerns with creative textual interpretation is reminiscent of rabbinic midrash, while its stress on “usage rather than pure idea” points to notions of community and historicity

²⁵ Eugene Borowitz, “Postmodern Judaism: One Theologian’s View”, pp. 35–45 in *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene B. Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Jewish Theology*, Peter Ochs (ed.), (Albany: State University of New York, 2000).

²⁶ Daniel J. Elazar, “Community” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD-ROM Edition, Version 1.0 (Jerusalem, Judaica Multimedia Ltd., 1997).

²⁷ Cohen, “Theology”, 976.

²⁸ Kepnes, “Postmodern Interpretations of Judaism”.

²⁹ Borowitz, “Postmodern Judaism”, 38.

which were critical to Jewish faith yet problematic for Jewish thinkers in the modern era.³⁰

For postmodern Jews, then, what is the meaning of God after the Holocaust? How can Torah speak meaningfully to postmoderns, and what are the ways in which it can be studied? What is the condition of Jewish people, *Israel*, in the postmodern world and what is the meaning of redemption in such an era? Jacob Neusner maintains that expressions of contemporary Judaism cannot rely on classical Jewish theology but must confront the themes of God, Torah and *Israel* in terms of these events as well as contemporary society, which I suggest is a postmodern society.³¹ It is from this dual perspective of classic Judaic themes expressed in a postmodern ethos that I examine the reconstruction of Jewish theology within the Jewish Renewal movement.

1.2 The Jewish Renewal Movement

During roughly the last four decades of the 20th century, there emerged (largely in North America) a specific movement which calls itself Jewish Renewal and which attempts to respiritualize Jewish daily life by drawing on classical rabbinic Judaism, Jewish mysticism, and contemporary secular thought. According to Arthur Waskow, by the late 1960's, many Jews found the organized Jewish religion to which they had been exposed as children spiritually empty, joyless, often sexist; it was "boring boiler-plate".³² When they turned to the larger North American society in which they lived, they saw a secular, materialistic world, where economic and social privilege were rampant. At the same time, the emergence of feminist Judaism, the ecology movement and the growing knowledge and understanding of Eastern spiritual traditions influenced some Jews to

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Jacob Neusner, "Introduction", pp.5-9 in *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives*, Jacob Neusner (ed.) (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973).

³² Arthur Waskow, *Godwrestling: Round 2*, (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 1996), 9.

reacquaint themselves with their own traditions and to rediscover mystical and meditative traditions in Judaism and coalesced into the Jewish Renewal movement.

Many Jews found it impossible to affiliate with a synagogue, yet did not want to be alienated. Their desire for more intimate forms of community led to the emergence of new forms of the traditional *havurot*, small groups of people who meet (often in private homes) to study texts and explore issues through communal discussion, drawing on the work of selected Jewish thinkers.³³ According to Jeffrey K. Salkin, the *havurah* movement, in looking for new answers to problems, “borrowed many Hasidic practices, especially ecstatic prayer, meditation and *niggunim*.”³⁴ Salkin states that the Jewish Renewal movement succeeded the *havurah* movement, adopting its respect for Jewish mysticism and hasidism, and “infusing it with insights from contemporary ecology, feminism and participatory democracy”.³⁵

Jewish Renewal considers itself transdenominational, that is, it is not affiliated with any of the current Jewish denominations but may draw on them in its outlooks and practices. The boundaries of the Jewish Renewal movement are not clear. Jewish “renewal” is a concept that appears in literature associated with mainstream Judaism, where it is sometimes also referred to as “renaissance”, and where the emphasis is on both spiritual renewal through adherence to the more classical aspects of Judaism, and cultural renewal through improved and wider Jewish education, somewhat echoing the Jewish “renaissance” in Weimar Germany.³⁶

More overtly, Jewish renewal is also a concept associated with the writings of California-based Michael Lerner, whose approach to renewal pivots around his definition of *tikkun olam*. Usually interpreted as “repair of the world”, in Lerner’s usage the phrase

³³ Jeffrey K. Salkin, “New Age Judaism”, pp. 355-370 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 366.

³⁶ Alisa R. Kurshan, *The Jewish Renaissance Agenda: Emerging Challenges*, <http://www.shma.com>, accessed November 6, 2006; originally published in 2000.

becomes “transformation of the world”, and thus provides a basis for his view that the respiritualization of Jewish daily life must be accompanied by overt political action and involvement to combat oppression in all its forms.³⁷ Lerner is associated with the magazine *Tikkun*, and has attempted to found a network of communities focussed on his approach to Jewish renewal.³⁸

Institutionally and more specifically, a loosely organized network of groups developed. This network referred to their approach to Judaism as Jewish Renewal, and considered themselves a movement: the Network of Jewish Renewal Communities.³⁹ This network was closely associated with the Philadelphia-based ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, and has now been integrated into it. According to its website, ALEPH grew out of the P’nai Or Religious Fellowship founded by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in 1962.⁴⁰ ALEPH considers itself the core institution in the Jewish Renewal movement, dedicated to the Jewish people’s sacred purpose of partnership with the Divine in the inseparable tasks of healing the world and healing our hearts. It supports the movement by organizing and nurturing communities, developing leadership, creating liturgical and scholarly resources, and working for social and environmental justice. It has a number of affiliated projects, including ALEPH Kallah, a biennial convocation and study week; OhaLaH: The Association of Rabbis for Jewish Renewal; a Rabbinic Studies Program; the Network of Jewish Renewal Communities; ALEPH's Sage-ing Program; C-DEEP (The Center for Devotional, Energy, and Ecstatic Practice); and The Shalom Center, which is a politically active group headed by Rabbi Arthur Waskow. It is also associated with a retreat centre, Elat Chayyim, presently located in Connecticut.⁴¹

³⁷ Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).

³⁸ Michael Lerner, letter soliciting funding support, mailed to donors to the Tikkun foundation, 2002.

³⁹ NJRC: *The Network of Jewish Renewal Communities* (<http://www.jewishrenewal.org>). Note that this website, which I consulted in 2002, no longer exists. It has been incorporated into the ALEPH website.

⁴⁰ ALEPH: *Alliance for Jewish Renewal*, www.aleph.org, November 6, 2006.

⁴¹ Elat Chayyim: <http://www.jewishretreatcenter.org>; November 5, 2006.

There are over three dozen congregations or groups formally affiliated with ALEPH via payment of dues. In addition, there are a number of groups who are informally affiliated via personal contacts among leaders.⁴² As well, a number of groups in North America and Israel exhibit features of Jewish Renewal or at least interest in its approach to Jewish spirituality. For example, in early 2006 the local Reconstructionist group here in Ottawa sponsored a short series of Jewish Renewal services, and invited the community at large to participate.⁴³ With regard to size, the number of individuals adhering to the movement probably does not exceed 5,000 or 10,000 worldwide.⁴⁴

To date there has been relatively little published scholarly work on the emergent Jewish Renewal movement. Aviva Goldberg has completed a doctoral thesis on the feminist aspects of Jewish Renewal.⁴⁵ Other authors have described the development, main influences and significant characteristics of Jewish Renewal.⁴⁶ Professor Chava Weissler of Lehigh University is conducting ethnographic studies of the movement, and

⁴² Chava Weissler, "Meanings of Shekhinah in the Jewish Renewal Movement", pp.58-83 in *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, No. 10, Fall, 2005, www.liupress.indiana.edu/catalog/index

⁴³ Announcements in community communication vehicles from the Ottawa Reconstructionist Havurah, February, 2006.

⁴⁴ This is my own estimate, based on information from the former website of the Network of Jewish Renewal Communities, general information regarding participation in interested groups, and personal observations and discussion during a study week in which I participated in July, 2005. In the literature available I have found no reliable estimate of the actual number of adherents.

⁴⁵ Aviva R. Goldberg, *Re-Awakening Deborah: Locating the Feminist in the Liturgy, Ritual and Theology of Contemporary Jewish Renewal*. (PhD Thesis, Toronto: York University, 2002).

⁴⁶ Yaakov Ariel, "Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius: The House of Love and Prayer in San Francisco, 1967-77", *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 13 (2) 139-165, 2003; Shaul Magid, "Jewish Renewal: Towards A New American Judaism", pp. 58-60 in *Tikkun*, January-February, 2006;"Jewish Renewal and the Holocaust: A Theological Response", pp. 59-68 in *Tikkun*, March-April, 2006; and "Jewish Renewal and American Spirituality", pp. 58-66 in *Tikkun*, May-June, 2006; Jeffrey K. Salkin "New Age Judaism", pp. 355-370 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

has given lectures based on her work.⁴⁷ Taken together, these works suggest that Jewish Renewal sees the personal search for, and development of a relationship to, God as essential to a revived Jewish spirituality. This search is aided by use of both traditional and mystical Jewish approaches and techniques such as Torah study, prayer intensity, chant, meditation, and charismatic leadership. At the same time, the Jewish Renewal spiritual path respects and learns from other traditions, incorporates techniques such as dance, yoga and dramatization to aid in prayer and in Torah study, and stresses the importance of feminist thought, gender issues and the need to be inclusive of homosexuals, lesbians, the transgendered and the bisexual. It also applies Jewish teachings to all areas of life, including food, money, sex, health and politics. It incorporates the North American emphasis on self-development and self-realization, while simultaneously stressing the importance of building community and fighting for social justice from a liberal and somewhat left of centre perspective.

Jewish Renewal cannot (yet) be characterized as a denomination.⁴⁸ Rather, it is an ideological movement which perceives Judaism as constantly renewing its encounter with the Divine.⁴⁹ The statement of principles espoused by ALEPH includes, *inter alia*, an awareness of the sacred in all existence, transformation of consciousness related to both cosmic purpose and individual healing and growth, and appreciation for both the emerging Feminine and the prophetic, kabbalistic and hasidic traditions as guides to the

⁴⁷ Chava Weissler, *Jewish Renewal and the American Spiritual Marketplace; Gender and Jewish Renewal; and The Jewish Renewal Movement: Ascending Through the Four Worlds*; 3 Stroum Lectures, University of Washington, 2003, unpublished; I am grateful to Professor Weissler for sharing with me copies of her lectures.

⁴⁸ As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, North American Judaism is comprised of four general streams of thought. These religious groupings are generally designated as denominations: Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist.

⁴⁹ Discussions on the ALEPH listserv (February 4-10, 2006) have raised the question of whether the movement is becoming a denomination. Discussants expressed concern about such an institutionalization of identity.

path of spiritual development.⁵⁰ Members as well as clergy (rabbis, cantors and pastoral workers) associated with Jewish Renewal come from a variety of Jewish (as well as non-Jewish) backgrounds.⁵¹ In fact, the movement's literature points out the wide variety of ideological and philosophical influences from which it draws. For example, the diagram in Figure 1(next page), "Thumbnail Origins of the Jewish Renewal Movement", is taken from three Renewal *siddurim* (prayerbooks).⁵² This diagram suggests that in addition to being influenced by the various Jewish denominations and hasidism, Jewish Renewal also draws on thinking associated with Jewish feminism, the ecology and self-actualization movements, the Holocaust, the latest science and Eastern philosophical perspectives.

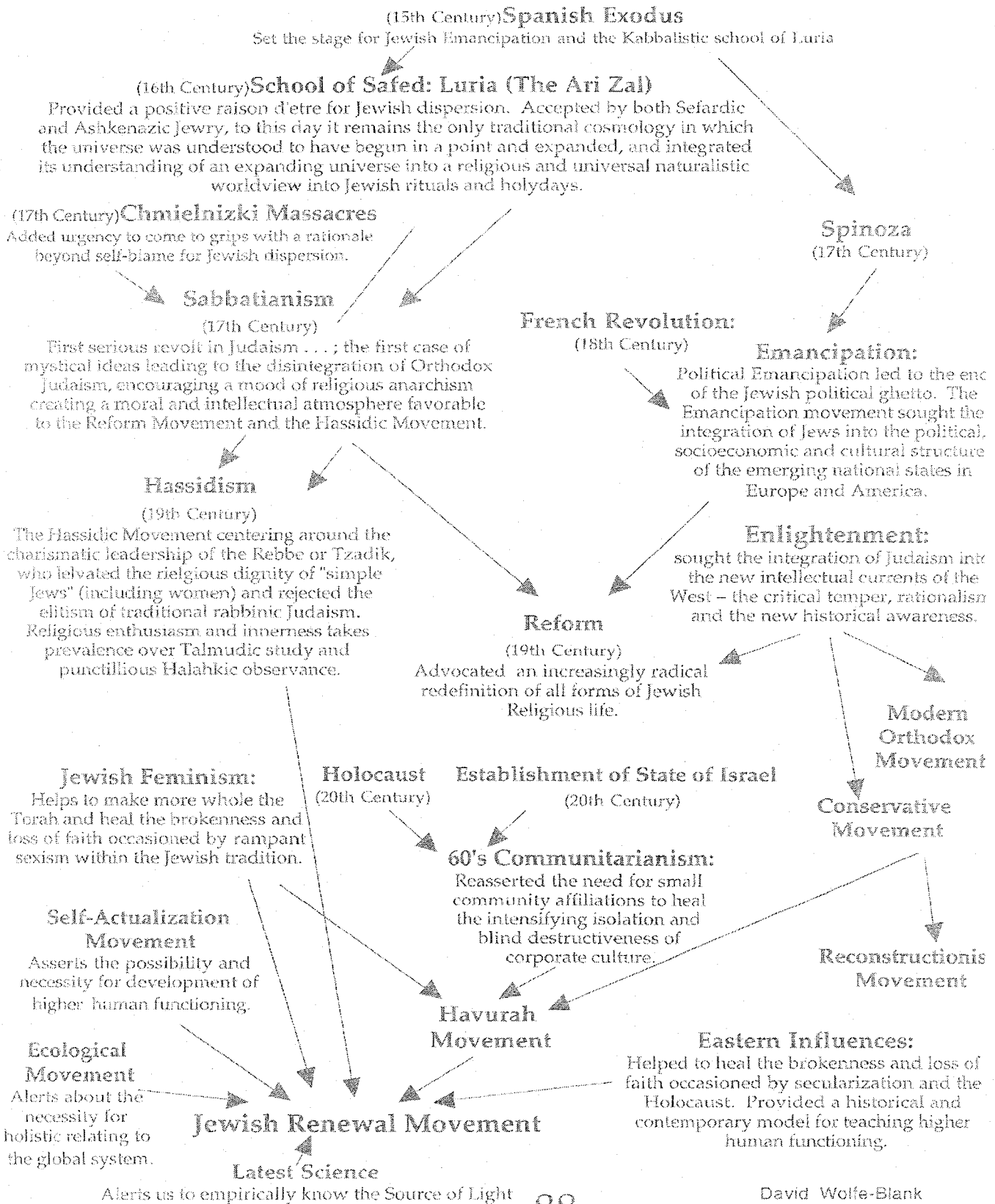
⁵⁰ See Appendix.

⁵¹ This point is made in various communications of ALEPH. I also met, during the study week referred to earlier, individuals and clergy who were raised in the orthodox, conservative, reform and reconstructionist Jewish traditions, as well as Jews from secular backgrounds and converts.

⁵² David Wolfe-Blank (ed.), *Complete Meta Siddur* (Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance For Jewish Renewal, 2004); Marcia Prager, *A Siddur For Erev Shabbat*, and *A Siddur For Shabbat Morning* (Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2004).

Figure 1: Thumbnail Origins of the Jewish Renewal Movement

Thumbnail Origins of the Jewish Renewal Movement



The theology of the movement has not yet been examined in detail. Aviva Goldberg, in her doctoral dissertation on the movement, concludes that its theology, liturgy and worship practices express a feminist perspective, but she does not treat the theology comprehensively.⁵³ Weissler, in a recent article, examined the way in which renewal Jews interpret the *Shekhinah*, the kabbalistic feminine divine.⁵⁴ In a largely descriptive article, Jeffrey Salkin locates Jewish Renewal within the broad category of New Age Judaism, and suggests that it is struggling with how to be an authentically Jewish movement yet “nourished by many non-Jewish intellectual and theological streams”.⁵⁵ This points to the issue of the movement’s underlying theology, its nature and coherence, and the sources, both Jewish and non-Jewish, upon which it draws.

I suggest that, to complement the ongoing research into Jewish Renewal practices, there is benefit in examining the underlying theology. The central goal of this work is to contribute to that examination by sketching out the theology as it appears in authoritative movement texts and by considering how the theological meaning is reconstructed. Flowing from this, I will present some thoughts on the potential it has to meet the needs of contemporary postmodern Jews. I am working from an interdisciplinary frame of reference, drawing on anthropological, sociological, historical and philosophical perspectives for my analysis, as well as rhetorical analysis for my data gathering and organization.

1.3 Research Focus, Sources and Methodology

Goldberg states in her doctoral thesis that “we are witnessing in Jewish Renewal the seeds of what may prove to be a radically new branch of Jewish practice”. She links this to the contribution of women within the movement.⁵⁶ I suggest that the novelty of

⁵³ Goldberg, *Re-Awakening Deborah*, 2002

⁵⁴ Weissler, “Meanings of Shekhinah in the Jewish Renewal Movement”, 2005.

⁵⁵ Salkin, “New Age Judaism”, 68.

⁵⁶ Goldberg, *Re-Awakening Deborah*, 5.

Jewish Renewal goes beyond practice, to its underlying theology. This theology provides the foundation for a developing, postmodern Judaism that resonates with postmodern thought and may have the capacity to address postmodern ontology. In this dissertation I explore how the Jewish Renewal movement reconstructs theological meaning by examining both how the classic themes, *God/Torah/Israel*, are set out in the textual work of a few of its key leaders, and what strategies are employed to support that interpretation.

The leaders of the Jewish Renewal movement have produced a voluminous body of written texts discussing their approach, or specific aspects of it. These include books; teachings gathered into short booklets (of approximately 20-40 pages each); collections of essays; liturgical materials such as prayer books, prayers and blessings; and articles in electronic newsletters and magazines. Taken together, this corpus includes hundreds of pieces. I have selected some books, teachings, essays and liturgical writings, as these are the richest sources of discussion of the themes of creation, revelation and redemption.

While the leadership of the movement is somewhat fluid and diverse, a number of individuals are featured on the ALEPH website as leaders and teachers within the movement. However, I have focussed on the work of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, who is widely considered the main founder of the movement. Born in Poland, he grew up in Vienna and Antwerp during the Second World War, and came to America in the early 1940s. He was ordained as a Chabad rabbi in 1947, and in the 1950s became an outreach worker for Chabad.⁵⁷ By the 1960s he was actively working to reach disaffected young Jews in North America, particularly in San Francisco. An imaginative, creative and charismatic leader, he had been active in the *havurah* movement.⁵⁸ He broke with Chabad in the 1960s and gradually associated with other individuals and groups to form what

⁵⁷ Chabad or Lubavitch is a branch of Hasidic Judaism, which is in turn a branch of the orthodox approach to Judaism. I discuss Chabad more fully in Chapters 3 and 6.

⁵⁸ Salkin, *New Age Judaism*, 367; Yaakov Ariel, "Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius: The House of Love and Prayer in San Francisco, 1967-77", *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 13 (2) 139-165, 2003

grew into the Jewish Renewal movement.⁵⁹ Now over eighty years old, he remains a prolific writer and revered teacher to the movement. My research has largely, although not exclusively, focussed on his textual corpus. In addition, I have benefited from personal discussion with Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi. Reb Zalman, as he is popularly known, remains the most authoritative spokesperson for the movement's theology; in this study, I refer interchangeably to his views and that of the Jewish Renewal movement as a whole.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow founded the Shalom Centre which became a division of ALEPH, and appears to be the driving force behind ALEPH. Most of the writings of the ALEPH *Newsletter* are authored by him, and many of the articles featured in the quarterly publication *The New Menorah* are also his. He is a strong proponent of political action, as evidenced by his articles, newsletters and ALEPH listserv emails, but I have focussed on two of his books rather than his more overtly political writings.

While Rabbis Schachter-Shalomi and Waskow are clearly associated with ALEPH, Rabbi Michael Lerner's association with that institution, and the Jewish Renewal movement itself, is less clear. While one of his earlier books, *Jewish Renewal*, published in 1994, is clearly focussed on the renewal of Judaism, his later work, *Spirit Matters*, published in 2000, appears to be much broader in scope. In fact, the *Tikkun* website which features his writing now suggests that his "core vision" is a multi-religious approach to social change.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in both these books he appears to identify with the movement, and I have included his books in my textual examination.

Other leaders' names either appear frequently in the movement's literature or are specifically listed on the ALEPH website as rabbis who teach in association with the movement and/or whose writings are available for purchase from the movement's website bookstore. Some are also actively associated with a specific synagogue or congregation. While I have not focussed on their work extensively, I have included selected textual pieces. Some have appeared in association with the *siddurim* produced by

⁵⁹ Ariel, "Hasidism in the House of Aquarius".

⁶⁰ See the statement of Core Vision at www.tikkun.org, accessed November 6, 2006.

David Wolfe-Blank (now deceased), Marcia Prager (who serves a congregation in Philadelphia) and David Zaslow (who is spiritual leader of a group in Ashland, Oregon). Some also have produced liturgy of various kinds (prayers, sermons, audio recordings of chants and music). Finally, Rabbi Daniel Siegel and his wife Hanna Tiferet Siegel, both important movement figures, are spiritual leaders who recently established a Jewish Renewal nexus near Vancouver. Rabbi Siegel has worked closely with Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi in the editing of his teachings and is credited with joint authorship of the book *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, published in 2005. The textual works that I studied are identified as Primary Sources in the Bibliography.

I examined the selected texts in detail to identify each reference to the themes of creation, revelation and redemption (God/Torah/*Israel*); the context in which the reference occurs; the attributes and dimensions associated with each of the themes; the patterns that appear; and the relationships among the themes and their attributes. I then analyzed the data within the framework of both rhetorical criticism and qualitative research/grounded theory development. These are outlined in the work of Sonja Foss on rhetorical analysis and Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin on grounded theory.⁶¹ Both these approaches offer a qualitative method of data-gathering and analysis in order to build a theory. Rhetorical analysis, or criticism, focuses on the construction of messages and how a collection of messages creates a specific effect. It tends to focus on the ideas and themes communicated in a specific text, one that may be a written document, perhaps a rendition of a speech or an article, or that may be another type of text such as a film, piece of art, or song. Grounded theory focuses on building theory through an interactive approach to data gathering and analysis, so that data is analyzed as it is gathered, and the result of the analysis used to suggest further data gathering. This approach assumes a larger body of text, such as that obtained by transcription of oral interviews, and also includes data from non-documentary texts such as films and videotapes. While the

⁶¹ Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (third edition) (Longrove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2004); Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (second edition) (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998).

analytical process outlined by Strauss and Corbin is much more detailed than that put forward by Foss, both approaches use essentially the same set of steps: identifying the body of data to be analyzed; codifying it according to some basic themes; analyzing each piece of data for its dimensions and attributes; using the analysis to direct the gathering of more data and to identify concepts and understand the relationships among the data dimensions and attributes; developing a conceptual framework that can be elaborated into a theory; testing and adjusting the framework/theory iteratively, and drawing conclusions.

Foss describes several types of rhetorical criticism, of which ideological criticism corresponds most closely to the analysis I undertook. Not only does this approach examine the beliefs and values of a group, it derives insights from both poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives to consider the context in which these beliefs and values occur. In general I applied Foss's approach to ideological criticism by identifying and elaborating the nature of the ideologies of God/Torah/*Israel* expressed by writers, and by identifying the rhetorical strategies used to advocate for that ideology. At the same time, my analysis of the data in the texts was aided by the detailed coding techniques described by Strauss and Corbin.

This process generated a very large number of data pieces, which I organized using Mindmap © software.⁶² The purpose of organizing the data is to discover relationships among the pieces. One approach is to use computer programs with relational database capability to organize the data and show relationships. Such software exists and is used extensively in sociological research. Reviews of various software packages are readily available on the internet. One such reviewer, Christine Barry, echoes the points made by Strauss and Corbin: qualitative data analysis software is only one analytical tool available to the researcher, and it is not a substitute for deep familiarity with the data achieved through detailed reading and analysis.⁶³ I chose to organize the

⁶² The mindmapping technique is common to a number of commercial software packages. I used the Mindmanager 5 program available at <http://www.Mindjet.com>, accessed November 6, 2006.

⁶³ Christine Barry, "Choosing Qualitative Data Analysis Software: Atlas/ti and Nudist Compared", *Sociological Research Online* 3(3) 1998, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/3/4/html>.

data using the “cut and paste” approach, which is essentially what the Mindmap software does.

It is evident that a research project which focuses on the written work of selected leaders of a religious movement does not necessarily provide insight into what the practitioners of the movement actually believe or how they use their actual beliefs to guide their behaviour and religious identification. Neil Gillman, referring to the work of Mordecai Kaplan, distinguishes between the experiential or existential aspects of Judaism and the intellectual aspects (that is, the theological or philosophical).⁶⁴ He points out that throughout Judaism’s history, its theological positions have been diverse, and that, for Jews, the philosopher’s and theologian’s preoccupation with clarifying and ordering what Jews are supposed to believe is far less intrinsically important to Jewish identification than the experiential dimension provided by behaviour and a sense of belonging. Yet, both have legitimate functions in Jewish identification, and he maintains that Jewish philosophical (and, by extension, theological) creativity has flowered in periods when there was an ideologically open setting and when there was a major turning point in Jewish history, often an historical trauma. In Gillman’s view, “if ever there was a moment in history when these two sets of conditions coincide, it is our own era”, and the situation of contemporary Jews compels an examination of the content of current Jewish belief in terms of the current historical situation.⁶⁵ To position my research in that context, in the next section I will review the social and spiritual condition of Jews in modern North America, and highlight broader, postmodern trends and thought.

As mentioned earlier, Jewish thought has always built on Jewish tradition, adapting it to fit specific contexts. In consequence, throughout this dissertation I have included historical overviews and summaries in order to provide context and a general understanding of the Jewish tradition as background to my discussion of specific issues.

⁶⁴ Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990).

⁶⁵ Gillman, *Sacred Fragments*, xxii.

1.4 The Postmodern Jewish Context in America

The social and spiritual condition of Jews in contemporary America has been well-studied and over the last four or five decades a considerable body of literature emerged, particularly with regard to Jewish identity and spirituality. By the 1980s, sociological research on contemporary Jewish identity suggested that the impact of modernity was complex and unclear. It did not lead either to rapid assimilation or to sustained group identity, because “American Jews have supplemented ancient forms of identification with an ever-changing array of new practices, forms of communal organizations, myths and symbols”.⁶⁶ Despite a residue of anti-Semitism, American Jews felt secure and able not only to adapt to and shape the broader culture, but also to exert political influence while numbering only 5-6 million in a population of some 300 million.⁶⁷ Reflecting a broader trend in American society, Jewish sensibility and religious meaning was expressed not only in religious denominations and synagogue life, but increasingly in the “American Jewish civil religion”, that extensive array of Jewish secular organizations whose activities express an ideology of Jewish survival and responsibility to improve the world.⁶⁸ At the same time, anthropological studies were pointing to an underlying search for Jewish identity and wholeness in a world where there was no longer one comprehensive worldview to offer a sense of community and meaning.⁶⁹ American Jewry is diverse, due not only to its informal form of organization but also to its historical emergence from successive waves of Jewish immigration from different parts of the world at different times. By the end of the 20th century, American Jewry found itself living in a “postmodern world of fragmented cultural universes”, with a variety of ways of being Jewish and limited or non-existent ties to older patriarchal

⁶⁶ Steven M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1983) 175.

⁶⁷ Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: Summit Books, 1985).

⁶⁸ Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), viii.

⁶⁹ Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

families and tight-knit communities.⁷⁰ This heterogeneity is enhanced by the voluntaristic nature of Jewish identification in America, where identifying as a Jew serves cultural and psychological ends more than social or political ones. In consequence, authenticity becomes more important, and is one explanation of the enormous impact of hasidism on popular Jewish culture. Hasidism not only claims to understand the authentic expression of Judaism, its approach is popularly seen as valuing intent over behaviour, thus offering hope of authenticity and righteousness even to those whose level of knowledge and formal level of observance of Jewish law is quite limited.⁷¹

Diversity of Jewish expression also reflects patterns observed in broader American culture. Dominated in the latter half of the 20th century by the sheer size of the baby-boom generation, the culture has been shaped by the boomer generation's struggles with regard to values and commitments. Wade Clark Roof maintains that, by the end of the century, concerns and attitudes that were marginal in the 1960s have moved into the mainstream culture.⁷² He finds that the resultant shift in American values now reflects formerly countercultural themes such as libertarian aspirations, greater egalitarianism, ecological consciousness and an enhanced concern with the self, and points to cross-cultural studies which show that these themes have become deeply entrenched in the modern life of most advanced industrial nations. Stemming from the baby-boom generation's tendency to search for a holistic vision of life, a pervasive new spirituality is emerging, one whose approach is pluralistic, syncretic eclectic, and strongly voluntaristic, reflecting the generation's deeply rooted expectation of individual choice in all facets of life in a consumer society. At the same time, the generation's maturing sense of the importance of self emphasizes that self in relation to others, and the importance of sharing, caring, accepting and belonging. In consequence, a "major restructuring of

⁷⁰ Jack Kugelmass, "Introduction", in *Between Two Worlds: Ethnographic Essays on American Jewry*, Jack Kugelmass (ed.) (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 2.

⁷¹ Kugelmass, *Between Two Worlds*.

⁷² Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

religion is underway, particularly the reshaping of religious communities”.⁷³ In Roof’s view, although many baby-boomers remain attached to their traditional religious life and institutions, there is a turn toward smaller religious communities and lifestyle enclaves. He suggests that this points to a more variegated and functional conception of moral and religious community, one in which a strong religious individualism exists along with strong commitment to a specific religious community or institution, in turn providing a solid sense of group identity.

While changes in American culture impact on the attitudes of the Jews, David Teutsch maintains that, despite their high level of integration and assimilation, American Jews continue to have unique patterns of religious expression, due to the complex interweaving of ethnicity, religion and culture.⁷⁴ An example is the growth, during the 1960s and 1970s, of *chavurot*, small, informal study groups which focus on study of Jewish texts. In addition, the American Jewish sense of ethnic identity is linked to the existence of the State of Israel, which has taken on a “major sacral dimension” in North America.⁷⁵ Yet, there is a growing cultural gap between American and Israeli Jews, perhaps due to differing political perspectives. As well, the majority of American Jews no longer understand Hebrew, the language of Judaism’s sacred texts, nor do they practice the daily, weekly or even cyclical annual observance of their forebears, but increasingly are linked to Judaism only through life-cycle events. Teutsch sees in these developments a need for American Judaism to develop strategies and approaches to religious expression that maximize involvement of all types of Jews through a renewed and pluralistic religious vision in which the moral and political are linked to the theological. Among the tools to develop that linkage is language, particularly that of the liturgy, through which a postmodern conception of God can be expressed.

⁷³ Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*, 250.

⁷⁴ David A. Teutsch (ed.) *Imagining the Jewish Future: Essays and Responses* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 250.

⁷⁵ Teutsch, *Imagining the Jewish Future*, 6.

The diversity of Jewish expression in contemporary North America draws on a range of thinking, including the philosophical and theological work of various scholars who have tried to deal with the implications for Judaism of the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel. These events raise profound questions. Can a Jew still believe in God after the Holocaust? Can humanity be trusted again? What are the implications for the security of the State of Israel? Early responses, in the first decades after these events, were partial, and given by thinkers who had been active earlier in the century. Leo Baeck did not directly address the issues and remained an ethical optimist; Mordecai Kaplan defined God as a process for good and saw human evil as the responsibility of humans, not God; and Martin Buber emphasized human inadequacy but did call for an openness to God to renew the relationship with humanity.⁷⁶ By the mid 1960s, Jewish existentialists (influenced by the earlier thought of major pre-World War II figures such as Buber, Rosenzweig and Kaplan) were recognizing the Holocaust as a central issue of contemporary Jewish theology. Some of them, such as Richard Rubenstein, focussed on the disaster and challenged Jews to embrace a sense of religious community in order to share their condition of living in a time of the death of belief in God, a time of acceptance that Jews are unaided by any higher power but only by their own resources.⁷⁷ Yet Rubenstein did not think Judaism has lost its meaning or power, because he did not see a theistic God as necessary for Jewish religious life.⁷⁸ Others, such as Emile Fackenheim, took a more active, existentialist approach, and, in arguing for the uniqueness of the Holocaust, maintained that God's presence or absence could not be explained, that Jews must accept their condition and its contradictions and endure them,

⁷⁶ David Ruderman, *Jewish Intellectual History: 16th to 20th Century, Part II* (Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company, 2002).

⁷⁷ Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); cf. Jacob Neusner (ed.) *Understanding Jewish Theology* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1973).

⁷⁸ Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, cited in Jacob Neusner, "The Holocaust and Contemporary Judaism", pp.177-193 in *Understanding Jewish Theology*, Jacob Neusner (ed.).

but that they must preserve Judaism and the Jewish people.⁷⁹ In contrast, Neusner holds that there is no implication of the Holocaust for Judaic theology or for Jewish community that was not present before the rise of Hitler because “Judaic piety has all along understood how to respond to disaster”.⁸⁰ In consequence, those for whom the classical symbolic structure of God, Torah, *Israel* remained intact would find wisdom in classic piety, and those for whom classical Judaism offered nothing would not change their attitude because of the Holocaust.⁸¹ At the same time, key Jewish thinkers shifted their focus to the areas of Torah study and *halakhah* or Jewish law. Educated Jews applied new approaches to analyzing and interpreting religious writings, approaches deriving from philosophy, history and philology. The existentialist Eugene Borowitz suggested that the biblical concept of covenant could be used to reconcile very different views of *halakhah* between the more halakhically observant Jews and those less so. For him, as well as others, the covenant embraced “both God and the people Israel as responsible agents, holding in equilibrium God’s demands and Israel’s needs, humanitarian duties to the world at large and particular obligations to the people”.⁸² This thinking harks back to the views expressed before World War II by Mordecai Kaplan, who recognized that any discussion of one of the fundamental tenets of Jewish commitment, whether God, Torah or *Israel*, would need to look at the relationships among all three elements, not simply to focus on one of them.⁸³

In contrast to Kaplan, Abraham Joshua Heschel adhered to the idea of *Israel* as a chosen people, that is, one with a responsibility to determine what God asks of man. He

⁷⁹ Neusner, *Understanding Jewish Theology*; Ruderman, *Jewish Intellectual History*; Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1980).

⁸⁰ Neusner, “The Holocaust and Contemporary Judaism”, 193.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 763.

⁸³ Norbert M. Samuelson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 267-287; Alan T. Levenson, *Modern Jewish Thinkers: An Introduction* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 2000), 159-188.

was also concerned with “reappropriating biblical and Rabbinic expressions of Jewish theology in a strikingly modern idiom that combines touches of the hasidism of his youth, mysticism, continental phenomenology and a hint of existentialism”.⁸⁴ Heschel saw *halakhah* through a somewhat mystical lens, as an inward dynamic process through which man could recover his faith via experience, with the Jew being asked to take a leap of action rather than a leap of thought. This experience would enhance his grasp of the ineffable, in contrast to the application of reason or the utilitarian observance of Jewish law.⁸⁵

At the end of the 20th century, the cross-cultural phenomenon, postmodernism, was clearly influencing Jewish theological thought. Kepnes maintains that Jews living in the postmodern condition no longer find their guiding ideologies in the transformative events of the modern period, the *Haskalah*, the Holocaust, and the establishment of the State of Israel.⁸⁶ In Gillman’s view, postmodernity (in contrast to modernity) “emphasizes a new humility about human power, a vision of science as resting on arbitrary foundations, and a recognition of the limits of reason as a resource for dealing with the most significant dimensions of human experience ... the postmodern impulse accentuates the subjectivity of all human experience”.⁸⁷ Gillman maintains that Jewish postmodernism resulted not only from the Holocaust (the most demonic expression of modernity), but also from the failure of the scientific approach to Torah study to address issues of meaning and from the emergence of a Jewish feminist voice, which has led to the development of much creative new liturgy and ritual to deal with significant moments in the human life-cycle.

⁸⁴ Neil Gillman, “Contemporary Jewish Theology”, pp. 441-460 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 443.

⁸⁵ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*.

⁸⁶ Kepnes, *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, 1-2.

⁸⁷ Gillman, “Contemporary Jewish Theology”, 456

Emmanuel Lévinas is considered the key philosophical figure of Jewish postmodernism.⁸⁸ His work is concerned with understanding the significance of the other person in order to understand the nature of being and knowledge of reality. He held that while traditional metaphysics sustained a distinction between the One and the Other, this distinction is actually incorporated within a single point of view, a totality, thus erasing complete and true otherness. The subjectivity of the other person is beyond this totality as it cannot be grasped by thought alone. This otherness commands the One (I or the self as an individual) to assume a responsibility for the Other which is beyond the care of its own self-preservation. This response to the Other's otherness establishes the One's ethical identity but also challenges the One to respect the absolute otherness of the Other. Thus, the notion of responsibility is at the core of ethics.⁸⁹ Lévinas felt that, "in the aftermath of Hitler's exterminations ... Judaism turned inward towards its origins", and he engaged in detailed study of Jewish texts to elaborate his philosophy.⁹⁰ In these texts he found Judaism conceiving of humanity as needing freedom from action dictated by sacred powers, yet integrating this need with its desire for transcendence by "experiencing the presence of God through one's relation to man. The ethical relation will appear to Judaism as an exceptional relation: in it, contact with an external being, instead of compromising human sovereignty, institutes and invests it".⁹¹

According to Kepnes, postmodern Jewish scholarship sees historical events as too complex and opaque to reveal clear meanings, and turns instead to hermeneutical strategies which recover the voice of the marginalized and the Other in Jewish history and thought, and which use traditional Jewish texts to give expression to contemporary

⁸⁸Gillman, "Contemporary Jewish Theology"; Kepnes, *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*.

⁸⁹ Thomas Trezise, *Encounters with Levinas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁹⁰ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (trans. Sean Hand) (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xiii.

⁹¹ Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 16.

issues of theological meaning.⁹² For example, Adi Ophir, using postmodern interpretive techniques, examines the Yom Kippur liturgy used in Israel today to conclude that it provides a common ground for interaction between religious Israeli Jews who adhere to a transcendent concept of God and secular Israeli Jews who may or may not be indifferent to the concept of God, but who do not see a possibility of articulating a representation of God in human language.⁹³

Edith Wyschogrod holds that Jewish theology after World War II became Holocaust theology, given the need to understand the event and its impact on Judaism, but that a post-Holocaust, postmodern Jewish theology is now needed and can emerge from both the ethical metaphysics of Lévinas and Hasidic thought.⁹⁴ For her, postmodernism is characterized by instability of meaning and a break with conventional frameworks from which to make meaning. In her view, postmodernism is both a methodological approach which can be used to demonstrate how the language of reason may be duplicitous, and an ontological term which “signifies the dismantling of the understanding of being and time that has dominated Western thought from its Greek beginnings to the present”.⁹⁵ She holds that postmodernism includes a “deep negation”, and finds a similar negation in Hasidic thought as interpreted by Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel.⁹⁶ She links this negation to the grounding of hasidism in Lurianic *kabbalah*, which in turn drew on the neoplatonic thought of Plotinus, for whom “the One and the

⁹² Steven Kepnes, “Postmodern Interpretations of Judaism: Deconstructive and Constructive Approaches”, pp.1-20 in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, Steven Kepnes (ed.) (New York: New York University Press), 1996

⁹³ Adi Ophir, “The Poor in Deed Facing the Lord of All Deeds”, pp.181-217 in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, Steven Kepnes (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

⁹⁴ Edith Wyschogrod, “Hasidism, Hellenism, Holocaust: A Postmodern View”.

⁹⁵ Edith Wyschogrod, “Hasidism, Hellenism, Holocaust: A Postmodern View”, 303.

⁹⁶ Edith Wyschogrod, “Hasidism, Hellenism, Holocaust: A Postmodern View”, 310.

nihil are nondifferent. Thus there is already a deep, deep negation within the core of divine plenitude”.⁹⁷

In general then, the Holocaust- focussed Jewish theology of the early postmodern period appeared to be based on a classic Jewish perception of the nature of God, whereas the postmodern approach demonstrates the possibility of evolving a new understanding of the concept, one linked more closely to ethical philosophy and to the understanding set forth in the mystical strain of Judaism. Given that the Jewish Renewal movement explicitly refers to Hasidic thought as one of the strands woven into its approach to respiritualizing daily life, the potential for its reconstruction of Jewish theological meaning to address a postmodern Jewish ontology becomes clear.

1.5 Chapter Outline

The rest of this dissertation argues that theological meaning in Jewish Renewal is reconstructed through five strategies: reinterpreting fundamental ideas to suit contemporary sensibilities; deriving authority for that reinterpretation from both traditional and contemporary thinkers; emphasizing the imaginal to achieve redemption; expressing the interpretation in liturgy, and linking the interpretation to the greater purpose of developing a post-Holocaust Judaism.

The leaders of the Jewish Renewal movement strongly encourage adherents to learn and use Hebrew, so that they may more fully appreciate the depth and richness of Judaism. As a sign of respect for this emphasis, in setting out my analysis of how Jewish Renewal reconstructs theological meaning, I have entitled each chapter in English accompanied by a (transliterated) Hebrew word or phrase which captures the key concept underlying each strategy.⁹⁸ The concept embraced within the Hebrew term is explained at the beginning of each chapter.

⁹⁷ Edith Wyschogrod, “Hasidism, Hellenism, Holocaust: A Postmodern View”, 313.

⁹⁸ There is no consistent style of transliteration within the various Jewish Renewal documents that I have examined, so in general I have chosen to adopt the transliterations indicated by the *Encyclopedia Judaica*,

Chapter 2, *Midrash: Reinterpreting God, Torah, Israel*, sets out the postmodern context in which Jewish Renewal reconstructs theology, as well as the main elements of the theology embedded in the Jewish Renewal texts. It describes the relationships among the reinterpreted theology via clusters of terms and concepts, including creation, revelation and redemption, as well as worship, service and study. The foundations in rabbinic and kabbalistic thought are introduced.

Chapter 3, *V'hakhamim omri(m): Deriving Authority From the Sources*, examines the way in which the reinterpreted understanding of God is perceived and portrayed as emerging out of the Jewish mystical and rabbinic traditions. This reinterpretation is analyzed as rooted in, but projecting beyond, modern liberal Jewish interpretation. The reinterpretation is also positioned within the frame of reference of contemporary scientific and psychological thought, and the dialogue with selected, contemporary, non-Jewish spiritual thought is explored.

Chapter 4, *Tikkun Olam: Emphasizing the Imaginal*, examines Renewal's emphasis on the imaginal as the locus of redemptive activity. It discusses the role and importance of the imaginal in psychological and religious thinking, and explores the emergence of Renewal's emphasis on the imaginal from the primary matrix of hasidic thought.

Chapter 5, *Barukh Attah: Expression in Liturgy*, examines the content of Renewal liturgy and demonstrates that it adapts the structure, form and wording of

CD ROM Edition, Version 1.0 (Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia Ltd., 1997). In my discussion of Jewish liturgy in Chapter 5, I have chosen to adopt the transliterations provided by the prayerbook *Siddur Sim Shalom*, (seventh printing) (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) 2003), which may occasionally differ from that of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. In cases where neither source contains the transliteration of a Hebrew term, or where there is a difference of opinion, I have relied on the advice of Professor Pierluigi Piovanelli and Rabbi Arnold Fine. Elsewhere, when referring directly to Jewish Renewal documents or other quotes, I use the transliterations found in those documents and quotes. In addition, definitions given for Hebrew terms are taken from specific documents where indicated, or from the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

traditional Jewish liturgy to include the reinterpreted themes of God, Torah, *Israel*, and thus embeds its reconstructed theology into daily spiritual expression.

Chapter 6, *L'Dor Va-Dor: Bridging Past and Future*, examines the Renewal interpretation of the concepts of chosenness and covenant and suggests this interpretation is a response to the Holocaust and represents the search for a post-Holocaust metaphysics and Jewish ethics. Renewal emphasizes activities that build meaning into daily life, and this emphasis is explored in the context of postmodern tendencies and perspectives. The extent to which the rabbinic and kabbalistic foundations of the reconstructed theology seem to resonate with postmodern thought is explored.

Chapter 7, *Conclusions: A Postmodern Judaism*, refers to the larger postmodern cultural matrix within which Jewish Renewal reconstructs Jewish theology. Its strategies for that reconstruction resonate with the postmodern ethos, yet are profoundly Jewish. Renewal theology stands in tension with that of other contemporary North American Jewish approaches, yet it may be pointing the way to a twenty-first century, postmodern, post-Holocaust Judaism.

Chapter 2

Midrash: Reinterpreting God, Torah, Israel

The Jewish Renewal movement reconstructs Jewish theology within the context of the larger postmodern cultural matrix. That matrix influences both contemporary theology, broadly speaking, and Jewish thought in particular, both of which, in turn, affect Jewish Renewal theology.

2.1 The Postmodern Context

The term “postmodern” is not easily defined. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner maintain that the term developed historically but unevenly within diverse theoretical fields. Initially used in the late nineteenth century as a term applied to English painting, after World War II “postmodern” became a historical term that signified a break with the modern age.⁹⁹ Modernity is a historical periodizing term which refers to the epoch that follows the middle ages or feudalism. Its theoretical discourses championed reason as the source of social progress and knowledge as the locus of truth, and are marked by the belief that theory can mirror reality. Various democratic revolutions used the term in the attempt to overturn the feudal order and establish a just and egalitarian social order that would embody reason and social progress. Defenders of modernity maintain that modernity has the intellectual resources and potential to overcome its own limitations, which include institutions that perpetuate power imbalances through modes of domination and control.

Postmodernists, on the other hand claim that there is emerging an era which constitutes a novel stage of history and sociocultural formation and which requires new concepts and theories in order to explain processes such as technological advancement,

⁹⁹ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 1-33.

new forms of knowledge and changes in socioeconomic systems.¹⁰⁰ All of these are seen as producing increased cultural fragmentation, changes in the experience of space and time and new modes of experience, subjectivity and culture. Discourses of the postmodern are now widespread and found in a range of fields such as social theory, aesthetics and cultural theory, philosophy, and even contemporary science, which has broken with Newtonian determinism and Cartesian dualism and now embraces principles of chaos and indeterminacy. Yet not all writers who contribute to those discourses consider themselves postmodernists; some reject postmodern theory as a “species of irrationalism”.¹⁰¹

Best and Kellner point out that there is no unified postmodern theory, but that all such theories explode the boundaries between disciplines and produce a new kind of discourse which is supradisciplinary.¹⁰² They argue that postmodern theories tend to be reductive and narrow, arguing from cultural and discursive perspectives but generally ignoring issues of economics and production, even though the economy remains the central structuring institution of our capitalist society. They hold that we are living in a transitional, borderline period between modernity and the new, as yet inadequately theorized social situation, one which calls for supradisciplinary and multiperspectival approaches which utilize a blend of both modern and postmodern theories.

Richard Tarnas echoes this idea of a multiperspectival approach in his description of the postmodern intellectual situation.¹⁰³ He perceives two antithetical impulses in that situation: “one pressing for a radical deconstruction and unmasking- of knowledge, beliefs and world views- and the other for a radical integration and reconciliation”.¹⁰⁴ He argues that the complexity and ambiguity of the contemporary situation has produced a postmodern mind that, in contrast to the modern mind, is essentially an “open-ended,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 32.

¹⁰² Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, 256-304.

¹⁰³ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 395-410.

¹⁰⁴ Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 407.

indeterminate set of attitudes that has been shaped by a great diversity of intellectual and cultural currents".¹⁰⁵ The postmodern mind appreciates the plasticity of reality and knowledge, stresses the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principles, and recognizes that human knowledge is subjectively determined by many factors, so that it is relative and fallible rather than absolute or certain. Reality is a fluid, unfolding process, continually affected and moulded by actions and beliefs, and in some sense constructed by the mind, not simply perceived by it. Thus, all human understanding is interpretation, and no interpretation is final. This awareness of the mind's fundamentally interpretive nature is signalled by the prevalence of the idea of paradigms in contemporary discourse. Yet, the openness and indeterminacy of the postmodern mind can lead to a dogmatic relativism and a fragmenting skepticism, and provide little firm ground for the development of a worldview, so that the postmodern human quest for meaning in the cosmos is problematic, rejecting totalization and limiting knowledge to the local and the specific.¹⁰⁶

Yet Tarnas sees in the pluralism, complexity and ambiguity of the postmodern intellectual situation "precisely the characteristics necessary for the potential emergence of a fundamentally new form of intellectual vision".¹⁰⁷ In particular, the cultural and intellectual role of religion is being transformed, with the simultaneous decline in the influence of institutionalized religion but the resurgence of the religious sensibility itself. The postmodern mind is marked by a resurgence of still-vital forms of both modern and pre-modern sensibility.¹⁰⁸ These include the scientific approach, romanticism, the enlightenment, renaissance syncretism, and the major western religions of Protestantism,

¹⁰⁵ Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 395.

¹⁰⁶ In *The Passion of the Western Mind*, p. 401, Tarnass points to Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of the postmodern as 'incredulity toward metanarratives', but does not give a specific reference.

¹⁰⁷ Tarnass, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 402.

¹⁰⁸ This may be due, at least in part, to postmodernism's rejection of modernism and its "cult of the new and novel", as discussed by Graham Ward in "Introduction, or A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace", pp. xv-xliii in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* Graham Ward (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) xlii.

Catholicism and Judaism. As well, it incorporates elements of the western cultural tradition going back to the Hellenistic era, including platonic and presocratic philosophy hermeticism, mythology and the mystery religions. This mixture is in turn melded with a multitude of non-western cultural perspectives such as the Buddhist and Hindu mystical traditions, western esoteric traditions, and archaic and indigenous perspectives pre-dating western civilization, including neolithic European and Native American spiritual traditions.

Tarnas holds that the modernist ascendancy of secular individualism and the decline of traditional religious belief have precipitated widespread spiritual anomie but ultimately also encouraged greater spiritual autonomy. Postmoderns, aware of the individual's responsibility for self and capacity for creative innovation, work out meaning for themselves, drawing on a vast range of spiritual resources. There is a trend to rethinking and reformulating the human relation to nature; various contemporary scientific theoretical approaches (including the Gaia hypothesis), blended at times with archaic and mystical conceptions of nature, point to the possibility of a non-reductionist scientific worldview.¹⁰⁹

Tarnas suggests this integrative tendency has been encouraged by the postmodern inclination to rethink the nature of imagination. Visible in the work of writers in various disciplines, this perspective on imagination "no longer conceives it as simplistically opposed to perception and reason; rather, perception and reason are recognized as being always informed by the imagination".¹¹⁰ The increased understanding of the power and complexity of the unconscious is linked to a growing awareness of the "fundamental mediating role of the imagination in human experience".¹¹¹

Richard Kearney has examined the philosophical evolution of the concept of imagination in western thought, which melded ideas from both Hellenic and Hebraic

¹⁰⁹ Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, 405.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

sources.¹¹² The Hellenic notion of imagination treats it primarily epistemologically, from the viewpoint of cognition, whereas “the singular originality of the Hebraic concept” emphasizes the ethical aspect, the human’s free choice between good and evil.¹¹³ He holds that the “hebraic account” of the origin and development of imagination, which in Hebrew was *yetser*, stemming from the root *yzr* (create), sees it as the human creative impulse to imitate divine creation.¹¹⁴ In this account, expressed through rabbinic and kabbalistic thought as well as hasidic tales, imagination is seen as potentially both positive and negative, useable for both good and bad, and thus with an underlying ethical aspect that can be the source of meaning in life.

At the same time, Kearney points to postmodernist thinkers’ concerns with the “demise of the imagination” because the image is now less the expression of an individual subject and more a commodity of consumerist culture.¹¹⁵ For Kearney, postmodernism is not so much as a step beyond modernity, but a reworking of the crisis within modernity. That crisis is the collapse of the belief that progressive social emancipation leads to increased meaning, as the central western humanist ideologies of universal advancement and emancipation are replaced by a complex network of beliefs that characterize the more open and reflexive postmodern world.

This reworking explains the postmodernist inclination to reexamine the diverse traditions that gave rise to modernity. It also requires discrimination between “what is destructive in the modern legacy and what is potentially enabling” as well as “rigorous philosophical reflection and ethical responsibility”.¹¹⁶ Referring to the work of Lévinas, (which I discuss in Chapter 6), Kearney calls for the postmodern development of an ethical imagination, a concept which sees the role of imagination in terms of the

¹¹² Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

¹¹³ Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 52.

¹¹⁴ Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 38.

¹¹⁵ Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 6

¹¹⁶ Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 1-33, 26-27.

relationship between self and other, and which helps western society to avoid the potential postmodern “descent into apocalyptic emptiness”, because that society subscribes to the ethical demand of responsibility to the “other”.

As will be seen in the discussion which follows, Jewish Renewal’s expression of its theology reflects certain postmodern tendencies. Yet it also builds on classical Jewish theological expression

2.2 Jewish Theological Expression

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Jewish theology has existed since biblical times, and can be traced through various evolutions in the biblical, rabbinic, medieval and modern periods. To be robust, a theology must possess both contemporaneity, “so that its teachings cohere with our present state of knowledge”, and consistency, so that there are no internal contradictions.¹¹⁷ Louis Jacobs points out that internal consistency is particularly difficult with regard to Jewish theology given the rich variety of diverse views that have been advocated by Jewish thinkers over the centuries.¹¹⁸

These views have been expressed in the various texts of rabbinic Judaism, particularly the Talmud. Yet they are also contained in another type of Jewish literature, *midrash*. *Midrash* is not a particular text, but a collection of texts. As Barry Holtz explains, it is helpful to think of *midrash* (a word which is based on a Hebrew root meaning ‘to search out’) as both the process of interpreting sacred texts and as a corpus of works that represents the collection of these interpretations.¹¹⁹

Midrash emerged initially as an attempt to maintain a sense of continuity between ancient biblical traditions and Hellenistic Judaism. It was, and remains, a way of dealing with religious tension and discontinuity, when new cultural and intellectual pressures

¹¹⁷ Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (London: Behrman House, 1973), 4.

¹¹⁸ Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 1-20.

¹¹⁹ Barry Holtz, “Midrash”, pp. 177-211 in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classical Jewish Texts* (New York: Summit Books, 1984).

have to be addressed in a way that resolves religious crises and “reaffirms continuity with the traditions of the past”.¹²⁰ A number of external ideas, such as that of the soul and the afterlife, entered rabbinic Judaism by way of *midrash*.

Midrashic texts can be exegetical, homiletical or narrative. Understanding them requires that the reader learns to “think midrashically” by understanding and accepting that rabbinic style used both “creative historiography” and “creative philology” to interpret texts.¹²¹ Creative historiography involved imaginative search for reasons, filling in of historical gaps and explication of meaning and motivation. Creative philology involved the use of puns, wordplays, letter reversals and convergence of sounds as techniques which could unlock the secret mystery of the Bible.

By reinterpreting the basic building blocks of Jewish theology, God/Torah/*Israel*, Schachter-Shalomi is engaging in contemporary *midrash*; as will be seen, he uses both creative philology and a creative approach to interpretation of science, rather than creative historiography, to develop his contemporary midrashic texts.

Jacobs holds that Jewish theology should address a range of issues including the view of God and the God-human relationship, the meaning and significance of worship, and the ideas of Messiah and the chosen people. In his discussion of Jewish theology he comments on several aspects of these issues, such as God’s unity, transcendence and immanence, creation, ethics, Torah and *mitzvot*, chosenness, peoplehood and statehood, and the messianic hope and belief in the hereafter.¹²²

As mentioned previously, Jacob Neusner argues that all varieties of Jewish theology, however expressed, address the three central issues of God, Torah and *Israel*, and that contemporary expressions of Jewish theology must confront these themes in the

¹²⁰ Holtz, “Midrash”, 179.

¹²¹ Holtz, “Midrash”, 189.

¹²² Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 1-20

context of the Holocaust and modern changes in the condition of the Jewish people.¹²³ Thus, the main elements with which a Jewish theology is constructed appear to be the nature of God and the God-human relationship, the relevance of Torah and worship of God, and the meaning of Jewish peoplehood. Each of these elements appears to be associated with a number of concepts, forming clusters, and all are interrelated. Schachter-Shalomi elaborates Jewish Renewal theology via midrashic style interpretation of several of these concepts.

2.3 Jewish Renewal's Theological Expression

The expression of the movement's theology must be seen in the context of three major factors: the Holocaust (*Shoah*), the paradigm shift, and the foundational virtue of hasidism and *kabbalah*. These aspects are more fully discussed in subsequent chapters; I introduce them here in order to aid understanding of the sections which follow, which contain numerous hasidic and kabbalistic references as well as some references to the Holocaust.

In his 1993 work, *Paradigm Shift*, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi implies that Judaism has failed to integrate the experience of the Holocaust, and thus has not yet been able to renew its own spiritual drive nor grasp that its task today is to focus not only on its own good, but the good of the entire planet. The post-Holocaust world needs *tikkun* – healing, repair and transformation – but the old Judaism is no longer repairable and cannot be the vehicle for that *tikkun*.

Just as “Biblical Judaism ran out of time at the destruction of the First Temple” and could not be repaired through the “patch job of the Second Temple”, so after Auschwitz “time ran out for rabbinic Judaism”.¹²⁴ Spiritual formation within the deistic

¹²³ Jacob Neusner, *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973).

¹²⁴ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift: From the Jewish Renewal Teachings of Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi* (ed. Ellen Singer; Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1993), 265.

paradigm of the biblical, patriarchal period gave way to the theistic perspective of the rabbinic period. After the Holocaust, after Hiroshima and with the establishment of the State of Israel, another “paradigm shift” is guiding Judaism.¹²⁵ In the new paradigm, the “emerging Gaian cosmology”, which Schachter-Shalomi sees himself as helping to shape, portrays the entire planet (Gaia) as evolving toward a higher level of universal consciousness.¹²⁶ In such a fluid period of shift, the “legal-rational order” gives way to “a more empirical, experiential mode”, a phenomenon which “purists” refer to as “syncretic”.¹²⁷ In such a period new religions emerge and old ones are transformed. In consequence, the restoration of a vanished “*Yiddishkeit*”, the religious culture of Yiddish speaking or Eastern European Jews, is no longer a viable option for *Israel*.¹²⁸ Nor are the patching attempts embodied by the denominational approach or the preservative attempts of contemporary hasidism likely to be effective. A renewed Judaism is required, one which draws on past spiritual tools and traditions, particularly the wisdom of hasidism and *kabbalah*, to develop new tools and traditions. But this new Judaism develops a perspective linked to the shifting paradigm and an emerging Gaian cosmology, and encourages Jews, who once needed to maintain their distinctiveness, now to see themselves as an organic part of the whole human family.

As explained in the previous chapter, I take Renewal’s theology to be largely that expressed by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. In a work published in 2005, Schachter-Shalomi elaborates his theology using a complex image. He refers to the “deep structure” of Judaism, and to the “teachers of our lineage”, and in particular to the work of the German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig.¹²⁹ Writing in the earliest decades of the

¹²⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, xx.

¹²⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, xx. I discuss the Gaia theory and the Gaian approach to spirituality and consciousness in Chapter 3.

¹²⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 291.

¹²⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, xix.

¹²⁹ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (with Rabbi Daniel Siegel), *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist* (Victoria: Trafford, 2005), 17.

20th century, Rosenzweig set out a comprehensive view of reality, which posited the elements of reality – God, World and Man – linked by the processes of Creation (God and World), Revelation (God and Man) and Redemption (Man and World). He also conceived of *Israel* as, in essence, an eternal people, separate from state and the events of history, and thus representing Man. These ideas were represented symbolically by two triangles intertwined to form a six-pointed star, a late symbol of Judaism which he called the Star of Redemption.¹³⁰

Schachter-Shalomi builds on this work to develop a more complex image using a three dimensional star to represents his “contemporary credo”.¹³¹ The three-dimensional star consists of three triads, each of which is a set of the traditional Jewish themes linked together to form a unity: God-Torah-*Israel*; Creation-Revelation-Redemption; and Worship (*avodah*)-Deeds of Kindness (*gemillut chasadim*) and Study (of Torah). These are illustrated in Figure 2.

¹³⁰ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (trans. from the second edition, 1930, by William Allo; Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1970).

¹³¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 21.

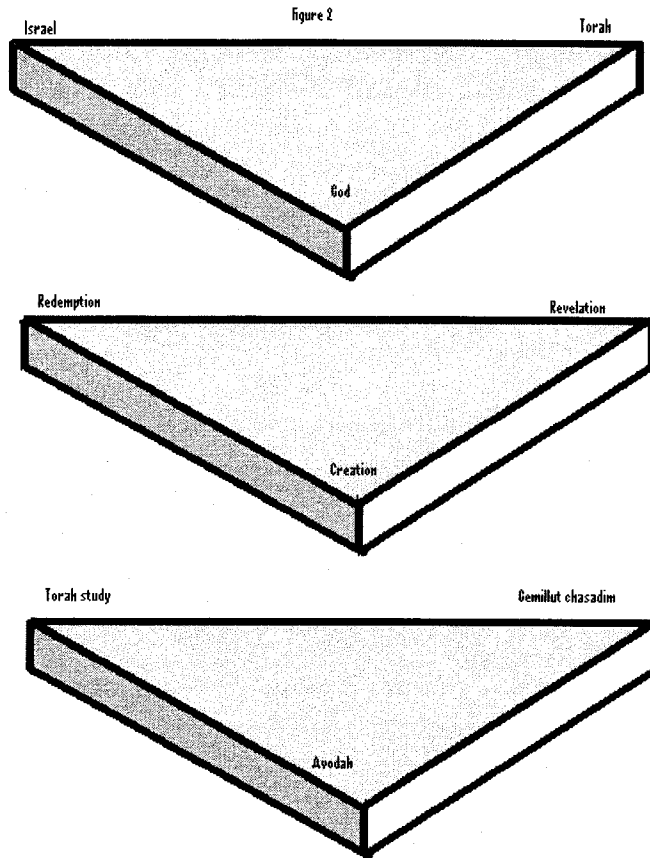


Figure 2: Schachter-Shalomi's "Contemporary Credo"

The first triad can be considered to be the force in the universe, the second to be the functions or actions of the elements in the first (for example, God's action is creation), and the third to be humanity's task as response to the force and its action. If these triads are visualized as existing on the horizontal plane, one below the other, then it can be seen that, looking vertically, there are three related clusters of themes: God/Creation/Worship; Torah/Revelation/Kindness; and *Israel* / Redemption/Study. It is these clusters which I discuss below.

Schachter-Shalomi maps the three-dimensional star onto the kabbalistic tree of life, with elements of the triads corresponding to nine *sefirot*, all bound together by a tenth *sefirah*, the *brit* or covenant. The whole is then considered to exist in a range of four

universes of discourse, which are the four worlds of kabbalistic thought. It is this complex image that is explained below.

2.4 The God Cluster

2.4.1 God and Creation

Schachter-Shalomi's conception of God is explicated both in direct references to divine attributes, names, actions and human-divine relationships and experiences, and through discussions of creation, pleroma, divinity, soul, prayer and meditation. Taken together, these references trace out a clear picture of his interpretation of this most fundamental Judaic theme. I will look first at God's attributes and names and then turn to the human relationship to and experience of God.

God is cosmic, the creator of the universe operating continuously on a vast, cosmic realm and timescale. In discussions on the importance of prayer and shabbat, this becomes clear; for example: "Yah, our God, sovereign over the universe";¹³² "eternal God, creator of the universe";¹³³ "God's blessed creatorship";¹³⁴ "source of all being".¹³⁵ The cosmic God is a unity, simple rather than compound, an insight which Schachter-Shalomi attributes to Maimonides: "G~d, G~d's Essence and G~d's knowledge are absolutely One".¹³⁶ The feminine is integrated in this unity. Schachter-Shalomi maintains

¹³² Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Economics: You Can Get Anything You Want In As-on-I's Restaurant* (ed. Daniel Siegel; Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2002), 17.

¹³³ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to A New Jewish Spirit: Reb Zalman's Guide to Recapturing the Intimacy & Ecstasy in Your Relationship with God* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003), 43.

¹³⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 86.

¹³⁵ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Words of Light Shabbaton Writings* (Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2000), 25.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

that patriarchal Judaism repressed the feminine which was found in its predecessor, paganism, but that it re-emerged: “the Goddess, for whom we made no place when this split happened, appeared as Torah, as Shabbat and as Shekhinah”.¹³⁷ *Shekhinah* is the feminine aspect of God, “the indwelling presence as it is at home in Judaism: Shekhinah, the Divine presence”.¹³⁸ This feminine aspect is particularly important at this time of an emerging cosmology, when feminine-oriented interpretation of the Torah is bringing new insights, “if we allow the feminine aspect of the Divine to seed us with the seed of a new awareness”.¹³⁹

Evil is also contained within the unity of God: “God is the name that man attaches to the Voice”, a voice which calls man to order his inner self to a “prime coordinate” and to do the work of transforming evil into good.¹⁴⁰ Theodicy is key to challenging our complacency and it is important to express our existential anger: “How can we take seriously any idea of God that doesn’t encompass evil as well as good?”.¹⁴¹ Both good and evil are aspects of God: “if we could get into a Mobius strip mentality... God is one”.¹⁴²

According to Schachter-Shalomi, primary sensory experiences of the Divine are important to spiritual growth, but are not emphasized in Western religions. Modern Judaism has “reduced God to a concept”, which does not provide a God individuals can relate to or the spiritual experience for which many in our culture hunger.¹⁴³ This view is supported by contemporary writers. Robert Wuthnow has explored the changing nature of American spirituality over the last half of the twentieth century, and he also identifies this

¹³⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 147.

¹³⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 144

¹³⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Words of Light Shabbaton*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 83-84.

¹⁴¹ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (with Joel Segel), *Jewish with Feeling: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Practice* (New York: Riverhead, 2005), 22.

¹⁴² Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 26.

¹⁴³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 14.

hunger for spiritual experience.¹⁴⁴ In his view, the spirituality of inhabiting sacred space associated with churches and synagogues that predominated in the 1950s gave way in the 1960s to a spirituality of seeking, marked by constant exposure to new ideas and a somewhat unfocussed, searching and sampling approach to the sacred, which often resulted in partial knowledge of various traditions linked to some practical wisdom. At the end of the century, a spirituality of practice is emerging which provides an orderly and disciplined approach to the sacred, but which is nevertheless deeply rooted in the personal and the individual. As Wuthnow points out, “Paradoxically, it is thus practice...that is most capable of generating a balanced perspective on the sacredness of the world”.¹⁴⁵ By engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, reflection, and study of texts, the practitioner is able to step back and reflect on the world, recognize how it needs healing, and invest energy into the process of healing the world.¹⁴⁶

Philip Wexler has gone further than Wuthnow, identifying deep social changes that signal postmodernism as a transitional form of society, and hypothesizing that a new type of society is emerging.¹⁴⁷ The new society is engaged in a quest for authentic experience, and is about being, experience, bodiliness and transcendence. He suggests that this search is an effort to renew and revitalize everyday life.

In Schachter-Shalomi’s view, the rationalistic approach encourages the use of nouns to describe a God who is thought of as a Being. In the last few decades, the experiential approach, whether induced by drugs or “mind-soul” disciplines learned from various religions, has led not only to an appreciation of time as flowing and the organic connectedness of everything, but more importantly to an understanding of the dynamic

¹⁴⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Philip Wexler, *The Mystical Society: An Emerging Social Vision* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000).

nature of God.¹⁴⁸ From this altered perspective, words such as “Godhead, *Eyn Soff*, Brahman” more closely describe the reality of God than “Lord, Father, King, Judge”.¹⁴⁹ God is a process rather than a static entity. We must start thinking that “God is a verb” and create interactive, rather than active or passive verb forms to describe the Divine.¹⁵⁰ Such an interactive verb form “barely exists in English”.¹⁵¹ He suggests this concept is easier to absorb if one realizes that “Hebrew is a verb-based language in which many nouns are actually participles of verbs”.¹⁵² With this understanding, the focus shifts from seeing object to seeing function and process. This understanding suggests that one of the tasks of the committed aggregate of the people *Israel* today is to replace descriptive noun pairs such as “active Father-passive Child, King-Subject, Judge-Defendant with something like mutual and interactive Friend-friend, Lover-lover, Partner-partner”.¹⁵³

Understanding God as an interactive process rather than a noun-concept leads to a Jewish orientation to “God as the Verb energizing the universe, God as the Source of all movement. The energy flows everywhere; it is how God ‘gods’ ”.¹⁵⁴ Once we orient with the “flow of God energy”, we are aligned and in harmony with the universe and the age-old Jewish view of life and behaviour, which entails commitment to “conservation, preservation, ecological concern, organicity and appropriateness”.¹⁵⁵ Prayer and ritual are important, because “it is our natural function to reciprocate God’s love by keeping the organic energy of the universe flowing any way we can”.¹⁵⁶ Prayer completes the circuit

¹⁴⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 139-142.

¹⁴⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 141.

¹⁵⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 266.

¹⁵¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 21.

¹⁵² Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 62.

¹⁵³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 48.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 70.

of God's energy and helps to keep it flowing, so it is important that we make time for prayer, especially at dawn and dusk, because "God is manifested in cyclical time, in the recurring flow of recreation".¹⁵⁷

This understanding of God as a dynamic process leads to a different understanding of the relationship between man and God. In a discussion tracing the evolution of the Jewish understanding of God, Schachter-Shalomi maintains that deism was the dominant mode until the destruction of the Second Temple, when there was a shift to theism. During the deistic period, God was considered to inhabit space, moved around the cosmos, and was worshipped through sacrifices, whereas under theism, God became a spirit separate from the cosmos, with a sanctuary in time rather than space (the Shabbat), and was offered words in prayer. Today, many people find words inadequate and time secularized, and want the holistic understanding that can come with direct, primary experience. As a result, we look internally for God: "First, we sought God in space, in *olam*. Then we started to look for God in time. And now we are looking for God more in person".¹⁵⁸ Schachter-Shalomi believes that today we are moving from theism to panentheism, the idea the God is everything and in everything.¹⁵⁹ "So it's not that God created the world but that God *became* the world".¹⁶⁰ This sense of God as a process, of God becoming the world, leads in turn to an understanding of God both as immanent and transcendent. For Schachter-Shalomi, the difference between "God immanent and God transcendent" is "a very thin line, which is composed only of the surface tension between

¹⁵⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 63.

¹⁵⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame: Teachings and Tales of the Hasidic Masters* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003) 21.

¹⁵⁹ Schachter-Shalomi defines panentheism as the idea that the world is contained within God, and pantheism as the idea that God and the world are co-equal, see *The Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam* (Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2003), 43. He maintains that the distinction between pantheism and panentheism is not real, because from both the galactic and molecular perspectives there is no distinction. It only exists at the human level. See *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 20.

the two aspects of God”.¹⁶¹ At this interface, in this tension, is a void. Yet paradoxically, this void is both totally empty and totally full. In the transcendental experience, one flips “between fullness and emptiness, faster and faster, until they have become one”.¹⁶² He refers to this void, simultaneously empty and full, as the “pleroma”, which is both the beginning and the end of the created world.¹⁶³ It penetrates the created world completely, is endless and eternal, and has no qualities because it has all qualities. The idea of pleroma harks back to ancient Gnosticism. The gnostics were less interested in the intellectual aspects of the way to gnosis or spiritual understanding, and more concerned with direct experience of salvation and enlightenment through experience of the divine.¹⁶⁴ For the gnostics, the supreme God was inaccessible to the human mind, and could only be described in negative terms such as ineffable, invisible, incomprehensible. Such a negative theological concept was “widespread in the classical world”.¹⁶⁵ The gnostics saw the divine world as an extension and actualization of the nature of God, calling it the *pleroma*, or “fullness “of God, with various levels of powers or being called *aeons*.¹⁶⁶

Schachter-Shalomi takes this gnostic theologumenon even further, blending it with the contemporary idea of process. He holds that, with God as process, we begin to understand that “we are in a relationship of divinity with the Divine. We are G~d. But this identity creates a terrible confusion, because we see ourselves in two ways, both as ego and as Divine”.¹⁶⁷ One antidote to this confusion is to concentrate on our unity with

¹⁶¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 54.

¹⁶² Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 56.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Roelof van den Broek, “Gnosticism and Hermeticism in Antiquity: Two Roads to Salvation”, Pp. 1-20 in *Gnosticism and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times*, Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds.) (Albany: State University of New York, 1998).

¹⁶⁵ van den Broek, “Gnosticism and Hermeticism in Antiquity: Two Roads to Salvation”, 7.

¹⁶⁶ van den Broek, “Gnosticism and Hermeticism in Antiquity: Two Roads to Salvation”, 8.

¹⁶⁷ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Gate to the Heart: An Evolving Process* (Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2000), 17.

the earth: "Perhaps our primary service now in prayer is to the Earth, to the environment, to ecological awareness. We have taken so much from Nature that now we must be aware of Her needs".¹⁶⁸ Another approach is to attune ourselves to the relationship of divinity by re-thinking our basic concept of the ego, to understand that the Self is not bounded by the skin but has "leaky margins", being permeable with a flow of energy going through.¹⁶⁹

In referring to the permeable self, Schachter-Shalomi is reflecting another characteristic of the emergent mystical society identified by Wexler. According to this view, in the modern era energy was internalized as libido. In the post-postmodern era to which our society is moving, resacralization as a mass practice recontextualizes the self to direct attention away from the internal world and to search for energy in the external, social and cosmic realms. Thus, energy is located "outside the individualized self in a re-energized view of the environment-whether animistic virtual or cosmic", a situation which "asserts a multicoded pantheism" as an alternative to internalized libido energy.¹⁷⁰ Both in its pantheistic interpretation of God and its application of the earth-centered approach to understanding the human relationship to divinity, Jewish Renewal reflects but goes beyond the ancient Jewish conception of unity. If unity is conceived as dynamic rather than static, it can be thought of from two perspectives-- as the unification of parts into a whole, or as separation of parts from the whole. Judaism classically favours the former. As Charles Vernoff holds, the principle of unity "grounds the entire structure of the Judaic worldview".¹⁷¹ In his view, it is the deepest organizing pattern for historical Judaism, and is embodied in theological terms which reflect aspects of the unity principle, such as justice (*tzedek*) reparation (*tikkun*), peace (*shalom*) and redemption (*geulah*). The principle of unity for Judaism includes several elements. First, the whole is

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Gate to the Heart*, 20.

¹⁷⁰ Wexler, *The Mystical Society*, 35.

¹⁷¹ Charles Elliott Vernoff, "Unity", pp. 1025-1032 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought* (Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.) (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 1025.

greater than the sum of its parts, so that “the ground of unitive interrelation for cosmos in its entirety, creation as such, is the transcendent oneness of God.”¹⁷² Second, to function, the whole depends upon its parts and each part depends upon the whole, so that “the uniqueness of the part and the completeness of the whole are reciprocal values that can be actualized only in and through their inherent mutuality”.¹⁷³ Third, the process of unification (*yichud*) of the parts of an entity into the whole is essential to produce a true individual with a unique identity irreducible to any other identity, and which can actualize its individual uniqueness. Fourth, “a person who has not achieved considerable actualized unification is enslaved to whatever component of his being exerts the most power at any given moment”.¹⁷⁴

Through the biblical and rabbinic periods, unity was understood as a drive toward harmony with a transcendent creator. In contrast, as I will discuss further in the next chapter, *kabbalah* and hasidism introduced immanent interpretations of unity which moved closer to the other view of unity, which holds that apparently distinct essences are identical. It is this view of unity to which pantheism adheres. Vernoff contrasts the evolution of the Hebraic view with that of India. In his view, the transcendent view of God dates back to the slave society of ancient Mesopotamia. Only a deity who transcends the elements he governs and creates could “meet the deepest spiritual needs likely engendered in late Sumer for a god of justice, freedom and harmony” by personifying a radically transcendent freedom “that could reconcile contradictions while respecting and upholding discrete integrities”.¹⁷⁵ In contrast, “ancient India’s spiritual crisis began with the compromise of distinctions among the various impersonal forces of nature, as the identities of the divine personifications blurred”.¹⁷⁶ As a result, the Indian approach was to dissolve all discrete entities into an “ultimate substantive ground of impersonal being”,

¹⁷² Vernoff, “Unity”, 1029.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷⁴ Vernoff, “Unity”, 1030.

¹⁷⁵ Vernoff, “Unity”, 1026, 1027.

¹⁷⁶ Vernoff, “Unity”, 1027.

which then led to the discovery of a radically immanent substratum.¹⁷⁷ The kabbalistic approach of postulating a godhead, *Ein-sof*, and its emanations, the *sefirot* (discussed in this and subsequent chapters), attempts to bridge this dichotomy of immanence and transcendence. While maintaining that God is both immanent and transcendent, Renewal's view of God is closer to the Eastern conception of unity as union or identification of apparently distinct essences than it is to the ancient Judaic notion of a transcendent God.

For Schachter-Shalomi, since God is both immanent and transcendent, questions that lead one to develop an inner experience of the Divine, a sense of unity with the earth and the energy flow of the universe are more important than focusing on the nature of God, the problem of evil or the literalness of revelation, because a person's relationship to God is built not on answers to those questions but on actions taken in response to here-and-now questions such as "Will I *davven* (pray) tomorrow morning?"¹⁷⁸ This attitude reflects American pragmatic philosophy of the early twentieth century, with its emphasis on experience and action over fixed principles. It also echoes some of the themes of the transcendentalist thought that has been so important in shaping the American intellectual tradition, although no references are made to those thinkers. Shaul Magid has linked Jewish Renewal to the "subversive spirituality of the American frontier" and to "the trajectory of American spirituality".¹⁷⁹ Emerging out early nineteenth century Protestant Christianity, transcendentalism, according to George Hochfield, was an American manifestation of European romanticism, in that it divinized nature, glorified human aspiration and freedom and elevated the power of intuition and the creative energy of the imagination.¹⁸⁰ It was both a search for faith and a revulsion against commercialism, and

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 26.

¹⁷⁹ Shaul Magid, "Jewish Renewal And American Spirituality" *Tikkun* May/June, 2002: 58-66.

¹⁸⁰ George Hochfield, "An Introduction to Transcendentalism", pp.35-51 in *American Transcendentalism: An Anthology of Criticism*, Brian M. Barbour (ed.) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 1973).

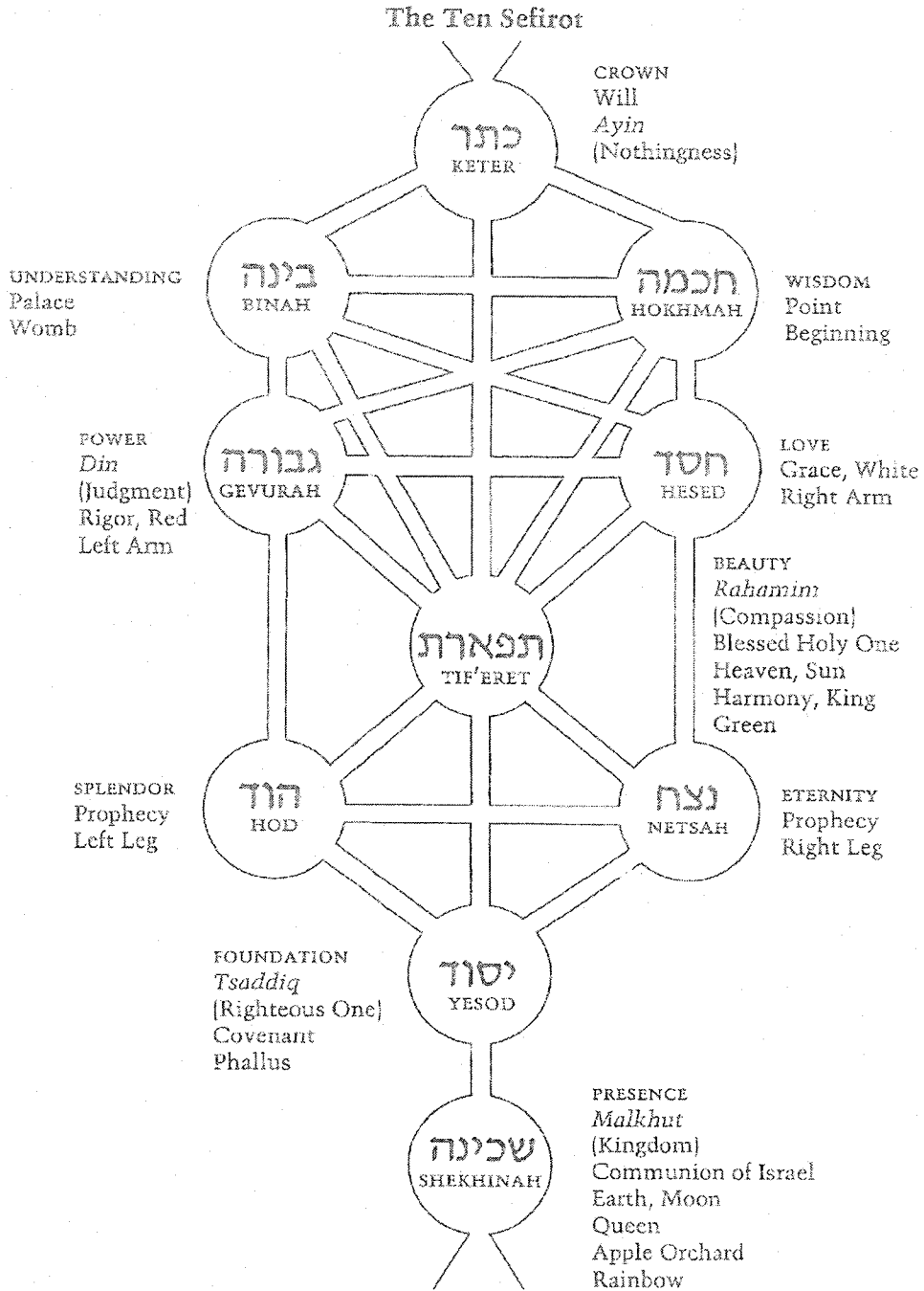
emphasized individualism, spiritual criteria for daily living, and immediate, experiential access to the divine for the common man.¹⁸¹

At the same time, it is clear Schachter-Shalomi's approach derives from his familiarity and comfort with kabbalistic concepts, which focus on inner experience. The kabbalistic Tree of Life is one pictorial representation of the structure of creation, and it contains ten dimensions or *sefirot* which Schachter-Shalomi says represent constellations of Divine attributes.¹⁸² (See Figure 3 below).

¹⁸¹ David Bowers, "Democratic Vistas", pp.9-21 in *American Transcendentalism: An Anthology of Criticism*, Brian. M. Barbour (ed.) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 1973).

¹⁸² Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 52.

Figure 3: The “Tree of Life”



The complex symbolism of the *sefirot* is based on both mathematical and organic imagery.¹⁸³ Each *sefirah* has a name, and can stand for several qualities, depending on the symbol systems the kabbalist is using. The first *sefirah* is *keter* (crown, will, ayin-nothingness); the second is *chochmah* (wisdom, point, beginning); the third is *binah* (understanding, palace, womb); *chesed* is love (grace, white, right arm); *gevurah* is power, judgement (*din*), rigor and right arm; *tiferet* is beauty, divine compassion and harmony; *netzach* is eternity, prophecy, victory, right leg; *hod* is glory, splendour, left leg; *yesod* is foundation, covenant, phallus, and *malkut* is *shekhinah*, kingdom, communion of *Israel*, queen, earth and moon.¹⁸⁴ Schachter-Shalomi presents these as the crucial elements of the kabbalistic reality map, and points out that all of them relate to each other, that is, there are pathways between them, and that the unitive experience underscores the awareness of the interrelationships or paths linking the *sefirot*.¹⁸⁵ In kabbalistic literature, the relationships and experiences associated with the *sefirot* are rendered in complex mythical imagery, which are, however, considered as figures of speech only, “organic symbols of a spiritual reality beyond normal comprehension”.¹⁸⁶

Kabbalist symbolism and cosmology also underpin Schachter-Shalomi’s stress on the importance of developing the imaginal in our lives, as it contributes to deeper understanding of our relationship to God. Starting with the four letters of the Tetragrammaton (*yud, hey, vav, hey*) he describes four levels of reality in which humans function. If these letters are written vertically, they form a ladder of reality. The lower *hey* corresponds to the world of *asiyyah*, which represents function or action, where we

¹⁸³ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends In Jewish Mysticism* (reprinted from the third revised edition; New York: Schocken, 1988), 95-109.

¹⁸⁴ Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club – Harper San Francisco, 1998), xvii. For an interesting discussion of the psychological and philosophical origins and meanings of the *sefirot*, see Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 25-35.

¹⁸⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 53.

¹⁸⁶ Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, 9.

are the objects of creation. This is our normal world, and in it we know God as *Elohim*, the Creator. The *vav* represents the world of *yetzirah*, formation, growth or gestation. This is the world of vital feelings, the imaginal realm where our emotional being is attuned and negative sentiments replaced with gratefulness, joy and compassion. In this world we experience God as the one who listens to our prayers, cares for us, flows energy to us, in other words, as a personal God. We assign names such as Judge, Father, King to the images of our experience of God at this level of reality.¹⁸⁷

The higher *hey* represents the world of *beri'ah*, creation, intellect, pure thought. In this world we understand ourselves as being the result of intended and continuous creation. God is *Ein-sof*, the infinite at the centre of the universe, “a centre to which all opposites apply simultaneously”, an essence that is the “source of consciousness, being, and bliss radiating out a universe from itself”.¹⁸⁸

The *yud* represents the world of *atzilut*, which is beyond the power of words to describe. At the core of *atzilut* is a paradox: God is an absolute singularity, with which we covenant, but in singularity there is no uniqueness of the human; “in *atzilut* there can be no object, only a subject reflecting on itself”.¹⁸⁹ This experience is the experience of the holy or numinous described by Rudolf Otto as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, an extraordinary experience of overwhelming power which is simultaneously terrifying, merciful and gracious.¹⁹⁰

In Schachter-Shalomi’s view, “a God idea that exists only on one level cannot sustain a person’s faith”, which is why the Judaism of modern synagogues is so disaffecting – it has narrowed the God idea to such an extent that few people can relate to it in a significant way.¹⁹¹ For him the four worlds approach is a way of describing not

¹⁸⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 57-63; *Paradigm Shift*, 197-99.

¹⁸⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 64-66.

¹⁸⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 68.

¹⁹⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 75.

¹⁹¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 70.

only individual experiences of the Divine, but also universes of discourse about God, humanity and the world. Applying the four worlds approach to creation, which is God's function or action, it can be seen that in *asiyyah*, "we think of God as the prime mover who makes the engine of the cosmos run".¹⁹² In *yetzirah*, God forms the world and directs meaningful coincidence; in *ber'iah*, God gives everything in the world multiple dimensions of meaning and purpose. But it is in *atzilut* that we enter a universe of discourse that is most appropriate for the time in which we live. In *atzilut*, there is no existence outside of God and there never was a creation, since in *atzilut*, "God is the essential allness which has no existence, only being, and whose being is the cosmos".¹⁹³ Just as issues framed in relation to the world of *asiyyah*, such as whether God created *ex nihilo*, were appropriate for the age of Maimonides, it is appropriate to frame today's issues in relation to the world of *atzilut*, because in our post-Einstein age we understand that matter, energy, thought and materiality "are all aspects of the same essence".¹⁹⁴

2.4.2 Worship

Living in an awareness of God entails awareness of a transformative relationship, which is expressed experientially, by communication, worship and entreaty, and service. For Schachter-Shalomi, these are all encompassed by the word *avodah* (service), which denotes a closeness that was originally offered through sacrifice, but is now offered through prayer, or *davennen*.¹⁹⁵ He sees the rediscovery of the experience of prayer as a way to enrich the "highly descriptive, oververbalized, intellectualized, and underexperienced" elitist Judaism of today.¹⁹⁶ Regular prayer, which has effects similar

¹⁹² Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 290.

¹⁹³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 293.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 219.

¹⁹⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 57.

to daily meditation practice, attunes the ego and makes it more permeable, and can help achieve a sense of oneness with God, much like the still point in meditative traditions.¹⁹⁷ This sense of closeness to the Source, which in the hasidic tradition is called *devekut*, produces a feeling of *ashrei* or happiness, and in modern terminology could be described as a sense of being “online” with the greatest server in the universe, God.¹⁹⁸

The technique of experiencing prayer can be learned with practice. In several writings Schachter-Shalomi discusses the most important prayers in the Jewish worship, including the daily morning and evening prayers as well as those used in the weekly service. I will address these more fully in Chapter 5.

Regular and sincere prayer is transformative: “talking to God once can be an electrifying experience. Talking to God regularly will nourish your soul and change your life”.¹⁹⁹ It also contributes to a strong sense of identity. Schachter-Shalomi states that the knowledge that he is part of something happening all around the world, for example as other Jews also pray when the sun brings the dawn, gives him “an amazing gift”, the sense of “belonging to a people that is conscious of life on earth as dwelling in God’s house, of feeling fortunate to have this awareness, who pray three times a day all around the world...”.²⁰⁰ At the same time, this identity has a universal human component; regular prayers are also recited by people of many other faiths, and “becoming aware of this adds a quality of vastness to the symphony of praise for God”²⁰¹

2.4.3 Summary

For Jewish Renewal, God is the word we use to describe the intuitive understanding that the entire universe is one, conscious, interconnected entity, which

¹⁹⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 19-28.

¹⁹⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Words of Light Shabbaton*, 25.

¹⁹⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 66.

²⁰⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 242-243.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

includes both good and evil, and which unfolds anew at every moment. Mankind describes God in different terms and ways, linked to the epoch in which he is living, the collective understanding of the nature of the universe and of reality, and the collective level of development of consciousness. Regular experiential appreciation of that intuitive understanding is essential, and the Jewish prayers are particularly important in this regard, with their ability to guide the individual into and back out of the altered states of consciousness needed to experience the intuitive understanding.

2.5 The Torah Cluster

2.5.1 Torah

The Torah is much more than a book or set of scriptures, it can serve as a channel to God, the source of all knowledge, because it is not merely a human work, but one that also belongs to God.²⁰² To serve in that capacity, it must be grappled with: “Torah isn’t Torah until it is interacted with”.²⁰³ According to Schachter-Shalomi, the Talmudic sages recognized the importance of this process in each generation, so that contemporary meaning can be found, through the saying, “Torah is not in heaven, it is here on earth”.²⁰⁴ Thus, the task of all committed, contemporary Jews, not just clergy or religious practitioners is to develop a thorough knowledge of traditional sources in order to create new terminology, language, root metaphors, etc., so that the revelatory process can function as effectively as it did for the ancients: “what we are looking for is a Torah which can sustain us just as Torah sustained all the generations before us”.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Economics*, 9.

²⁰³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 190.

²⁰⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 169.

²⁰⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 156.

The wisdom of Torah can only be fully appreciated if the notion of it as legislation is abandoned.²⁰⁶ Torah is the basis of a rich tradition from which to learn about the importance of creating meaningful prayer, and of understanding the crucial link between rest and the ability to reconnect to the deepest part of ourselves, ideas which underlie Abraham Joshua Heschel's metaphor of Shabbat as a temple in time.²⁰⁷ It can also be thought of as a constitution, the basis of the interchange between God and human beings, in which humans come to understand that they are to serve the purpose for which the universe was created, which is "to know and reflect back to God what it feels like to be a human being and to stand in relationship with the creator".²⁰⁸ Torah supports this relationship at different levels of awareness, that is, in the four worlds, and we perceive and describe it differently according to the universe of discourse in which we are operating. In *asiyyah*, Torah is the written word, the historical record, in which the mythic quality of the stories and eternal themes of love, jealousy and rivalry speak to us. In *yetzirah*, the world of feeling, Torah is an expression of the love between the divine teacher and the human student. In *beri'ah*, Torah is a vast repository of universal, shared consciousness which stimulates a response from God, as at the revelation on Mount Sinai, and which can be thought of as the process of inviting Torah into life. And in *atzilut*, Torah is pre-revelation, when we seem to access the mind of God directly. In totality, Torah is "a rush of focussed energy, aimed and directed for achieving consciousness".²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 266-267.

²⁰⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 38-45; for a discussion of Heschel's metaphor, see Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987, originally published 1951).

²⁰⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 98.

²⁰⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 104.

2.5.2 Revelation

Revelation begins with the flash of insight that the universe is not an accident, and that our suffering is accompanied by divine love and acceptance. Schachter-Shalomi associates it with the process of “Godbirthing”, the intuiting of a divine spark within the individual and the nurturing and growth of that awareness through daily spiritual practice.²¹⁰ While there are many paths to such an insightful experience, Jewish tradition sees the beginning of its path in the revelation to a people at Sinai, and nurtures the awareness through the annual Yom Kippur experience. It also recognizes that revelation is spiritual growth which requires the moral effort associated with the discipline of daily spiritual practices such as prayer and ritual: “the revelation alone cannot make permanent the change that happens within”.²¹¹

While, as the rabbis said, “Torah speaks in the language of humans”, that is through mythology and instruction, Schachter-Shalomi holds that Torah also recognizes, through the description of the events at Sinai, that an altered state of consciousness is required to receive revelation fully.²¹² The four worlds approach represents such an understanding, and provides other maps of reality: “In each world, there is a different way of knowing being; each revelation is a different revelation. This is exactly what we mean when we speak of altered states of consciousness”.²¹³ By developing the ability to be still, for example through meditative practice, we can receive the communication of Torah and enter altered states: “It is in this teetering between worlds that one can see God”.²¹⁴ We come to understand that Torah is constantly coming to us, that revelation is a continuous process.²¹⁵ By learning to live in the four worlds simultaneously, that is, to consult our reality maps in keeping with the immediate need, we develop an heuristic

²¹⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 91-93.

²¹¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 36.

²¹² Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of Modern Kabbalist*, 320-326.

²¹³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of Modern Kabbalist*, 327.

²¹⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of Modern Kabbalist*, 329.

²¹⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 237-239.

approach to spiritual development and come to understand that “each moment carries with it another permutation of the Divine name” and the “peak experience . . . is called getting *Olam haBa* (the world to come, that is, after redemption) into this world”.²¹⁶

Yet revelation must extend beyond the individual, and after Auschwitz and Hiroshima we must collectively learn to set limits, draw lines, and develop new myths to guide us in the new paradigm: “revelations in the coming paradigm will . . . be found in the planetary mind”.²¹⁷ For Jews, this requires the development of a “permeable Judaism”, one which shares ideas and consciousness with other faiths and paths.²¹⁸ At the same time, revelation is to be found in the daily, the ordinary, the obvious: “God reveals and creates constantly in the ordinary”.²¹⁹ And it is the ordinary and the daily where we apply *mitzvot* and the practice of deeds of kindness.

2.5.3 *Gemillut Chasadim/Deeds of Kindness*

The basis of the *mitzvot* (commandments) is responsibility, and Torah teaches that it is important to think about the consequences of actions. The *mitzvot* must unfold in the discovery of how the world works, and “we must go beyond the concept that mitzvah is legislated by an outside power, by *melekh haolam*”, that is, God.²²⁰ Jewish Renewal is not caught up in the problems associated with restoration, but supports a transformative reading of Judaism’s current place in history, and must be supported with a more progressive development of *halakhah* (the collective interpretation of Jewish law and *mitzvot*) to support concepts such as eco-kosher because much of *halakhah* is rooted in a “pre-Copernican world view”.²²¹ In the emerging paradigm, it makes sense to take

²¹⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Gate to the Heart*, 9-11.

²¹⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 303.

²¹⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 36.

²¹⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 49.

²²⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 86.

²²¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 269.

workable ideas and concepts from outside Judaism and adapt them as new or modified *mitzvot*, as well as to recognize that “there are some mitzvot that are not just Jewish” but are universal and are grounded in the individual’s relationship with God.²²²

In this regard, Schachter-Shalomi maintains that the *mitzvot* of *gemillut chasadim* are much more subtle than just the doing of good deeds, which is how they are usually defined.²²³ *Gemillut chasadim* is the establishment of the reciprocity of acceptance and love between individuals and expressing that in action. “Torah is teaching us not just what to give but how to give”, and stresses that means have to be in harmony with intentions, so that we can differentiate between that which is self-serving and that which is truly a *mitzvah*, and update the concept of what is fair in life.²²⁴

In the contemporary world, with its drive to increasingly private lives, there is less likelihood of engagement in the *mitzvot* of good deeds: “G’millut chasadim (*sic*). . . has by and large lost its centrality in Jewish life”.²²⁵ Yet the traditional system of *mitzvot*, by creating pauses in thought and action, touched different psychological levels including the pre-verbal, and thus enhanced consciousness, taught people how to become kind, and to truly see and relate to each other.²²⁶ Thus it is important that these practices are taken back into contemporary lives in ways that increase the equity in our relations with each other. For Judaism to remain linked to its traditions, this requires rethinking the concepts such as *kashrut* and *tzedakah* (charity) to encompass more global concerns, and finding ways in which to transmit to the younger generation the values that are non-verbal and experiential.²²⁷ “God resides . . . wherever God is let in”, and the action of *mitzvot* is important to ensure entrainment with the harmony of the universe.²²⁸

²²² Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 201.

²²³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 177-203. I discuss this idea of eco-kosher more fully in chapter 6.

²²⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 180.

²²⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 188.

²²⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 136-138.

²²⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 190-203.

2.5.4 Summary

Torah, then, is a channel to the divine source of all knowledge, provided it is studied intensely in order to discover meaning for contemporary lives. The ancient, rabbinic and mystical traditions of Torah interpretation provide a basis for updating Jewish mythology to provide contemporary meaning by encompassing emerging perspectives. Using the four worlds approach, Torah becomes a tool for developing consciousness and achieving the altered state which leads to the insight of revelation. Revelation is a continuous, transformative process, expressed in daily life through the action of *mitzvot*, which must also be updated to produce a more meaningful contemporary *halakhah*. In particular, the *mitzvot* of *gemillut chasadim*, deeds of loving kindness, teach people how to truly relate to each other and become entrained with the harmony of the universe.

2.6 The Israel Cluster

2.6.1 Israel, the People

Schachter-Shalomi expresses his ideas concerning Israel as a people through discussions of identity, boundaries and traditions; of relationships with non-Jews and with the State of Israel; and of the idea of chosenness as function or responsibility. He recognizes that the issue of assimilation is central for modern Jews, especially in North America, and suggests that Jews address the issue both in cost-benefit terms and in terms of the purpose of existence in this world. The “who is a Jew” issue within contemporary Judaism tends to objectify and categorize Jews because the word Jew is usually used as a noun. There is a more effective way of dealing with the question, by focussing on the

²²⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 121.

experience and actions associated with being Jewish: “if we could learn to be comfortable with using Jew as a verb, we would . . . understand gradations of Jewishness which would include . . . frequency, intensity, range and intentionality”.²²⁹ At the same time, the ancient and collective Jewish tradition is very important. In a discussion of *brit milah*, (circumcision), he emphasizes the Jewish values which are transmitted by family relationships and rituals, pointing out that, “there is an aspect of being Jewish that goes beyond a mere private matter between a soul and her God”.²³⁰

Particularly in a time of paradigm shift, it is difficult to negotiate the balance between changes in worldview and the need to retain Jewish identity and a sense of peoplehood.²³¹ Yet the Jewish people “share a root metaphor for God”, and the kabbalah and Torah both point to the idea of God growing and emerging.²³² Using a kabbalistically-based interpretive approach, the Jewish Renewal movement’s adherents “see ourselves as an active part of *K’lal Yisra’el* (*sic*)(the people Israel), helping it to find a new spiritual centre, to gather around this emerging cosmology, and creating institutions appropriate to this changed reality”.²³³ By embracing the myth and fate of the Jewish people, and thinking in terms of *klal Yisrael*, Jews can accept that they belong to a people in search of self-definition, because “there is no way to use the mind to uncover a universally acceptable definition of what it means to be or to become a Jew”.²³⁴ People who are truly committed to Judaism recognize the need to ensure its renewal and continuity, and that “the reality of our experience is that we are part of a floating crap game called Israel, moving from country to country”.²³⁵

²²⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 142.

²³⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, 78.

²³¹ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal Is Judaism NOW: To See the Power of Heart in Our Time*, Daniel Siegel (ed.) Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2005), 71.

²³² Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 77.

²³³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal Is Judaism NOW*, 120.

²³⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 152.

²³⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 167.

A key element in the search for self-definition and the establishment of a meaningful contemporary Judaism is to develop a “consensus of understanding about the holocaust (*sic*)”.²³⁶ This requires a re-thinking of the relationship with non-Jews. In Jungian psychological terms, Jews as a people need to integrate the shadow, learning to deal with non-Jews in a dialogical rather than dialectical way.²³⁷ Recognizing that Judaism is not necessarily the best or most complete spiritual path for everyone, contemporary Jews know that it is important to participate in interfaith discussion, particularly with Christians and Muslims, in order to learn from each other, find commonalities, and “move over a little bit . . . and make room for the tribes of Israel which are outside of Israel”.²³⁸ Such understanding can be strengthened by, rather than threatened by, the link between contemporary diaspora Jews and the State of Israel, because “the State of Israel is God’s grace to Israel (i.e., the people)”, and provide an opportunity to apply the lessons humanity learned in the Holocaust.²³⁹ For Schachter-Shalomi, the physical land of Israel possesses a mysterious holiness, which can serve as a model for the holiness of mother earth that Jews and all humanity should feel throughout the world.²⁴⁰

Any discussion of *Israel’s* relationship to others raises the issue of Jewish particularity and the concept of chosenness. For Schachter-Shalomi, Jews do have a particular task, which serves the universal, but so might other peoples. He uses the metaphor of the body to illustrate the organic connection between all, and to point out that being a Jew consists only in part of specific Jewish concerns.²⁴¹ Suggesting Jews are

²³⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 63.

²³⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 53-65.

²³⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 141. In this comment, Schachter-Shalomi appears to consider Christianity and Islam as offshoots of ancient Judaism.

²³⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 68.

²⁴⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 164-165.

²⁴¹ The analogy of the body politic is ancient and was used by thinkers from the classical Indians and Greeks to the 17th century, when it gave way to the idea of social contract. It is founded on the twin principles that mind or life permeates the natural world, and that one simple pattern exists at many levels of

the priestly organ of the body of humankind, he states “I need to ask about the cosmic function of this idea of Jewish chosenness” and concludes that “the cost of being Jewish is a price worth paying for the sake of humankind”.²⁴² The priestly function of Jews, expressed kabbalistically as the responsibility to raise the divine sparks in everyone and everything in the world, can help in the process of humanity’s responsibility for healing the planetary organism.²⁴³ *Israel* has the characteristics of race, nation and religion, yet is not quite any one of these, but is “the people who are preparing for the time when the whole world and all of humankind will see themselves as the kingdom of God”.²⁴⁴

2.6.2 Redemption

Schachter-Shalomi expresses his understanding of the religious quest for salvation in discussions of messianism and of *tikkun olam* (repair of the world). In Judaism redemption was traditionally associated with the saving of the Jewish people from exile and oppression through the coming of a messiah (*mashiach*), although kabbalistic literature associated redemption with a metaphysical change in the order of creation, whereby the Godhead is fully restored to the universe through union with the *shekhinah* and the defeat of demonic forces through the processes of *tikkun*.²⁴⁵

Schachter-Shalomi underlines the importance of the concept of redemption to Judaism and its power to sustain a sense of Jewish purpose and identity. The idea of *mashiach* is “essential . . . in our diet” because it propels both the individual Jew and the

being but is manifested most perfectly in the human body. See David G. Hale, “Analogy of the Body Politic”, pp. 68-69 in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas, vol. 1* (ed. Philip P. Wiener; New York: Ch. Scribner’s Sons, 1973-74).

²⁴² Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 161.

²⁴³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal is Judaism NOW*, 175-195.

²⁴⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 163.

²⁴⁵ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 451.

collective people Israel toward a transcendent purpose.²⁴⁶ He holds that in the past, the *mashiach* was seen as the leader of good against evil, a dualistic perspective that ultimately failed with the Sabbatean movement, which “didn’t work and couldn’t work as long as its messianism was triumphalist”, that is, setting one part of humanity against another.²⁴⁷ Rethinking the concept of *mashiach* from a contemporary, monistic approach “keeps the messianic dream alive” and inspires Jews to “continue doing the work of tikkun”.²⁴⁸ His intention is to retain “the Jewish flavour of *mashiach*” and use it to construct a “theology which allows us to massage the differences between the particularly Jewish and the universal”, so that the Jewish people can recognize and work compatibly with other faiths “working toward the same goals”.²⁴⁹ Shorn of its ethnic association, “a kind of no-frills *mashi’ach*” becomes an empty utopian description rather than a useful theological construct.²⁵⁰

Although he recognizes that the idea of a messiah generates uneasiness in the contemporary Jew, Schachter-Shalomi maintains that “*Mashi’ach* is simply the Jewish way of daring to hope that the future will be better than anything we have experienced so far”.²⁵¹ This hope is crucial to Jewish spiritual life, and the challenge is how to activate it: “today’s Messianic hope rests not on a passive hope for a better world, but on the active urge to create a better world”.²⁵² In Schachter-Shalomi’s view, contemporary thinkers recognize the impossibility of redeeming total evil, and accept that all humanity shares

²⁴⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal is Judaism NOW*, 7-27.

²⁴⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal is Judaism NOW*, 114. For a discussion of the Sabbatean movement see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi; The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676* (translated by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973).

²⁴⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal is Judaism NOW*, 21-22.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal is Judaism NOW*, 7.

²⁵¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 224.

²⁵² Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 227.

the condition of exile in an unredeemed world.²⁵³ The urge to create a better world is innate to all creatures, lying in the reptilian and limbic systems of the brain.²⁵⁴ In the emerging paradigm, this urge expresses itself in the bringing of a monistic approach to *gemillut chasadim*, in the “realization that all individual souls are but expressions of one Soul, doing the inner work necessary to realize that, and translating that realization into action”.²⁵⁵ That action includes working “to ensure the health of our species . . . and planet into the future”.²⁵⁶ That inner work, accompanied by daily actions to express *gemillut chasadim*, will generate a global awareness and an attitude to nature and to all of creation which sees the messianic time as one where there is a harmonious energy balance in the universe, where all creatures are in tune with the energy of the universe and possess a sense a universal connection so that there are no victors and victims, but mutually beneficial and harmonious arrangements. Yet this is not a utopia: “I don’t believe that the lion is going to stop eating lamb chops, but I have a sense that this will happen in an obvious harmony. While I think it will be true that human beings will stop eating lamb chops, *mashi’ach* will not have come for the lion if it has to eat straw”.²⁵⁷

By tracing the development of the kabbalistic concepts of *tikkun olam* and *olam haba*, Schachter-Shalomi locates in the teachings of the last three (5th, 6th and 7th) Lubavitcher Rebbes the idea that a transition to higher levels of consciousness, when there is general awareness that God is all, is associated with messianic times and that the world is entering the era of that transition: “*olam haba* is not just a time in the temporal future but a state of consciousness which can be accessed by individuals, at least, now”.²⁵⁸ The concept of *tikkun* can thus be understood not only as repairing the world but as the process of understanding that the cosmos is an integrated unity. It is a “dance of

²⁵³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 18-20.

²⁵⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 1-2.

²⁵⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 246.

²⁵⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish with Feeling*, 195.

²⁵⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 305-306.

²⁵⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikun Olam*, 30-54.

integration” through which *Israel*, as well as other peoples, heal by integrating the shadow and by working with each other to improve the world.²⁵⁹

“The messianic idea itself carries with it as sense of infinity”, so that redemption is a never-ending process of trying to achieve and maintain that sense of an internal freedom and liberation illustrated by the story of the Exodus.²⁶⁰ The extension of this Jewish sense of spiritual freedom independent of economic conditions to all others is the basis of “our desire for *mashi’ach* on a larger, more universal level”.²⁶¹ Schachter-Shalomi makes clear that this concept of redemption is important to his reconstruction of Jewish theology because it is quite different from the nature of redemption shared by the main thinkers of mainstream North American Judaism. He holds that most adherents of the three main movements, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, now share the belief that “creation is an ongoing process that is not sealed by any particular time”, a belief which has developed with the awareness of modern science.²⁶² And while there is not yet consensus, “we are slowly moving in the direction where more and more people are willing to agree that revelation is, in some way, an ongoing process”.²⁶³ Schachter-Shalomi recognizes that such a process view of redemption is not yet widespread among Jews; although he finds the beginnings of acceptance in the fact that “the overwhelming majority of Jews would say that there is an echo of *mashi’ach* in the State of Israel”.²⁶⁴ Even secular Jews who have led the State of Israel have a sense that its existence fulfills a prophetic destiny; thus, the “whole continuum of the Jewish people continues to connect the finite places of our present reality to the infinite and to place themselves within a redemptive process that is ongoing”.²⁶⁵ Redemption will have been achieved when there

²⁵⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikun Olam*, 30.

²⁶⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 369.

²⁶¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 370.

²⁶² Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 371.

²⁶³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 372.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

is a “total awakening of all that there is in the universe to the awareness that it is God”, and when the dichotomy between what we want to do and what we know we ought to do disappears at the moment of choosing to do an action.²⁶⁶

2.6.3 Torah Study

Schachter-Shalomi differentiates between Torah in the relationship God/Torah/*Israel*, where it represents consciousness, *chokhmah*, divine wisdom, and Torah in the relationship *avodah/gemillut chasadim*/Torah, where it represents devotion.²⁶⁷ In Judaism, the act of studying Torah is not limited to the obtaining of information.²⁶⁸ It is considered an act of devotion, exemplified by the Hebrew saying “*Torah li-shmah*”, which is usually translated as “Torah for its own sake”. Following the Baal Shem Tov,

Schachter-Shalomi points out that *li-shmah* actually means “for her name”, and suggests that the “her” can refer to the soul, the Torah itself, or God in the aspect of the *shekhinah*.²⁶⁹

The traditional Jewish morning prayers include a blessing for the study of Torah, which Schachter-Shalomi maintains is there for the purpose of orienting the individual to the inner level throughout the rest of the day, “so that everything you do gets connected to *Torah*”.²⁷⁰ This daily linking of life and Torah ensures the person is connected to and absorbed in God, and thus provides a basis for solving our life problems and surviving meaningfully with an idea of our purpose in this world.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 250-280.

²⁶⁸ For a fuller explanation of the meaning of Torah in Judaism, see Jacob Neusner, “The Doctrine of Torah”, pp. 193-211 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁶⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 253.

²⁷⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 256.

At the same time, studying Torah is traditionally a process that requires two people to work together. If a person is alone, he or she can invite God to be the study partner. Whether with another human or with God, an I-Thou relationship is created and the Torah itself becomes something living. Through the study and questions of each generation, the process of Torah continues and “it is as though God is also involved in the ongoing creation and development of *Torah*”.²⁷¹

From the kabbalistic perspective, the *shekhinah* is the divine indwelling or the feminine aspect of divinity. Hasidic prayer tradition begins with the *kavannah* (intention) of bringing about the union of the divine with the *shekhinah*. Torah study, as an act of devotion, energizes the *shekhinah* and brings about the union of the divine transcendent and immanent.

Schachter-Shalomi sees Torah study as a necessity: “A Jew who doesn’t study *Torah* periodically, whatever else there may be to commend his/her *yiddishkeit*, still lacks seriousness”.²⁷² Learning Torah is a lifetime process, and one starts with the mechanics, acquiring the tools and information necessary to continue the process. But the two phases must not be confused; real Torah study is not listening to lectures or acquiring knowledge by rote memory, it is active grappling with the text and its meanings for the contemporary time. It also teaches the individual to think in categories different than those imprinted by the surrounding culture and thus develops the ability to ask appropriate questions about meaning. For this reason it is important for the individual to become aware of “what is Torah-ly significant” before attempting to learn kabbalah.²⁷³ Schachter-Shalomi also sets out some techniques appropriate to *Torah li-shmah*. They include approaching it with focus and intention, clarifying the questions important to oneself, allowing the energy of the questions to flow through the learning and into an answer, reading out loud, researching commentaries to understand the details, visualizing what is being learned, looking for the principle at stake, and reviewing what has been learned. The practice of

²⁷¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 265.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 267.

Torah study teaches a language that lets Jews interact with each other beyond ethnic differences, and strengthens the awareness that “we are all part of one organism”.²⁷⁴ It is a daily reminder of the unfolding of the processes of creation, revelation and redemption, and of the individual’s partnership with God in aiding that unfolding.

2.6.4 Summary

Israel is all of race, nation and religion, yet not fully any of these, and will be perpetually in search of self-definition. Humanity can be considered as a human body, with each group acting as an organ or part with a specific function. *Israel*’s function is priestly, to use its understanding and practices to help heal the planet and aid all humanity to see itself as part of the whole organism and part of God. The concept of redemption helps Israel to retain its sense of purpose and identity. Expressed as *mashiach* or *tikkun*, it is the hope for a better future and the urge to create that future. This urge is innate and is a continuous process associated with the collective transition to a higher level of consciousness and the integration of all things in the cosmos. Torah study is an act of devotion, which should precede and form the foundation for a study of kabbalah, and not be separated from it. Practiced daily, it deepens the understanding of the processes of creation, revelation and redemption.

2.7 Covenant

Schachter-Shalomi sees the *brit* (covenant) as the force that binds together the triads described earlier, and sets the peculiarly Jewish character of the Star of Redemption: “the covenant of God with us, the Jewish people, is the core without which I could not even imagine the existence of Judaism”.²⁷⁵ He points out that no other religion has a similar concept – the Eastern spiritual traditions have no such concept, and Christianity uses the term but gives it a connotation of surrender. For Jews, the covenant

²⁷⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 280.

²⁷⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 22.

is not about surrender, it is about an enduring partnership with the Creator. Such a relationship requires the individual to make a decision on how to live, that is, how to fill his/her part of the covenantal relationship.²⁷⁶ This enduring and long-term relationship is symbolized by circumcision, a practice which Schachter-Shalomi sees as highly symbolic. The biblical description of Abraham circumcising himself and “offering that part of himself which connects a man with procreation”, underscores the enduring nature of the covenantal relationship.²⁷⁷ He feels the practice of circumcision is still important today, despite the modern concerns associated with it: “Bring the child into this covenant. There is something deeper than our political correctness”.²⁷⁸

The concept of covenant is complex, and Schachter-Shalomi takes a four-worlds approach to describing it. In the world of *asiyyah* (action), the covenant is a promise that God can count on the things that are expected of man, even if man regrets the promises. The enduring quality of the covenant comes from its strength and power. In *yetzirah*, the relationship is deeper, marked by a sense of grace and love, and endurance flows from intensity of feelings. In *beri'ah*, there is a sense of truth in the relationship, resting on the ground of trust and goodwill, and endurance is approached with intelligence and reason. And in *atzilut*, the endurance is the central part of what makes the universe true, and provides the power that makes the infinite and finite attract each other.²⁷⁹ Schachter-Shalomi also suggests that the Talmud and the Torah can be interpreted to demonstrate that a strong covenant is formed when both partners understand that they take of their own power and share with each other, rather than each having power over the other. In this way, through the sharing of power, the destinies of the partners are linked. Schachter-Shalomi points out that a key question for Jews today is whether their covenant with God is still current, and “why it is that we continue to wrestle with the God of the

²⁷⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 21-23; Id., *Paradigm Shift*, 117-125.

²⁷⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 342.

²⁷⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Words of Light Shabbaton*, 11.

²⁷⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 343-344.

covenant”.²⁸⁰ He suggests that wrestling is a commitment “to the process of redemption, of bringing unity deeper into this world”.²⁸¹

2.8 Theological Complements

It is clear that the texts associated with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi reconstruct a theology that is firmly rooted in Jewish thought, but seem to reflect Judaism’s mystical tradition more than the classical rabbinic stream of thinking. This theology conceptualizes God as an ever-unfolding cosmic creative process, which manifests in humans as an innate urge to create a harmonious existence. In contemporary humanity this ongoing process also manifests as a growing understanding that all things are integrated in the cosmos and that a collective transition to a higher level of consciousness is underway. As one element of humanity, the Jewish people still have a priestly role to play, supporting the collective evolution of consciousness through deepening the understanding of the innate urge to harmony and the ongoing process that is God. Torah study and regular worship are traditional and still valuable portals to that understanding.

From this theological stance there emerge two notable characteristics of Jewish Renewal – a strong spiritually-rooted orientation to social and political action, and a noticeable willingness to reach out to, dialogue with, and learn from other religions and spiritual paths. These characteristics are more fully reflected in the textual work of two other key figures associated with Jewish Renewal, Michael Lerner and Arthur Waskow. Although the texts of both these writers reflect simultaneously a socio-political activism and a religious outreach, Waskow’s ongoing activity and regular communications via ALEPH suggest a predominant interest in the activism, while Lerner’s ongoing production of *Tikkun* magazine seems somewhat more oriented to broadening the North

²⁸⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 354.

²⁸¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 355.

American contemporary politico-religious dialogue. Through writings oriented this way, each complements and deepens the theology set out by Schachter-Shalomi.

2.8.1 Michael Lerner: Emancipated Spirituality

With doctorates in both philosophy and clinical psychology, as well as rabbinical training, Rabbi Michael Lerner sets out a conception of Jewish Renewal that is broader than that of the movement associated with ALEPH, Schachter-Shalomi and Waskow. He describes his version of Jewish Renewal as an intricate weave of ideas which draws on: Torah and its revelation of “the deepest truths of the universe”; “the unconscious or dream material of the Jewish people at a particular period in its development”, that is, *midrash*; and contemporary psychoanalytical and sociological theory.²⁸² While he references the inspirational teaching and thinking of Schachter-Shalomi, and recognizes the contribution of ALEPH and the group calling itself the Jewish Renewal movement, from which much of his thinking derives, he maintains that the renewal of Judaism is taking place among the “activities, thinkers, theorists and activists” at work in the four main denominations of Judaism, as well as a wide-ranging constituency of Jewish social and political activist groups.²⁸³

This perspective on Jewish renewal is rooted in Lerner’s view that violence, cruelty and oppression have been internalized by humans down through the centuries through a complicated process of socialization, so that “cruelty was built into social institutions and the psychological legacy of human beings”.²⁸⁴ In contrast to its neighbours, ancient Israel saw the possibility that the world could be fundamentally transformed and cruelty defeated, provided people recognized in each other the image of God, and in fully recognizing the “other”, accept the obligation toward mutual caring and

²⁸² Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994), xiii.

²⁸³ Lerner, *Jewish Renewal*, xiv.

²⁸⁴ Michael Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal (Kabbalistic-Mystical-Neohasidic) Approach to God”, *Tikkun*, November 2004, 1 (<http://www.tikkun.org/renewal/index.cfm/action/god.html>).

concern. Still today, despite centuries of evolution toward a higher level of consciousness, “much of the pain and oppression we experience in this world is a reflection of the way we do not recognize God in the world in one another and in ourselves”.²⁸⁵ For Lerner then, “God is the Force of healing and transformation, the Force that makes it possible to break the tendency to pass on the pain and cruelty from generation to generation, the Force that makes possible the breaking of the repetition compulsion” and “that calls the world to love and mutual caring”.²⁸⁶ Like Schachter-Shalomi, he maintains that “Judaism has had a long history of evolving conceptions and languages about God”, which reflects the evolution, over the ages, of generational and individual levels of cognitive, emotional and spiritual development of consciousness.²⁸⁷

Referring to the stages of development of consciousness as presented by Ken Wilber²⁸⁸, Lerner suggests that humanity is collectively moving to higher levels of consciousness in which holistic thinking will predominate. We begin to understand that apparently solid objects are actually “energy fields” in which “energy events” occur to give an impression of solidity, and that reality is a flux of energies of which we are a part.²⁸⁹ “Everything is alive, capable of interacting with the rest of the universe in increasingly conscious and self-determining ways as matter organizes itself in greater and greater complexity, and everything is permeated with God’s spiritual energy”.²⁹⁰

Thus the understanding of, and language about, God begins to reflect “the notion of God as the Unity of All Being, in whom everything exists, but who is more than all that exists, yet manifests through all that exists”.²⁹¹ Lerner maintains that this approach

²⁸⁵ Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 3.

²⁸⁶ Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 4.

²⁸⁷ Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 7.

²⁸⁸ For a discussion of this, see Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision For Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000).

²⁸⁹ Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 9.

²⁹⁰ Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 10.

²⁹¹ Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 8.

captures the idea that God is emergent, that is, in the process of evolving and changing as humanity evolves and changes. But since all is One, “we might think of human beings as the particular way that God is becoming self-conscious, the mechanism in God for God’s becoming self-aware”.²⁹² Thus, in keeping with the universal order expressed in a living, conscious fashion (as per Wilber), we can see that “being one of God’s forms of self-awareness is to see ourselves as having a responsibility and a task rather than as having special status and entitlement”.²⁹³

In this Lerner is not referring only to the Jewish people. He underlines the importance of recognizing that “the chosenness of the human species, our ability to develop to a certain level of self-consciousness and consciousness of the totality, is at the same time an obligation toward compassion, caring and stewardship”.²⁹⁴ Yet he points out that while the Bible describes the idea of being in relationship with God, the idea that God is in a partnership relation with human beings is a “uniquely Jewish conception of God, developed in Kabbalah and Hasidic thought”.²⁹⁵ That this Jewish contribution is best made in dialogue with other religious perspectives is underscored by the variety of articles featured in his bimonthly magazine, *Tikkun*. This magazine describes itself as a “critique of politics, culture and society” with an interest in “analytical articles on Israel/Palestine, Jewish culture, and the intersection of religion and politics in the United States”.²⁹⁶ For example, a quick search of its database, covering twenty years of publishing, reveals approximately 500 articles, editorials, letters and interviews dealing with aspects of Christianity and Christian-Jewish interface.

While clearly adhering to his own Jewish spiritual path, Lerner recognizes that many paths are valid. The universalizing of Lerner’s message beyond Judaism is more

²⁹² Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 10.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ Lerner, “A Jewish Renewal Approach to God”, 11.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *Tikkun* (http://www.tikkun.org/core_vision).

evident in his recent book, *Spirit Matters*.²⁹⁷ In this work, he develops his idea of an “emancipatory spirituality”, generally substituting the word Spirit for the word God, and maintaining that such a transformative spirituality must be nurtured in many areas of contemporary life, including medicine, law, education, and spiritual practices in general.²⁹⁸ In his view, people living in advanced industrial nations now enjoy a very high level of material comfort compared to those who lived in previous eras, but are hungry for spiritual nourishment to provide an alternate to the dominant culture of materialism and power. Yet they often fall into a reactionary form of spirituality, which has an authoritative disdain for the Other, or a narcissistic spirituality which is shallow, self-absorbed and commodity-based. In contrast, emancipatory spirituality recognizes other humans as well as the earth and the entire cosmos as sacred. It affirms the equal worth of all humans and encourages people to work together in social and political movements pursuing non-violent strategies to overcome oppression of all kinds. It encourages people as individuals to develop mindfulness or alert attention to every act, to cultivate rich inner lives, to build their capacity to transcend individual ego, to enhance their capacity to play and experience joy, and to undertake various forms of human artistic expression. It encourages respect and care for the well being of each other and the entire universe, a deepening of intellectual capacities to this end and an integration of individual capacities and strengths at the global level. It supports the transformation of our society’s ethos of selfishness and materialism to one of love and caring, so that the entire human race can evolve to higher forms of knowing, sharing and loving.²⁹⁹

Lerner, then, from a more overtly psychological foundation, supports Schachter-Shalomi’s orientation to a holistic perspective of the universe with emphasis on the God-human partnership, the responsibility for stewardship of the earth, compassion in human relations, acceptance of the validity of non-Jewish spiritual perspectives, and the

²⁹⁷ Michael Lerner, *Spirit Matters* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2000).

²⁹⁸ Lerner, *Spirit Matters*, 4.

²⁹⁹ Lerner, *Spirit Matters*, 165-175.

particular contribution of Judaism in recognizing the possibility of, and need for, spiritual transformation.

2.8.2 Arthur Waskow: Godwrestling

With a doctorate in history and a background in conflict theory, non-violent action for social change and peace activism, Rabbi Arthur Waskow founded The Shalom Center in 1983. This Center applies spiritual thought and practice, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to activism in the areas of peace, social change, ecological stewardship and interfaith dialogue. He edits and writes for its weekly on-line *Shalom Report*. In 1993, Waskow co-founded ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal.³⁰⁰

In contrast to Lerner, Waskow is closely associated with Schachter-Shalomi. He has written several books, which generally tend to reinterpret Torah and apply it to contemporary issues, as well as explore the ways in which the Jewish spiritual path can give meaning to contemporary daily life. He stresses the value of learning through wrestling with ideas in group discussion, and his book *Godwrestling: Round 2: Ancient Wisdom, Future Paths*, is a re-examination of the meanings of classic themes of God, Torah, and *Israel*, from the perspective of the movement for Jewish renewal some two decades after the movement was founded.³⁰¹

For Waskow, “God, and ‘the world’ are two aspects of the same reality”.³⁰² He uses the breath as an analogy, as breath is both within the human body and beyond it. He points out that humans have described God in imagery that has changed over time as the human conception of God has changed. He suggests that the changing images of God are not simply ways of reconceiving God, but underscore a possibility that “the God-

³⁰⁰ *The Shalom Center* (http://www.shalomctr.org/taxonomy_menu/1/14).

³⁰¹ Arthur Waskow, *Godwrestling-Round 2: Ancient Wisdom, Future Paths* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996).

³⁰² Waskow, *Godwrestling-Round 2*, 281.

principle of the universe is Itself changing”.³⁰³ God is increasingly embodied in the world, increasingly immanent, and over the centuries, humanity, through a gradual development of universal consciousness, is becoming increasingly aware that “we are God”.³⁰⁴ At the same time, the unchanging, infinite aspect of God is also true, as the philosophers and mystics understand.

This new understanding of God provides new ways of understanding Torah and embodying it through techniques such as revised prayers, chants, mime and dance. Waskow maintains that these forms do not really borrow much from other traditions, rather, they take expression from both hasidism and the transnaturalism of Kaplan and fuse it with feminist and ecologically oriented spirituality, which “a relational, woven, interconnected sense of truth and wisdom”.³⁰⁵

This approach provides “a sense of the world in which God is not the Commander but the Web of Connections that makes a Unity of the universe”. The *mitzvot*, then, are understood not as commandments, but as the connections among humans. Biblical Judaism understood this connectedness, and encouraged “permeable boundaries” among individuals in the Jewish community, but impermeable boundaries between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.³⁰⁶ Today we recognize that “spirituality and community are necessary if personal wholeness and the earth’s survival are both to be protected”.³⁰⁷ Accordingly, the Jewish people needs to reshape Judaism to build connections among differing spiritualities and communities. For example, the Jewish understanding of the important rhythm between work and rest, expressed as Shabbat and the Jubilee, could be

³⁰³ Waskow, *Godwrestling-Round 2*, 282.

³⁰⁴ Waskow, *Godwrestling-Round 2*, 283.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Transnaturalism describes Kaplan’s view that the idea of God originates not in the supernatural, but is derived from the intuitive human understanding of the creative potential of the universe. I discuss this more fully in Chapter 3.

³⁰⁶ Waskow, *Godwrestling-Round 2*, 205.

³⁰⁷ Waskow, *Godwrestling-Round 2*, 204.

broadened to carry this rhythm out to the rest of the human race and the whole earth “as a response to the eco-crisis”.³⁰⁸

2.9 Jewish Renewal and Classical Jewish Theology

The work of these three writers, Schachter-Shalomi, Lerner and Waskow, demonstrates that Jewish Renewal is a liberal, heterodox form of Judaism, strongly rooted in mystical Jewish thought and practice, yet open to and willing to learn from all faiths.³⁰⁹ It encourages the incorporation of meaningful spiritual practices into Judaism and into daily life and emphasizes repairing the world through environmental and social activism, service to others and love of God. These practices and activities rest on a theological foundation which conceives of God as the human intuition that everything in the cosmos is integrated and involved in a continuously unfolding creative process. Revelation, through the medium of Torah study, is a continuous transformative process that entrains humans with the harmony of the universe. Redemption is the innate hope for, and urge to create, a better future, and is also a continuous process associated with the collective human transformation to a higher level of consciousness that more fully grasps the cosmic integration. Humanity is in an enduring covenantal relationship and partnership with God, the purpose of which is to bring about redemption.

The Renewal conception of God differs from both the biblical and rabbinic conceptions, yet builds on them (as well as on the Jewish mystical tradition) by

³⁰⁸ Waskow, *Godwrestling-Round 2*, 210. Also, note that the Book of Leviticus (25: 8-24) describes every fiftieth year as a special one in which no agricultural work was to be done, landed property reverted to its original owner and slaves were freed. In other words, the Jubilee was a period of rest and thanksgiving, on a national scale. For more details see Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 291.

³⁰⁹ Heterodox is used here in the general sense of non-orthodox, that is, the orthodox stream of Jewish thinking, which is considered rabbinic. See, for example, the *Encyclopedia Judaica*'s use of the word heterodox to explain the popular meaning of *apikoros* as one who negates rabbinic tradition, and to describe the theological views of, for example, Mordecai Kaplan and Louis Jacobs.

incorporating contemporary concepts which echo ancient non-Jewish thinking.³¹⁰ In the biblical view, knowledge of and faith in God results from God's personal revelation, both in the theophany at Sinai and in the events of history which were seen as reflecting the divine plan and purpose.³¹¹ The rabbinic program fostered a new attitude toward God, in which the divine actions in history were beyond human comprehension and humans would find God through their own enquiry, through everyday acts of goodness, and through recognition of the presence of God in human abilities and intellect. For the rabbinic sages, the promised world "can and will exist, if only people will imagine it ... will shape it with their minds ... will impose that imagined model of perfection upon their everyday lives."³¹² I will explore this idea of imagining a better world in Chapter 4.

The Renewal conception of Torah and revelation also builds on the classical Jewish conception. Jacob Neusner has traced the evolution of the meaning of the term "torah" in classical Judaism from a particular scroll or book into a symbol of the entire Judaic system.³¹³ In his view, "the doctrine of "Torah" in Judaism ... refers not to canonical writings alone but to God's will for holy Israel in every dimension of the everyday".³¹⁴ Rabbinic Judaism sees Torah study as transformative because those who learn and study Torah are affected not only in the mind but also in their heart, soul and character; "the Torah bears the power of gnostic learning".³¹⁵ I will explore this idea of transformation in my discussion of redemption and the imaginal in Chapter 4.

³¹⁰ In this chapter, the use of "pleroma"/void was an example of the echoing of such thinking. Chapters 3 and 4 provide additional examples.

³¹¹ Alan J. Avery-Peck, "The Doctrine of God", pp. 212-229 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³¹² Avery-Peck, "The Doctrine of God", 228.

³¹³ Jacob Neusner, "The Doctrine of Torah", pp. 193-211 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³¹⁴ Neusner, "The Doctrine of Torah", 194.

³¹⁵ Neusner, "The Doctrine of Torah", 197.

For classical or rabbinic Judaism, *Israel* is a theological category, more than a social or ethnic entity.³¹⁶ In the face of advancing Christianity, the idea of salvation and the concept of messiah also came to the fore and were associated with *Israel* in rabbinic thinking. They developed a theory of *Israel* as a society of persons in a familial relationship of obligation and responsibility to one another and to God. Neusner proposes that “the metaphor of family provided an encompassing theory of society”, and broadens it to include the social contract encompassing both Jews and gentiles.³¹⁷ The messiah theme in classical Judaism became more prominent in response to the rise of Christianity and the notion of Jewish exile.³¹⁸ It gradually evolved from the more ancient emphasis on a future king to a more idealized conception of a utopian future. Rabbinic texts varied widely in their thinking about the messiah, but all saw messiah as subordinate to Torah and God. In general, there existed a rabbinic prohibition against forcing the end time and redemption. With the emergence of organized Zionism and the return to the land of Israel, conflict arose between classically minded religious Jews and those who were more attuned to contemporary and secular thinking, with respect to the concept of redemption and the messiah. Nevertheless, “while the figure of messiah surely is present in Jewish religious imagination, ... hope for the messiah’s arrival is not the driving force of Jewish religious life”.³¹⁹ I suggest the Jewish Renewal does place more emphasis on hope for a better future, but accomplishes that emphasis by broadening the associated ideas of *Israel*, redemption, and covenant to include all of humanity.

³¹⁶ Jacob Neusner, “The Doctrine of Israel”, pp.230-246 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³¹⁷ Jacob Neusner, “The Doctrine of Israel”, 238.

³¹⁸ William Scott Green and Jed Silverstein, “The Doctrine of Messiah”, pp. 247-267 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³¹⁹ Green and Silverstein, “The Doctrine of Messiah”, 266.

2.10 Reinterpretation as Making Meaning

The philosopher Suzanne Langer claimed that “the concept of meaning, in all its varieties, is the dominant philosophical concept of our time. Sign, symbol, denotation, signification, communication- these notions are our stock in trade”.³²⁰ Although Langer’s description of meaning is limited to semantics, the psychiatrist Victor Frankl insisted that the meaning was a basic human need, and thus man has a drive to find it or make it.³²¹ The philosopher Alfred Stern takes the pragmatic approach. He suggests that meaning is indefinable but that people seem to know what it is because they keep searching for it, at least in a context, and he notes that “one of the earliest and most ingenious creations of man’s search for meaning was religion”.³²² He maintains that questions of the meaning of human existence can be addressed in terms of the concepts of purpose and justification. These in turn can be addressed from a theological perspective, which argues that God created us for a certain purpose, the fulfillment of which provides the justification for man’s existence. A metaphysical perspective suggests that the purpose of human existence is inherent in nature or some other abstract force such as the Absolute, and in fulfilling the purpose of the abstract entity, human existence becomes justified, that is, meaningful. A critical perspective, on the other hand, maintains that meaning does not derive from our existence or the things it confronts, but is given to our existence by us, individually and collectively, through acts of will.

This critical approach to understanding meaning forms the basis of some sociological definitions of religion which depict it as an institutionalized system for addressing questions of ultimate meaning.³²³ Others see religion more in terms of a

³²⁰ Suzanne Langer, *Philosophical Sketches* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 54.

³²¹ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Washington: Washington Square Press, 1987).

³²² Alfred Stern, *The Search for Meaning: Philosophical Vistas* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1971), 4.

³²³ See, for example, Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, England: Faber and Faber, 1967; U.S. edition, *The Sacred Canopy*); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*

dynamic process which contributes to a sense of a meaning or purpose to existence but which is also an adaptation strategy that helps humans cope with changes in environment and context.³²⁴ Adaptation can include shifts in meaning associated with textual reinterpretation. At the same time, innovations and reinterpretations may be a way of resolving inherent tensions within a tradition, or may reflect the natural human tendency to improve tradition by changing it.³²⁵

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is no single tradition as there is no single Judaism. Rather, over the centuries there have been multiple systems, and today there still exist a plurality of Judaisms, albeit a different plurality. What holds these multiple traditions together into “Judaism” is the fact that they all recapitulate the paradigmatic experience of exile and return set out in the Torah, the Five Books of Moses.³²⁶ This cycle of exile and return is set out in the biblical world view, with its convictions that there is only one, creator God who guides history, commands justice and mercy and chose *Israel* as His people. Consideration of issues arising from this foundation forms the Jewish intellectual heritage.³²⁷

During the long period from the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. to the *Haskalah* (Jewish “enlightenment”) in the 19th century, the rabbinic tradition gradually came to be normative. Rabbinic Judaism was founded on the Torah but enriched by a body of additional holy texts, the writings of the sages who taught and

(Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1965); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

³²⁴ See Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976); Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³²⁵ Michael Williams, Collette Cox and Martin Jaffee (eds.), *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change* (New York: Mouton DeGruyter, 1992).

³²⁶ Jacob Neusner, “Defining Judaism”, pp. 3-19 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism* (Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds.: Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

³²⁷ Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), xi.

produced a philosophical law code (the *Mishnah*) and other scriptural commentaries during the approximately five centuries from about 200 to 700 C.E.. This rabbinic Judaism remained normative for so long in part because it was able to interact with, and absorb concepts from, other Judaic thought systems, including the philosophical and the mystical. Each of these had its own canon of works, and each was shaped by learned authorities who were “infused with the content and spirit of Rabbinic (*sic*) Judaism”.³²⁸

As Barry Holtz points out, the rabbinic sages saw all Jewish study of sacred texts as Torah, and all Torah has the validity of revelation, because its authority rests with God although human beings are its agents. In contrast to our own age, rabbinic writers did not value originality per se, because Torah, having a divine author, contains all truth. Rather, they valued the creative interpretation, the new insight, that study of, interaction with, and commentary on, the text can provide. In consequence, the rabbinic tradition greatly valued the weight of earlier commentary and past learning.³²⁹ In fact, the Talmud (that part of Torah which is the rabbinic discussion and analysis of the Mishnah, which is itself the codification of the tradition of a parallel oral Torah) values equally the study of both practical and theoretical issues, and also values opinions that were rejected by earlier generations as well as those that were accepted.³³⁰

Jewish philosophical literature flowered during the medieval period, when Jews were prospering in the Islamic world. Rabbinic Judaism found itself intellectually challenged from the surrounding Islamic culture, so Jewish thinkers sought “other intellectual tools” to supplement “the received tradition and talmudic hermeneutics”.³³¹ Rabbinic philosophers/theologians struggled to resolve the tensions and conflicts that arose due to ideas from Greek philosophical thought, particularly Aristotelianism and

³²⁸ Neusner, “Defining Judaism”, 18.

³²⁹ Barry W. Holtz, “Introduction”, pp. 11-29 in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* Barry Holtz (ed.) (New York: Summit Books, 1984)

³³⁰ Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition, A Reference Guide* (trans. R. Israel V. Berman) (New York: Random House, 1989), 2.

³³¹ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 375.

neo-Platonism. These streams of Greek thought supported rabbinic thought in that both confirmed monotheism by “postulating a supreme incorporeal principle” (the Prime Mover and the divine One, respectively); both accepted that “the human spirit can be illuminated by God”, thus being compatible with the concept of revelation, and both emphasized the ethical.³³² Yet tensions resulted from the impersonality of God in both Greek systems, with the creative processes of the Prime Mover (causation) and the divine One (emanation) conceived as automatic, rather than due to a divine will. Thus ethics arose out of intellectual speculation rather than a concept of moral action. Other philosophical and theological limitations of Greek thought gradually emerged, and by the sixteenth century, rabbinic Jewish thought was focussed less on the philosophical challenges and more on the challenge posed by Jewish mysticism.³³³

Like the Jewish philosophers, Jewish mystics of the period, the kabbalists, sought a “renaissance of Judaism on a new plane”.³³⁴ Their understanding of religious experience, however, was symbolic, rather than allegorical, as was the philosophers’. In attempting “to discover a new stratum of religious consciousness” related to direct experience of the divine, the kabbalists dialogued with Jewish philosophy in order to explore a realm of religious reality that was quite different from that examined by the Jewish philosophers.³³⁵ These Jewish mystics were not concerned with defending Judaic rationality in the face of Greek thought or the emerging scientific mindset, but sought to revive Judaism through piety, devoutness and a passionate commitment to the domains of *halakhah*, *aggadah* and prayer, where post-biblical Judaism was classically expressed.³³⁶ Combined with a relative indifference to contradictions, this approach underpinned their

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 373-418.

³³⁴ Gersohm Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 25.

³³⁵ Ibid., 24.

³³⁶ Ibid., 33.

development of what is, in effect, a parallel mythology, especially in Lurianic kabbalism, which I discuss in the next chapter.³³⁷

The social and political conditions in which European Jews lived during the medieval and early modern periods combined with a rabbinic flexibility adequate to allow it to adjust to changing conditions and intellectual currents contributed to the rabbinic tradition's prolonged hegemony. With the onset of modernity, changing social and political conditions threatened Jewry with disintegration and dissolution.³³⁸ The response of eastern European Jews as a whole was largely to cling to the traditional hasidism.³³⁹ The philosophers/theologians of western Jewry, however, became concerned with religious reform, to reconcile the ancient rabbinic tradition with broader contemporary thought and to respond to an increasingly virulent anti-semitism. Their theological reinterpretations were associated with the emergence of the main denominations referred to in Chapter 1.

In parallel, by the end of the 19th century, Jewish literature, particularly in western Europe, had expanded considerably beyond the rabbinic tradition and absorbed the ideas of the European enlightenment and subsequent intellectual movements, "including romanticism, philosophical idealism, positivism and utopian socialism".³⁴⁰ Thus in the extended modern period there developed several other streams of Jewish thought including Zionism, Jewish socialism, and Jewish secularism. These are primarily concerned with the political, social and cultural dimension of the Jewish situation, and

³³⁷ Ben-Zion Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981); R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Jewish Mysticism", pp.217-233 in *The Jewish World: History and Culture of the Jewish People*, E. Kedourie (ed.) (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979).

³³⁸ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 516-716.

³³⁹ R. Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985). Hasidism, at least in its initial stages, was actually a renewal movement. I discussed this in a previous paper, "An Exploration of Three Renewal movements in Pre-Modern Judaism" (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, August, 2003).

³⁴⁰ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 569.

exhibit very limited concern with the theological and metaphysical issues.³⁴¹ Yet they corroborate that with Judaism's entry into modernity there was a "collapse of the ideational and institutional consensus" with respect to the "seminal ideas of classical Judaism".³⁴²

It is clear that, overall, this centuries-old Jewish intellectual heritage has been fluid, dynamic, and negotiable. The traditions of Judaism form a matrix of interpretation and reinterpretation as well as absorption and transformation of external ideas, both theological and non-theological, or rejection of them, or use of them as tools for understanding. It is arguable to what extent non-Jewish thought in that matrix is used to provide conceptual tools with which to develop deeper understandings and creative reinterpretations of the theological issues versus the extent to which non-Jewish thought is used as a source of authority for that reinterpretation.³⁴³ This brings me to the issue of syncretism.

I prefer to avoid using the term "syncretic" to describe Jewish Renewal's theology, because I hold that it is ambiguous and often understood to be pejorative. Salkin describes Jewish Renewal as "flirting with syncretism", a clearly negative assessment.³⁴⁴ In my view, this wording implies that there is a normative Judaism from which Jewish Renewal theology is departing, and that innovation should be limited and sanctioned by the keepers of the norm. Magid, on the other hand, employs the term

³⁴¹ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 685-686.

³⁴² Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements and Beliefs* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).

³⁴³ For an interesting discussion of this point, see Norbert Samuelson's discussion of contemporary scientific cosmology, contemporary philosophy and Plato's *Timeus* as tools for understanding the classical rabbinic dogma of creation, in *Judaism and the Doctrine of Creation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), particularly 220-240.

³⁴⁴ Jeffrey K. Salkin, "New Age Judaism", pp.366-67 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (ed.) Malden, Maryland: Blackwell Publishing, 2003),367.

syncretic to describe Jewish Renewal, but uses it rather more neutrally in the context of Renewal's transformative (albeit subversive) inclination.³⁴⁵

Anita Leopold and Jeppe Jensen have examined the historical and contemporary controversy associated with the use of the term "syncretic" in religious studies.³⁴⁶ The term has been used in a variety of ways: descriptive, taxonomic, discursive, political, and explanatory. Its pejorative connotations are historically linked to Christian theological disputes and mission policy dating back several centuries. In this usage, the term syncretic presumes the idea of natural differences in religions and is linked to the ideas of impurity and norm.³⁴⁷

Leopold and Jensen attempt to rehabilitate the term, suggesting there is explanatory value in the use of the term syncretic, provided it is regarded phenomenologically and is clearly defined in context when used by individual scholars. Depending on the discourse in which the term is embedded, it can be defined from three perspectives. As a social phenomenon it is related to power and the encounters of cultures and discourses, which leads to syncretistic innovations. As a semiotic phenomenon, syncretism has a metaphorical function, and can bridge, blend or redirect the meaning of apparently dissimilar ideas in religions and culture; that is, it is transformative and hermeneutical. As a cognitive phenomenon, it explains the process by which human cognition blends concepts or constrains that blending.³⁴⁸ Applying this theoretical model of syncretism, I suggest that Salkin's usage of the term syncretic speaks to syncretism as a social phenomenon because it implies an authoritative power with regard to Jewish religious innovation and thus, ironically, echoes the attitude of Christian theologians who used the term pejoratively. Magid's usage, however, speaks to syncretism as a semiotic

³⁴⁵ Shaul Magid, "Rainbow Hasidism in America – The Maturation of Jewish Renewal", *The Reconstructionist*, Spring 2004, 34-59.

³⁴⁶ Anita Leopold and Jeppe S. Jensen, (eds.) *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 376-385.

phenomenon, because his discussion points to the dynamics of religious change and the transformative and hermeneutical aspects of syncretism between Jewish Renewal theology and other religions.

It is clear that Jewish thought has a long history of blending ideas, and Jewish Renewal follows that path in reconstructing Jewish theology. At the same time, Jewish Renewal also follows the ancient Jewish belief that ideas from the past can be used to develop meaning in the present. In itself, this approach is a characteristic of postmodernism, and in the following chapters I explore more fully this use of the past.

Jewish Renewal does not refer to itself as syncretic. It does clearly recognize influences from both secular and non-Jewish sources; for example, the figure “Thumbnail Origins of the Jewish Renewal Movement” provided in Chapter 1 refers to influences from contemporary science, and the self-actualization and ecological movements, as well as eastern religions. In fact, Schachter-Shalomi promotes interfaith communication, learning and borrowing, for the sake of the planet’s survival as well as for the future of Judaism. He promotes a “permeable Judaism”, which recognizes that all spiritual traditions possess a “teleological urge to wholeness” because “our spiritual hunger has a universal component” that cannot be satisfied with only one perspective.³⁴⁹ He urges Renewalists to continue to reinvigorate contemporary Judaism by continuing to innovate and pioneer different ways, to deepen the individual connection to God. In his view, developing Jewish “spiritual technology” by learning from other traditions will not overwhelm Judaism as long as differences are treasured, explored and, when borrowed, adjusted to reflect the frame of Jewish tradition.³⁵⁰

This chapter has set out the first strategy in Jewish Renewal’s reconstruction of theological meaning – the reinterpretation of the basic building blocks of Jewish theology. It is important to develop a more complete understanding of the Jewish

³⁴⁹ Respectively, Schachter-Shalomi, *The Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 84; *Paradigm Shift*, 274; and *Jewish With Feeling*, 198.

³⁵⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Words of Light Shabbaton*, 36.

Renewal reinterpretation; the next four chapters describe four strategies that support this reinterpretation.

Chapter 3

V'hakhamim omri(m): Deriving Authority From the Sources

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Torah is a multifaceted term in Judaism. It is both the revelation on which Judaism is based and the study of the entirety of Jewish texts throughout the ages. Torah, then, includes the Bible, the midrashic literature, the Talmuds (Babylonian and Jerusalem), the commentaries, the legal codes, the philosophical texts and the mystical texts.³⁵¹ Rabbinic tradition venerates the great learning of past generations and the weight of earlier precedents. The Talmud in particular is a scholastic text, whose chief purpose is to preserve the perspectives of earlier generations and provide learning materials for later generations.³⁵²

At the same time, rabbinic tradition also values the creative interpretation, one which provides new insight and meaning by demonstrating new connections among passages of text. “And the sages say...” (*v'hakhamim omri*) is a phrase frequently encountered, particularly in talmudic texts. While a specific sage may be named, the interest is less in the historical accuracy of a particular sage’s views and more in referring to a perspective in the tradition. The phrase usually provides the textual basis of a line of thought on which the writer then builds to provide his own interpretation.³⁵³ In this way, the new interpretation derives authority from an older perspective in the text. The classic texts, then, are rich in exchange and response, reflecting the interactive dynamic spirit of Torah and commentary. This creative, interactive approach ensures that “reading” Torah

³⁵¹ Barry Holtz, “Introduction”, pp.11-29 in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classical Jewish Texts* (Barry Holtz, ed.) (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 12-13.

³⁵² Robert Goldenberg, “Talmud”, pp.129-176 in *Back to the Sources*.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

is about transformation, about creating something useful from something that has potential to point to change.³⁵⁴

In the previous chapter, I described the matrix of Jewish and non-Jewish thought from which the Jewish intellectual heritage derives meaning. Throughout the ages, Jewish writers have been influenced by, and borrowed from, non-Jewish streams of thought, which they used to expand the boundaries of Judaism, through both talmudic and other exegesis. For example, in a discussion of the emergence of comprehensive codes of Jewish law since the medieval period, Goldenberg points out that “Maimonides’ Code, the *Mishneh Torah* (the Torah recapitulated) begins with a philosophical introduction in which the rudiments of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics are turned into the foundation of Jewish Law”.³⁵⁵ It is clear then, that the Jewish intellectual heritage derives contemporary meaning by melding an astute invocation of authority within the tradition with an acceptance of the influence of concepts from other streams of thought.

It is against this background that I now examine Jewish Renewal’s strategy of turning to sources, whether historical or contemporary, Jewish or non-Jewish, to support its theological reinterpretations. The texts that I have examined seem either to echo or actually make reference to a vast range of thinkers. Although it is most notable in *Paradigm Shift*, throughout Schachter-Shalomi’s work there are references to the thought or writing of mystics, both Jewish and non-Jewish; to contemporary and not quite so contemporary philosophers and theologians whose perspectives include both Jewish and non-Jewish; and to contemporary scientific thinkers. Jewish Renewal thought, and Schachter-Shalomi’s work in particular, has been described as syncretic.³⁵⁶ I suggest this is not a particularly helpful description, as it excessively simplifies a complex picture. Rather, it is more revealing to parse out the various ways in which Schachter-Shalomi, as representative of Jewish Renewal theology, uses the thought of other writers. His writing

³⁵⁴ Holtz, “Introduction”.

³⁵⁵ Goldenberg, *Talmud*, 161.

³⁵⁶ Jeffrey K. Salkin, “New Age Judaism”, pp. 354-370 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

shows both a profound relationship with and respect for Jewish traditions, especially the mystical and Reconstructionist. He turns to the mystical tradition, particularly early hasidism, for authority for his ideas. He also builds on Reconstructionist thought although he does not invoke it authoritatively. The influence of contemporary streams of thought such as New Age and Eco-Spiritualism, as well as other religions, is also apparent. His relationship to these streams of thought is more interactive than authoritative, dipping into them to borrow or compare concepts, metaphors and language.

3.1 Deriving Authority: The Jewish Mystical Stream

As was seen in Chapter 2, the concepts and language of the Jewish mystics and the Hasidic tradition appear consistently throughout Schachter-Shalomi's teaching and writing because they are the foundation for his reinterpretation of the ancient building blocks of Jewish theology. This point is reinforced in *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist* (jointly authored with Rabbi Daniel Siegel):

For us, the Kabbalistic tradition serves as the foundation for a rethinking of Judaism in light of the great changes taking place in human thinking and society ... it helps provide both language and concepts on which we can build, not a restored Judaism, but a renewed Judaism ... anchored in mysticism, [it] will serve as a vehicle for the transformation of the individual practitioner, the community of spiritual seekers, the Jewish people, and hopefully the larger world.³⁵⁷

To understand how some of the Jewish Renewal theology set out in the previous chapter relates to aspects of Jewish mysticism, it is essential to provide as grounding a general overview of the relationship among pre-kabbalistic, kabbalistic and hasidic mysticisms, the key concepts they share, and their transformation of classical rabbinic

³⁵⁷ Z. Schachter-Shalomi, "Introduction" in *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist* (with Rabbi Daniel Siegel) (Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing, 2005).

ideas. In doing so, I am aware that such a cursory, historically- oriented summation risks presenting a monolithic and very limited picture of the various Jewish mysticisms that are woven into the fabric of Jewish mystical tradition. As Moshe Idel has pointed out, “ ‘pure’ mystical schools are very rare”, and this summary cannot do justice to the complexity of development of Jewish mysticism.³⁵⁸

3.1.1 Pre-kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism

Jewish mysticism has ancient roots.³⁵⁹ Max Kadushin maintained that the rabbinic understanding of God was not cognitive but the result of a deep inner experience associated with prayer and study of Torah, and thus could be considered “normal mysticism”.³⁶⁰ Most scholars, however, consider mysticism as a current of thought largely parallel to (although not exclusive of) rabbinic Judaism.³⁶¹ Although scholars differ somewhat in their delineation of mystical periods in Jewish history, there seems to

³⁵⁸ Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 21. See also Harold Bloom’s *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1999). Although Bloom’s focus is literary criticism, he draws heavily on the work of Gershom Scholem to present a concise, lucid, and excellent summation of kabbalistic concepts and their historical origins. See *Kabbalah and Criticism*, pp. 15-47.

³⁵⁹ In ancient and medieval times it was also intertwined with belief in magic, as I mention later. See I. Gruenwald, “Major Issues in the Study and Understanding of Judaism,” in Jacob Neusner (ed.) *Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 2: Historical Synthesis* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1995), 1-49; Stephan Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); K. E. Grozinger and Joseph Dan (eds.), *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah (International Symposium held in Frankfurt a.M. 1991)* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995).

³⁶⁰ Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Bloch, 1972), 194.

³⁶¹ Grozinger and Dan, *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah*.

be convergence toward the five periods which I describe in this section on Jewish mysticism: ancient, medieval, kabbalistic, lurianic and hasidic.³⁶²

Ancient Jewish mysticism was rooted in the prophetic visionary experiences of the Biblical period and developed through the Mishnaic period to the early Middle Ages. It focused on man's connection to God, and was based on the prophet Ezekiel's description of the celestial chariot (*merkavah*, also frequently transliterated as *merkabah*). Practitioners of this tradition were considered to descend through meditation into the inner recesses of their own minds, through heavenly palaces (*hekhalot*), which we would consider today as levels of consciousness, to the ultimate, seventh heavenly hall in which there would arise the throne of divine glory.³⁶³ This mysticism was practised by leading Talmudic rabbis who opposed popularization of this aspect of Talmudic Judaism because they considered it esoteric and suitable only for skilled practitioners.

Medieval Jewish mysticism was more speculative and focused on the structure of the cosmos and man's connection with it. Its most significant text, the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation), was first circulated in the sixth century CE.³⁶⁴ It addressed the hidden workings of the universe, set out a cosmology and cosmogony, reinterpreted concepts from the *merkavah* literature, and linked to older Jewish speculations concerning divine wisdom (*hokhmah*, or *Sophia*). It describes thirty two paths of wisdom which are fundamental forces and instruments of creation. The number is the sum of the twenty two letters of the Hebrew alphabet plus the ten primordial numbers, called *sefirot*. Each of the

³⁶² I generally adhere to the periods set out by Grozinger and Dan but a different periodization can be found, e.g., in Sheila Spector, *Jewish Mysticism: An Annotated Bibliography on the Kabbalah in English*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984).

³⁶³ This period gave rise to writings called *Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* literature. See Ben-Zion Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981); M. S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (New York: University Press of America, 1983); E. Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor: Jewish Mysticism and Modern Psychology* (Boulder, Co.: Shambhala, 1981).

³⁶⁴ The date of composition of this book is not clear.

sefirot is associated with a category of creation, which were later reinterpreted (by kabbalists) as emanations from God.³⁶⁵

In the later part of the 12th century, there emerged, primarily in Germany and in Egypt, Jewish pietistic movements which were influenced variously by early *merkavah* mysticism, neo-Platonism, occultism derived from earlier Jewish beliefs in magic and German belief in demons and witches, as well as Islamic and Christian asceticism. Called Hasidic (after the Hebrew word for pious, *hasid*, but not to be confused with the eighteenth century movement which I discuss later), these advocated not an apocalyptic vision but a pietistic society which participated in an immanent relationship with the Godhead, as opposed to a future ideal state. They stressed the mystery of God's unity, and an esoteric analysis of the Torah which saw every word of the Pentateuch as containing a secret, hidden meaning. Their prayer made use of a technique of meditating on the Hebrew letters and their numerological equivalents. Pietistic hasidism may have exchanged some ideas with kabbalism.³⁶⁶ It significantly influenced the spirituality of Ashkenazi Jewry and may have been influenced by certain contemporary forms of Christian piety, but eventually it merged with the new kabbalah.³⁶⁷

Also in the later part of the twelfth century, medieval Jewish philosophy came to the fore, particularly in the writings of Maimonides. Although mysticism and rational philosophy might be considered two very different systems of knowledge, certain types of philosophy lead to mysticism, and many types of mysticism resort to philosophical explication when trying to describe the mystical experiences. There was a mystical dimension to Maimonides' thought, and he contributed to Jewish mysticism by clarifying the phenomenon of the mystical encounter via a set of criteria to assess mystical

³⁶⁵ Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor*; G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987).

³⁶⁶ See Gruenwald, "Major Issues"; Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor*; Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*.

³⁶⁷ R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, "Jewish Mysticism", in E. Kedourie (ed.), *The Jewish World: History and Culture of the Jewish People* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 217-223.

illumination as opposed to the hallucination of a sick mind. He also expounded a technique for developing closeness to God which involved meditating on God's perfection as revealed in nature, an area which had long been controversial in Jewish religious thought, given its concern with idolatry.³⁶⁸

3.1.2 Kabbalistic Mysticism

Etymologically, the word kabbalah derives from the Hebrew *kibbel*, which means to receive, and signifies the traditional knowledge of the Jews.³⁶⁹ Technically, the word kabbalah refers to the movement of Jewish mysticism that emerged out of Provence around the 12th century, which is what I discuss below. Today however, the word is frequently generalized to denote the entire history of Jewish mysticism. To add to the confusion, in the late middle ages Christian occultists adopted aspects of kabbalah for their own use, and eventually developed quite a different system. As well, over time the word kabbalah, or various spellings such as cabala, came to be a generic label for knowledge of rites of any kind of secret society.³⁷⁰

In late twelfth century Provence/Languedoc, there appeared the anonymously written *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Brilliance), which crystallized early Kabbalism. Its central premise is that there is a vast, unseen order beyond what we typically experience in everyday life. The early Kabbalists emphasized the hidden aspects of God, and the book *Bahir* is essentially a treatise and manual on how to find the glory behind the world of daily reality. *Bahir* incorporates the teachings of a number of earlier mystics, particularly those from Babylonia and Palestine, and may be linked to ancient gnosticism. It presents a new idea of mystical contemplation, not on the letters of the alphabet, but on the *sefirot*, as emanations of the Godhead through which creation was effected. It also accepts the theory of the transmigration of the soul (*gilgul*), which was opposed by

³⁶⁸ Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*; Scholem, *Origin of the Kabbalah*.

³⁶⁹ Spector, *Jewish Mysticism*, xii. Note that Spector transliterates the word as *kabel*.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Jewish philosophers. In Scholem's view, *Bahir* represents a "reversion ... to an archaic symbolism that is utterly unique in medieval Judaism" and that with its publication, "a Jewish form of mythical thought entered into unavoidable competition with the rabbinic and philosophic forms of this same medieval Judaism".³⁷¹

The normative Judaism of the medieval Diaspora was rabbinic and communal. The emphasis on Torah study, along with state-enforced communal living and identity, meant that the average Jews (males, that is) were relatively well informed about their religion, familiar with its scriptures and oriented to religion in communal rather than individual terms. Communication with the divine could be achieved by group or individual, through performance of ritual, prayer and study. The various religious symbols – such as the *tallit* (prayer shawl), the *tefillin* (phylacteries), the *mezuzah*³⁷², food and drink and their associated rituals – all served to underline the important goals of official Jewish ritual and practice: praise and thanksgiving to God, recitation and affirmation of the religious code, repentance and the commemoration of past national events. At the same time, this official Judaism did not answer most people's daily individual problems, goals and fears. Thus ordinary Jews practiced a folk religion which combined the sacred writings and symbols of official Judaism with a wide variety of magical beliefs and practices that had developed in Jewish folk tradition or had been adopted from the non-Jewish environment.³⁷³ Even Talmudic sages were known to practice magic; given the strains and exigencies of daily life in an often hostile environment, the cultural climate of medieval Judaism accepted the practice of magic as an aid to dealing with difficult situations.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ Scholem, *Origin of the Kabbalah*, 197- 98.

³⁷² The word *mezuzah* is untranslatable. Originally it meant the doorpost, but today it refers to the small container of metal, wood or ceramic which contains a tiny parchment inscribed with the first few lines of the *Shema* prayer, and which is affixed to the doorpost of a traditional Jewish home. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

³⁷³ Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*, 27-44.

³⁷⁴ Gruenwald, "Major Issues", 39-42.

R. J. Zwi Werblowsky describes kabbalah as “a strangely bizarre theosophical system, in which Neoplatonic, Gnostic and mystical elements have come together in a combination that is still difficult to disentangle, but is undoubtedly the most influential and far-reaching of all forms of Jewish mysticism”.³⁷⁵ He maintains that at the centre of this system lies a distinction between two apparently incompatible conceptions of God. One is the abstract rational God of philosophy, so essentially One that not even attributes can be postulated, a God rather lacking in divine vitality. The other is a living dynamic God whose relevance to man is found precisely in his personality and multiplicity. The Kabbalists combined both concepts into a single theology. The hidden and unknown God is a great, divine, Nothing, which the Kabbalists call *Ein-sof*, the infinite. Yet God must be manifest in a way that man can apprehend. The Kabbalists interpret the Torah story of creation as meaning that *Ein-sof* concentrated energy in one luminous point and then burst forth in a process of emanations, a process by which divine Nothingness become divine Being. The stages of manifestation of the deity are the *sefirot*, which interact dynamically, and make up the inner life of the Godhead, which remains essentially One in spite of its complexity.

Around 1280-1286, Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon compiled what was to become the cornerstone of kabbalistic literature, the *Zohar*, (or Book of Splendor). The book and the other writings it encouraged aroused excitement about this exotic current in Judaism which made normative rabbinical Judaism seem rather barren. As a result, through the 14th century kabbalah was carried to Italy and the Middle East and flourished especially in Spain, where Gerona became an important centre of Kabbalistic learning.³⁷⁶ The enmity of the rabbinical establishment, philosophers and other normative thinkers was aroused, because they saw the *Zohar* and similar works as assimilable only by those who were already well-versed in Jewish law and sophisticated in their understanding. In the

³⁷⁵ Werblowsky, “Jewish Mysticism”, 221.

³⁷⁶ I have twice visited Gerona, and have spent several fascinating hours in the small, preserved, portion of the old Jewish Quarter. It was haunting to see the juxtaposition of the tiny, empty dwelling places and hallowed learning centre with the Spanish government’s attempts to capitalize on the modern Jewish tourist trade while trying to appear respectful.

next couple of centuries, for many Jews, these works and the kabbalah would lead to messianic pretensions and a dangerous downplay of the realities of Jewish survival in a hostile Christian world.³⁷⁷

3.1.3 Hasidism and Mysticism

Despite rabbinic concern, kabbalistic mysticism thrived until the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. What had been a flourishing Jewish culture then rapidly dissolved, and many mystics equated the tragedy with the messianic wars which were to precede the return to Jerusalem. The focus of mystical speculation shifted from creation to apocalypse. Many of the exiled mystics moved to Safed in Palestine, where a vibrant kabbalistic community under the leadership of Moshe Cordovero and Isaac Luria in the sixteenth century developed new theories and a new approach which are considered the later kabbalah.³⁷⁸

The early Kabbalists, who were men of great talmudic learning, saw themselves as trying to understand the profound mystery of the divine in all its manifestations and were thus able to counter criticism of both the inherent dualism of their conception and the image of a tenfold God. But, by the sheer power inherent in the kabbalistic system, the *sefirot* became more and more personified, and the emphasis on unity correspondingly became more insistent. Luria envisioned groups of *sefirot* as having separate identities. The last *sefirah*, *malkut*, was identified with the *shekinah*, among other things. Mystical Judaism had conceived of the *shekinah* as a feminine element of divinity, and mystical adepts had argued for the existence of two primary influences that were seen together to underlie every aspect of creation. The twin forces, opposite but

³⁷⁷ See Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor*, and Scholem, *Origin of the Kabbalah*, for discussions of the link to the disastrous messianic Sabbatean movement.

³⁷⁸ In Safed, I roamed the hilly, sweltering, winding and narrow medieval streets on a very hot Friday afternoon as people were preparing for Shabbat. It too has its tourist shops, yet it is neither empty nor haunted, but a busy little community pulsating with life. And with religion – even the air seemed to vibrate with orthodox Jewish holiness and mysticism.

complementary, are united in mysterious union, manifested in diverse ways. The *Zohar* stressed that the patriarchal God of scripture had a female counterpart or element, just as humanity consists of male and female. Only when the two elements are united does harmony govern the universe. This female element, the *shekinah*, may have had more ancient roots – there is some evidence of the concept in Talmudic thinking.³⁷⁹ In any case, in Kabbalistic thinking it became associated with a clear sexual or even erotic undercurrent, as works such as the twelfth century *Sefer Bahir*, mentioned earlier, are replete with allusions to the feminine counterpart of God and ascribe great significance to human sexuality as a mirror of the divine structure.³⁸⁰

Although the relationship between masculine and feminine aspects of the divine was described in frankly erotic terms, there is no eroticism in the relationship between man and God.³⁸¹ The Jewish mystic seeks the ideal of *deveikut*, a term found in pre-kabbalistic Jewish writing, and used to describe an ideal of attachment to God by having God always in mind. There is scholarly dispute as to whether the kabbalistic understanding of *deveikut* is the same unitive mystical experience, the same total absorption in God that is found in Christian or Muslim mysticism, or whether human individuality is preserved even in the ecstasy of cleaving to the divine.³⁸² The Kabbalist's task is to promote this by contemplative efforts and a holy life.

³⁷⁹ Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 96-157. However, Scholem maintains that “for the Talmud, Shekhinah simply meant the presence of God”, and that it was the kabbalists who invested the concept with new meaning as the feminine aspect of God. See Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 16-17.

³⁸⁰ Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*; Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor*.

³⁸¹ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1995, originally 1971), 203-226. Also, it should be noted that, despite its erotic content, the Song of Songs has always been interpreted allegorically with respect to theology; see Elsie Stern, *The Jewish Study Bible*, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1565-66.

³⁸² Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 445. Scholem clearly is of the view that the kabbalistic conception of *deveikut* is not the same as the unitive mystical experience; see his discussion of union versus communion in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 203-226.

Another Lurianic change dealt with the transition from the immaterial world of the *sefirot* to our material world. Between *Ein-Sof* and the material world there were four worlds. *Atzilut* is the world of emanation and the *sefirot*. *Beri'ah* is the world of creation, the throne and the chariot. *Yetsirah* is the world of formation, where the angels reside. *Asiyyah* is the world of making, which finally yields the terrestrial realm.³⁸³

These four worlds were part of an elaborate new mythology around which Lurianic Kabbalism pivoted. Long before the beginning of the human race, the divine realm contracted (*tzimtzum*, withdrawal) to make room for the finite world which was to emerge in the act of creation. But the withdrawal was not total, and a residue of divine potency remained to influence the finite world, to direct it to its divinely appointed goals. As well, through vessels or channels, divine light poured into the emptiness caused by the contraction. But the vessels that were to effect the creation could not contain the light and collapsed, and divine sparks fell into the chaos, begetting a state of disorder. This cosmic disorder is the root of all human problems. The sparks yearn to return to their source, and the history of the world, with its progress and setbacks, is the history of this struggle for a restoration of the sparks. Man is God's helper in the struggle for restoration of perfect order. It is the vocation of the Jew, *Israel*, by withdrawal from worldliness and submission to the disciplines of mystical piety, to effect the restoration (*tikkun*). When the process of *tikkun* has been completed and perfection achieved, the messiah will come. This system produced a cosmos in which man and God are bound together much more closely than in rabbinic Jewish theology. They need one another, and God is not completely independent of the world. Man is not just a sinner, passively awaiting his fate, but a factor in the universe, a being whose actions are vitally related to the inner life of the Godhead.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*, 18-20.

³⁸⁴ Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*; Werblowsky, "Jewish Mysticism". In addition, Lurianic Kabbalism is a messianic mysticism, in contrast to other forms of mysticism, in which the historic and messianic dimensions of Judaism tend to disappear in the quest for mystical fulfillment of life in God. Lurianic Kabbalism contributed to the rise of Sabbatai Zevi. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, and Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*.

In Lurianic kabbalah, man's role in the universe is accomplished by the reinterpretation of the rabbinic concept of *tikkun*. Jonathan Sacks states that the concept of *tikkun* makes a limited appearance in rabbinic literature, where it functions as a concept that merely creates social order.³⁸⁵ The rabbinic concept can be found mainly in chapters four and five of the tractate Gitten, in the Talmud. Inserted among various rulings governing divorce, the idea appears as fifteen rulings associated with the "good order of the world"³⁸⁶ or "for the benefit of society".³⁸⁷ Kabbalistic interpretation broadens the idea of *tikkun* to include a range of mystical reactions aimed at repairing the cosmic order; *tikkun* is accomplished by carrying out the divine commandments, which the kabbalists viewed as vehicles for establishing contact with the divine.³⁸⁸

This highly condensed and simplified summary of Lurianic kabbalah gives an indication of why, in the 16th and early 17th centuries, kabbalism captured the popular imagination of ordinary Jews, despite opposition from the rabbinic and philosophical elites. Scholem attributes Lurianic kabbalism's rapid dissemination to its combination of symbol and myth which seemed to reflect the historical reality within which unsophisticated Jews lived. The accretions which shaped Lurianic kabbalism after Luria's death, in particular, provided a satisfying ideology for the socially and economically oppressed Jewish masses.³⁸⁹ Scholem maintains that Lurianism's "decisive innovation, that which held the secret of Lurianic appeal to the age, was the transposition of the central concepts of exile and redemption from the historical to a cosmic and even divine

³⁸⁵ Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Tikkun Olam: Orthodoxy's Responsibility to Perfect G-d's World*, December, 1997, http://www.ou.org/public_affairs/article/tikkun_olam_jsacks.

³⁸⁶ *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation*, vol. XVIII.B: *Gittin*, chapters 4-5, (trans. Jacob Neusner) (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 5.

³⁸⁷ *Talmud Bavli: The Schottenstein Edition, Tractate Gittin*, vol. 1-2 (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1993), 32a et. seq.

³⁸⁸ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 443-444.

³⁸⁹ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 22-27

plane”.³⁹⁰ In its popular exposition, Lurianic mythology provided a history of the world which pivoted around the drama of God seeking to perfect his true image and mankind, in particular the people *Israel*, seeking to promote this aim by means of good works. As a result, Jewish suffering and exile reflected a struggle at the heart of creation and was linked to *Israel*'s redemptive mission to heal the sickness of the world.³⁹¹ This approach transfers the redemptive task, which in rabbinic tradition belonged to the messiah, to the historical nation, *Israel*, and shifts the focus of messianism from an outside world to an inner spiritual realm. It also transforms the concept of the messiah from the one who brings restoration (*tikkun*) and redemption to the one whose appearance is brought about by human acts of *tikkun*.³⁹²

By the mid-17th century, the messianic mood emanating from the kabbalists in Safed, in particular Lurianism, spread throughout the diaspora, brought with it messianic tensions, and provided the background for the Sabbatean movement. Sabbatai Sevi (also spelled Shabbatai Zevi³⁹³) was a Turkish rabbinic scholar and kabbalist who believed that he was the Messiah. To prepare himself for this role he deliberately engaged in forbidden acts such as eating forbidden foods. To the dismay of the rabbinic establishment, a popular movement with antinomian tendencies supported Zevi as Messiah and spread rapidly among Jews. Zevi attempted to depose the Sultan in Constantinople in 1666. He was captured, and chose conversion to Islam over execution. Despite attempts by learned followers to explain the Sabbatean apostasy, the movement gradually died out, but the rabbinic establishment remained strongly opposed to signs of Sabbateanism and antinomianism in the following centuries.³⁹⁴

After the messianic Sabbatean debacle to which kabbalism contributed, the kabbalists became very conservative, limited popular access to Jewish esotericism and

³⁹⁰ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 26.

³⁹¹ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 44-45.

³⁹² Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 44-56

³⁹³ Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 456.

³⁹⁴ Jacobs, *ibid.*

tried to reestablish its historical position as an elitist pursuit. As well, the rabbis and their religious discussions were remote from daily life. That life became increasingly oppressive due to the social and economic conditions in which most Jews lived, particularly in southeast Poland where hasidism arose in the middle of the 18th century.³⁹⁵ Its titular founder, Israel ben Eliezer, known as the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (Master of the Good Name) and also by the acronym *Besht*, was a charismatic leader who communicated his teachings orally to a group of disciples. A comparatively unscholarly religious teacher and self-taught kabbalist, he engaged in magical activities, taught his followers by means of simple stories and parables, and preached a religion of joy. His successor, Dov Baer, the Great *Maggid* (preacher), was a talmudic and kabbalistic scholar who gave the hasidic ideas greater depth and complexity by relating them to kabbalah in novel ways.³⁹⁶

Benzion Dinur and Raphael Mahler have both argued that social, economic and historical factors facilitated the rise and expansion of early hasidism.³⁹⁷ In general, Jewish communal leadership had decayed, with corruption and bribery among officials and moral decadence as well as religious ignorance among the rabbinate. Hasidism was closely connected to the opposition to the official community leadership. On the other hand, Sharot disputes this conclusion, pointing out that the “most rebellious and vocal opponents of the official community, the artisans in the large towns, remained largely outside the movement”.³⁹⁸ He points out that hasidism had no program to reform the *kehillah*, and did not propose a radical social restructuring.

³⁹⁵ Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*; R. Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985); L. S. Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967).

³⁹⁶ Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*.

³⁹⁷ Benzion Dinur, “The Origins of Hasidism and Its Social and Messianic Foundations”, pp.86-208 in *Essential Papers On Hasidism: Origins to Present*, Gershon David Hundert (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1991); Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of American, 1985).

³⁹⁸ Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*, 149.

Early hasidism tended to encourage moderation, which, along with its strong roots in tradition, kept antinomian tendencies in check and allowed for its subsequent growth. By the end of the 19th century, in eastern Europe, hasidism had spread over the entire range of Jewish occupations and social, economic and intellectual levels. The reason has to do with the idea of the *zaddik* as the living master and the *hasid*, who must seek continually to be in touch with the master. The *zaddik* performed prayer in the Hasidic way and studied Torah for its own sake, and thus was seen as having a particular ability to attract the divine into this world and distribute that divine influx into the world.³⁹⁹ By the time of the third or fourth generation following the *Besht*, the concept of the *zaddik*, a carrier of considerable personal charisma, had evolved to encompass three roles. He was a cosmic redeemer, who could rescue the divine sparks from their captivity in the material world. He was a personal redeemer who, after his death, could stay in touch with his *hasid* and influence his fate in the afterlife. And he could protect men from evil and cause change in the material conditions of the world, because he was seen as a healer and miracle worker, at least in the eyes of the hasidic masses.⁴⁰⁰

Thus the *zaddik* was a mystic who was active in the world, a combination of powerful roles that had formerly been separate from leadership. The rabbi's main function was to teach the Torah and render decisions in Jewish law. The *zaddik* served his followers as spiritual guide and mentor and was called a *rebbe*, which is a variation on rabbi and was introduced to distinguish between the two. A man was recognized as a *zaddik* through personal charisma and the principle of discipleship. Disciples tended to stay close to the *rebbe*. As a result, there developed the institution of the *rebbe*'s court. This court varied in size according to the number and wealth of his following, who supported him economically. Some large courts were similar to self-sufficient manor houses, with assorted family members, followers and their families, administrative

³⁹⁹ For a fascinating discussion of the complexity of the *zaddik*'s role, see Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 189-208.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

assistants, artisans and merchants all associated in close proximity around the *rebbe* who was the pinnacle of this rather closed group.⁴⁰¹

The succession principle gradually widened to include various combinations of discipleship and heredity by sons and sons-in-law. These multiple forms of succession led to decentralization and segmentation of the movement – it had no centralized leadership but was composed of autonomous, mainly local, groups. Internal competition developed, as well as religious differences in the roles and lifestyles of the *rebbe*, and differences in the ideology, values and religious practices of the hasidic groups. Hasidism at this stage focussed on personal salvation *in* exile rather than national redemption *from* exile.⁴⁰² It was “a resurgence of a basic yearning of the human spirit for closeness to God ... it is mysticism breaking out from the small circles of devotees to become the possession of the people as a whole”.⁴⁰³ Moshe Idel considers hasidism as a religious movement as “a perfect case of the proliferation of small sects that differ from each other on relatively unimportant issues”.⁴⁰⁴

In contrast to the contemporary rabbinic remoteness and the kabbalistic asceticism, early hasidism, that is, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* and his group, emphasized joy, humility and spontaneity in worship. While accepting the Lurianic cosmology, they concentrated on the omnipresence of God rather than the catastrophic shattering of the vessels and dispersion of the divine sparks. At the same time, they accepted that even sinful impulses do not have to be completely repressed but contain a divine spark which can be released in the service of God. Through its adaptation of Lurianic kabbalah, hasidism pushed further the transformation of certain rabbinic concepts. Hasidism shifted the kabbalistic emphasis on mystical speculation and a theory about the origin and repair of the cosmos, to a mystical psychology that looked to *devekut* as a method for attaining

⁴⁰¹ Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*, 158-174; Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment*, 23-28.

⁴⁰² Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*.

⁴⁰³ Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*, 24.

⁴⁰⁴ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 19.

inner bliss. In the Hasidic view, a physical act could become religious if in performing it, one cleaved mentally to God, that is, kept God in mind at all times. Thus *deveikut* could be achieved by ordinary Jews, not just the intellectual or spiritual elite.⁴⁰⁵ This hasidic idea of *deveikut* became institutionalized in the *zaddick*. In the rabbinic tradition, *deveikut* is an ideal which human beings can usually only realize through being attached to Torah and its study.⁴⁰⁶ Hasidism made it more immediate and accessible by postulating that, while the divine was only accessible to the spiritually endowed, the ordinary Jew, the masses, could also achieve the heights of *deveikut* by cleaving to the *zaddik*. Particularly for spiritual men, any act, including those concerned with physical pleasure and the achievement of material needs became a religious act if the intention was to cleave to God.⁴⁰⁷

Kavvanah (intention) in rabbinic Judaism was associated with proper concentration with regard to prayer and performance of the *mitzvot* (commandments), but the kabbalists transformed this rabbinic ideal associated with prayer into a complex of mystical intentions the individual is to focus on when contemplating the system of *sefirot*. Hasidism not only taught that religious achievement could be obtained through involvement in the concrete, material world, it opposed asceticism and encouraged Jews to take pleasure in the things of the world, such as food and, properly used, alcohol. It emphasized the importance of prayer, which was seen to lead to deeper, more ecstatic forms of religious experience, often expressed through body movements and shouting.⁴⁰⁸ The centrality of prayer in hasidism represented a “restructuring of the hierarchy of Jewish religious values”, so that mystical fervour was seen as more important than

⁴⁰⁵ Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience of History* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 489-496.

⁴⁰⁶ Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 302.

⁴⁰⁷ Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, 489-496.

⁴⁰⁸ Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*; Bokser, *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*.

scholarship, and scriptural study became a contemplative rather than an intellectual pursuit.⁴⁰⁹

Idel has provided an overview of 20th century scholarship on Jewish mysticism, ranging through the approaches of Buber, Scholem and Heschel, among others.⁴¹⁰ He suggests that while they all saw a vital role for hasidism in modern Judaism, there are some underlying assumptions which present a somewhat limited and inaccurate picture of hasidism, linking it too closely to Lurianic kabbalah, seeing it too readily as an attempt to neutralize extant messianism, or seeing it as more innovative than in reality it was. Rather, the hasidic masters worked interactively with a “mystical panorama”, developing concepts and ideas chosen from among a range of mystical paradigms available to them via a large, and still inadequately explored, corpus of mystical literature.⁴¹¹ This panoramic assumption can provide a much better understanding of the complexity of hasidic mysticism, and points to it as a choice among a plurality of mystical and non-mystical sources, previously existing mystical values, as well as various speculative themes and religious models in Judaism.

Included in this available panorama were ideas associated with older strands of kabbalistic thinking such as the ecstatic kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia or the thought of Luria’s predecessor in Safed, Moshe Cordovero. Among these ideas were immanentism and pantheism, which some consider characteristic of hasidism.⁴¹² Although the kabbalists all unequivocally acknowledged a transcendent layer of the Divine, interpretations which pushed the logic of their emanational systems lead to pantheistic views. In ecstatic kabbalah, pantheism became associated with *devekut* (understood as mystical union with the Divine): “it is possible to unite with God because He permeates

⁴⁰⁹ Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism and Magic*, 141.

⁴¹⁰ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 2-20.

⁴¹¹ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 12.

⁴¹² Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 17-18; see also Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: New American Library, 1974), 144-152, as well as his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 347.

all of existence, and this continuous diffusion of the divine facilitates the mystical encounter”.⁴¹³ At the same time, Idel points out that these and other theological ideas were not so much catalysts for the emergence of the 18th century hasidic mystics as they were background reference points. Adopting a variety of theological ideas helped hasidism to validate itself and develop a more comprehensive worldview.⁴¹⁴ That worldview, based on the assumption that God is omnipresent in all things, understands reality as “simultaneously a divine essence and a physical manifestation, as a spiritual interior and a material exterior, as a divine unity and a corporeal multiplicity, as nothingness, *ayin*, and as existence, *yesh*, or else as having opposite visages that condition each other and are united within each other”.⁴¹⁵ This worldview brought with it emphasis on spiritual internalization of religious life and on the value of intention which can illuminate secular activities and convert them to acts of divine worship.

Idel discerns three competing models woven throughout the history of Jewish mysticism. The magical model (where magic refers to supernaturally-assisted human control over nature) is not associated with a specific body of hasidic or kabbalistic literature. The ecstatic model was expressed in the writings of 13th century R. Abraham Abulafia and a few others, and later reappeared in the work of Cordovero. The theosophical-theurgical model (theurgy being defined as the attempt by the hasidic master to induce a change within the divine infrastructure itself, rather than control over nature) is associated particularly with Zoharic and Iurianic literature and the Kabbalists of Safed. All of these models were available to the hasidic masters.⁴¹⁶ Both the magic and ecstatic models were influenced by medieval Muslim culture, and are somewhat anthropocentric, with man being the centre and main beneficiary of the activity and the

⁴¹³ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 18. It appears that Idel does not share Scholem’s view that *devekut* refers to communion, not union, with the divine.

⁴¹⁴ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 24.

⁴¹⁵ Rachel Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism* (trans. Jeffrey M. Green) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 13.

⁴¹⁶ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 45-102.

person being the location of the encounter with the divine.⁴¹⁷ In contrast, the theosophical-theurgic model is strongly theo-and mytho-centric.⁴¹⁸

Idel sees Hasidic thought as characterized by its effort (via the concept of *zaddik* as able to draw the divine down to the material world) to hold together the two extremes of spiritual and material, as part of a system that was both religious and social. Its approach to the encounter with the divine is closer to the mysticism of love than to the mysticism of knowledge and understanding. Hasidism has been presented by some as a popularization of kabbalah, or as a psychological interpretation of Lurianism, or the generic name for social groups associated with charismatic figures, but understood from the panoramic approach, it is much more than these. “It has a unique spiritual countenance... both a continuation of and a significant divergence from earlier types of thought”.⁴¹⁹

On the other hand, Gershom Scholem states that although *devekut* is essentially an emotional value associated with love of the divine, it is frequently linked in early Hasidic thought with the mind, a link which may have come from kabbalistic tradition.⁴²⁰ On Scholem’s reading, the Hasidic view is that there is a strong emotional colouring to the concept of mind, and through the practice of *devekut*, thought is transformed into emotion.

Ada Rapoport-Albert sees the focus on the *zaddik* as continuing the elitist tendency of some Jewish spiritual leadership.⁴²¹ She claims that, “far from being the demotic figure he is so often said to have been, the Besht was an aspiring elitist and a

⁴¹⁷ I discuss the medieval Muslim (that is, Sufi) approach in the next chapter.

⁴¹⁸ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 45-102.

⁴¹⁹ Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 211.

⁴²⁰ Gershom Scholem, “*Devekut*, Or Communion With God”, pp.275-298 in *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to the Present*, Gershon David Hundert, (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

⁴²¹ Ada Rapoport-Albert, “God and the Zaddik”, pp.299-329 in *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to the Present*, Gershon David Hundert, (ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

religious social climber”.⁴²² She constructs her argument around the concept of *devekut*, citing writings which indicate that early hasidism took for granted the idea that there existed a small number of spiritually endowed men who could experience *devekut* as cleaving to God, as well as the mass of ordinary people who could only experience it by cleaving to the spiritually endowed. Thus, hasidism blocked the access of ordinary people to God. Most ordinary people would find their direct route to God blocked by the small group of spiritual adepts who insisted that every contact with God be “channeled” through them and thus regulated by them.⁴²³

3.1.4 Neo-hasidism

The Jewish Renewal movement has been associated with the term neo-hasidism. There appears to be no common agreement on a definition of neo-hasidism. Writing in 1952, Schachter-Shalomi (then known as Schachter) evaluated the Hasidic movement and its survival, and felt that neo-hasidism was simply a modern rediscovery of hasidism.⁴²⁴ By 1962, when the work of Martin Buber had become widely known and studied, Stitskin linked neo-hasidism with Jewish existentialism: “As a Jewish existentialist, Buber belongs to the religious wing of the movement which in Judaism has become identified as neo-hasidism”.⁴²⁵ By 2002, some adherents of the Jewish Renewal movement were equating Jewish renewal with neo-hasidism: “Because of its emphasis on direct spiritual experience and mystical or Kabbalistic teachings, Jewish renewal is sometimes referred to as neo-Hasidic or Four Worlds Judaism (a reference to the “four worlds” of Jewish mysticism)”.⁴²⁶ An editorial in *Tikkun* magazine modified this somewhat: “Jewish Renewal ... is a kind of neo-hasidism, in that it seeks the spiritual

⁴²² Ibid., 314.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Zalman Schachter, “Hasidism and Neohasidism”, in *Judaism* 1 (1952): 216-221.

⁴²⁵ L. Stitskin, “Foreword” in E. Borowitz (ed.), *A Layman's Introduction to Religious Existentialism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 5.

⁴²⁶ ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, <http://www.aleph.org>.

renewal of Judaism, but ‘neo’ because it insists on full equality for women and a creative return to the process of transforming Halakhah [*sic*] (Jewish Law) so that it continues to be a living path to the connection to God”.⁴²⁷

In a discussion called “Neo-Hasidism Today”, Arthur Green argues that for Jews seeking a deeper spirituality than that offered by liberal American Judaism, religious existentialism “led us to the door” of the *I and Thou* dialogue.⁴²⁸ Yet this dialogue is essentially silent, so that Jews must look to traditional hasidism to “internalize” the traditional hasidic language and its more richly mythic world. The modern, seeking Jew’s “post-critical consciousness” has no interest in proving the truth or otherwise of mythology – it understands and accepts myth (of the Bible, hasidic writings, etc.) as being more profound than critical scholarship. He suggests that modern seekers must appropriate tradition to help on the journey to a deeper spirituality, but that in return, they ask that tradition not be seen as closed, but as able to be shaped by current thinking. For him, the “new hasidism” has in common with the old an intense internalization of *kavvanah*, with an understanding that *mitzvot* are means and not ends; they are “vessels for the divine light to come down to earth”. At the same time, the new hasidism cannot turn spiritual authority over to another (in keeping with the American tendency to independence), so there are no disciples, only teachers; to offset the potential for isolation, *havurot* and communities of seekers are important. For him the authority for neo-hasidism is to be found in the original thinking of the *Ba’al Shem Tov*, who represented “Hasidism at its boldest, early stage, where he enunciated truths as known, not as filtered”.

Neo-hasidism, then, is neither just a resurgent hasidic orthodoxy, nor just a religious existentialism. Rooted in both, it goes beyond them to be a work-in-progress, trying to shape tradition so that it is meaningful for modern Jews. Whether or not the

⁴²⁷ Tikkun Magazine, <http://www.tikkun.org/renewal/index.cfm>.

⁴²⁸ Arthur Green, “Neo-Hasidism Today: Conversation with Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Arthur Green”. CD #4 in *Awakening, Yearning and Renewal: A Conference on the Hasidic Roots of Contemporary Jewish Spiritual Expression* (The Spirituality Institute, <http://www.spiritualityinstitute.org>, 2003).

term neo-hasidic is helpful when applied to Jewish Renewal is a matter of debate, given that there is no clear definition of neohasidism. I turn now to an examination of the way in which Schachter-Shalomi finds authority for some of his ideas in hasidism.

3.2 Hasidism in Jewish Renewal

Writing in 1981, Schachter-Shalomi concluded that “Judaism and all the other Western religions are suffering from having become oververbalized and underexperienced”, and that the spiritual legacy of eastern European Jewry can help reinvigorate contemporary Judaism.⁴²⁹ Magid maintains that “Hasidic teachings, devotional practices and lifestyle, (tapered to fit the particular needs and values of countercultural America) are the foundation of Reb Zalman’s ongoing project”; the project is the “radical reconstruction of Hasidic spirituality”.⁴³⁰ Schachter-Shalomi himself has said that he wants to “reboot Hasidism”.⁴³¹ In his view, “Hasidism ... is an eminently usable model for Jewish Renewal” as adherents of Jewish Renewal, wanting to retain tradition yet meet contemporary spiritual needs, try to “retrofit our spiritual technology to the demands of our era”, being “sensitive to feminism, human potential, ecology, and whole-earth thinking”.⁴³² In other words, as Magid points out, “Hasidism ... becomes the model, but cannot be the solution to Reb Zalman’s project”, because it requires significant reformation to escape the “cultural, ideological and even spiritual values of an old paradigm”.⁴³³ In an earlier work, Schachter-Shalomi addresses this point through a computer analogy, suggesting that there is a need to “reformat Jewish tradition in such a way that the old files of rabbinic and biblical Judaism will remain compatible

⁴²⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *First Steps to a New Jewish Spirit*, xviii.

⁴³⁰ Shaul Magid, “Rainbow Hasidism in America – The Maturation of Jewish Renewal”, *The Reconstructionist*, Spring, 2004, 34-36.

⁴³¹ In a private conversation with me at the Kallah in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, on July 28, 2005.

⁴³² Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 11.

⁴³³ Magid, “Rainbow Hasidism in America”, 42.

with what we create” and that there is a need to write “new Jewish software which is intentionally formed so that it can read files created in applications and operating systems that are no longer being updated”.⁴³⁴

Schachter-Shalomi himself states that “much of what I have learned from Kabbalah stands in tension with what I consider to be an adequate map of reality for today”.⁴³⁵ In an examination of Schachter-Shalomi’s rendering of the thought of selected hasidic masters, Magid concludes that he uses textual interpretation of hasidic works not just to illuminate contemporary reality but to create it, because through his creative textual interpretation he finds in hasidic thought the beginnings of ideas which he puts forward in *Jewish Renewal*.⁴³⁶ As we saw earlier, the concept of *rebbe*, and the relationship between a person and his *rebbe*, is central to hasidism. Here again, *Jewish Renewal* “reformats” a traditional idea. Schachter-Shalomi takes a hasidic tale about a *hasid* who sent (telepathically) healing to his *rebbe*, and discusses it in terms of relationship, and the importance of working with others in relationships in order to heal, that is, renew ourselves.⁴³⁷ This idea serves to underscore the importance *Jewish Renewal* places on community and the student teacher relationship.

It also supports Schachter-Shalomi’s reconception of *rebbe* as a temporary function that individuals can undertake in order to help each other accomplish inner transformations: “... this is an intermittent function that we allow ourselves... in order to be able to have access to regions that the normal consciousness doesn’t have access to”.⁴³⁸ This idea of organic connection as a facilitator for the “transformational psychology” that is part of the Gaian perspective ushers in a new vision of the *rebbe*, which Magid suggests is “perhaps the first seismic move that Reb Zalman makes from

⁴³⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal is Judaism Now*, 22.

⁴³⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 47.

⁴³⁶ Magid, “Rainbow Hasidism in America”. 46-47.

⁴³⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 85.

⁴³⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 14.

Hasidism to Renewal”.⁴³⁹ This vision of rebbe as a function (rebbetude) rather than fully realized man who is in constant direct contact with God still stresses the importance of the intimate *rebbe-talmid* (teacher- student) relationship. Yet it recognizes that mastering the wisdom of the past is insufficient in the contemporary situation; the person who functions as rebbe needs to be personally prepared as well as conscious of the potential for abuse of power.⁴⁴⁰ Daniel Siegal, the Spiritual Director of ALEPH, points out that the relationship between the fitness of the teacher and the teaching is an old conversation in Judaism, with the Talmud and hasidic writings addressing criteria for the teacher-student relationship.⁴⁴¹ Another Jewish Renewal leader, Rabbi Goldie Ingram, has built on Schachter-Shalomi’s view and established and updated list of criteria for rebbetude which emphasize that a sense of God is at its core, and that the person carrying out the rebbe function needs to be humble, transparent, open to other ideas, empowering of others, and knowledgeable, as well as a host of other characteristics.⁴⁴² The emphasis on charismatic leadership as well as the rebbe as function poses a challenge to Jewish Renewal due to potential abuses of power. Chava Weissler discusses a recent controversy at ALEPH in which a charismatic teacher who was associated with the movement was accused of sexual misconduct with students.⁴⁴³ As Weissler points out, the Hasidic model of rebbe-disciple is important for Jewish Renewal, as is the cultivation of a deep and intense awareness of the divine presence. Thus “a turn toward spirituality brings both the promise and perils of charismatic leadership in its wake”.⁴⁴⁴

Schachter-Shalomi’s view is that the contemporary (post-Holocaust) theological paradigm is pantheism, and he looks to early hasidism for authority, finding in the work

⁴³⁹ Magid, “Rainbow Hasidism in America”, 38.

⁴⁴⁰ Z. Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counselling in Hasidism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

⁴⁴¹ Daniel Siegal, “If They Call You Rebbe...”, <http://www.aleph.org/pdf/rebbe.pdf>.

⁴⁴² Goldie Ingram, “Principles of Rebbetude”, <http://ww.ohalah.org/rebbetude.htm>

⁴⁴³ Chava Weissler, “Disciples, Rebbes and Jewish Renewal”, SHMA, December, 2006, 4-5.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5

of the *Besht* support for the idea that the divine is to be found in the person. Explaining that Jews (and by implication, humanity) in ancient times sought God in space (such as the Temple), and then in time (such as the rabbinic emphasis on *shabbat*), now God is found in person because time has become secularized. He refers to the traditional hasidic formula: “Seek ye the Lord where he may be found. Call upon Him, where He is near”.⁴⁴⁵ Magid suggests that hasidism does emphasize the importance of the person, and that stressing the divine in the human is a theological move that brings Judaism closer to Christianity.⁴⁴⁶

There are other examples of Schachter-Shalomi turning to Hasidic sources as authority for his views, particularly the need to recognize the validity of other religions. For example, he offers a creative reinterpretation in his discussion of the concept of *ashrei* (or *ashray*).⁴⁴⁷ In a teaching given in 2000, Schachter-Shalomi interprets *ashrei* as describing a feeling of blissful, blessed happiness, of being connected to God, using the metaphor of a computer being connected online to the main server. This is the traditional Jewish understanding of the word. Linking the attainment of *ashrei* to *devekut*, he stresses the need for Jewish Renewal as a movement to avoid becoming “orthodox renewalists”, and the importance of moving forward, recognizing and appreciating the strength of precedent and tradition but simultaneously having the courage to innovate in order to take that tradition to the next step.⁴⁴⁸ In another text, published later, he nuances the meaning of *ashrei*, suggesting that a theology of a renewed Judaism clearly responds to the search for “*ashrei*”, which he defines as the absence of anxiety.⁴⁴⁹ Suggesting that there are many ways of getting to *ashrei*, not all of them religious or Jewish, he holds that for the Jewish seeker kabbalah and contemporary *midrash* offer a solution to the tension

⁴⁴⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 21.

⁴⁴⁶ Magid, “Rainbow Hasidism in America”, 57: Note 12.

⁴⁴⁷ Both transliterations are used at various points in the texts.

⁴⁴⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Words of Light Shabbaton*, 25-27.

⁴⁴⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 5.

between the universal and the particular that the search for *ashrei* can engender.⁴⁵⁰ *Ashrei*, then, is not only the joy experienced by living in constant awareness of God, it becomes a mediating concept by which Jewish Renewal can both accept the validity of other religions and identify with contemporary North American culture's concern with anxiety.

Schachter-Shalomi also derives from Chabad Hasidism the authority to stress the importance of recognizing the validity of other religions. In another teaching, originally delivered in 1989, he refers to a 1905 teaching by the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe, Reb Shalom Dov Ber, on the biblical passage in which Moses tells the Israelites to assemble people to fight the Midianites (Numbers 31:3).⁴⁵¹ Schachter-Shalomi suggests that Reb Ber's teaching positions this passage as being about groups being cut off from each other due to extreme "surface tension" between them.⁴⁵² Reb Ber links this to another teaching (Deuteronomy 4:39) which concerns the two names of God, *YHWH* and *Elohim*. Through an exercise in numerology, he links *Elohim* to the differentiation and separation of all things and *YHWH* to the unity of all. Each name is essential to the other. (This is rooted in the Lubavitch or Chabad Hasidic concept of radical pantheism, which I discuss later).⁴⁵³ Schachter-Shalomi interprets Reb Ber's teaching as being about integration, and then moves from the kabbalistic interpretation of the name *Elohim* to the need to focus on the concept of relationship, in particular the relationships between and among the *sefirot*. He suggests that, while hasidic mysticism seems to focus on the *sefirot* themselves, it is also concerned with the balance achieved by the relationship among the *sefirot*. He then moves to a discussion of the importance of focusing on the relationships and sefirotic balance to acknowledging our own shadow in order to achieve wholeness. Finally, "this teaching applies to the adherents of a particular spiritual path taken collectively", which

⁴⁵⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 10-14.

⁴⁵¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 45-54.

⁴⁵² Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 46.

⁴⁵³ It is not entirely clear in the passage that the numerological exercise is Reb Ber's; it could also be an interjection by Schachter-Shalomi.

leads to the importance of Jews accepting the validity of and dialoguing with other religions: “We will not heal as a people or a religion if we continue to maintain the surface tension involved in claiming that Judaism is the best and most complete. The only way we can grow at this moment in history is by togethering with the other religions”.⁴⁵⁴ It can be seen, then, that Schachter-Shalomi has creatively associated with the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe the idea of the importance for Judaism’s future growth of the ability to work with other religious groups.

It is not only the Lubavitcher Hasidism to whom Schachter-Shalomi looks for the importance of recognizing the validity of other religious paths. In a discussion of the key thinkers of Bratslav Hasidism, Schachter-Shalomi points to the writing of its founder, Reb Nachman of Bratslav, for such authority. He interprets Reb Nachman’s teaching ‘Torah of the Void’ as dealing with both the sciences and non-Jewish religious traditions, and finds in that teaching the recognition that other traditions contain great wisdom: “Reb Nachman was saying ‘Even from the fairy tales of the *Goyim* there screams forth the glory of God’”.⁴⁵⁵

As a final example, Schachter-Shalomi derives authority for his Gaian interpretation of life from the Hasidic master Reb Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt (1745-1825), the Apter Rebbe. He refers to the Apter’s teaching regarding the instruction in Leviticus 7:10-11 that Moses was to anoint with oil all the surfaces of the tabernacle as well as the holy vessels it contained. Various other passages are referenced to demonstrate that in the Bible, oil is associated with wisdom, and wisdom with life. Thus, the Apter Rebbe is suggesting that Moses was bringing the sanctuary and its vessels to life by anointing them with oil. He interprets the Apter as saying that “if we look at something with *chokmah*, with our deep intuitive wisdom, even the seemingly inanimate takes on a life and holiness of its own ... this kernel of Jewish insight ... speaks directly to one of the holiest ideas put forward by the scientific community in recent years: the

⁴⁵⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 53.

⁴⁵⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 243.

idea that Earth itself is alive with a planetary intelligence of her own”- the Gaian hypothesis.⁴⁵⁶

These several examples show, then, that Schachter-Shalomi engages in contemporary *midrash* by following the classic Jewish approach of interacting with older texts to derive creative inspiration. In particular, it is clear that his perspective is deeply rooted in kabbalistic and hasidic traditions. Thus he looks to hasidism for authority on which to build interpretations of Jewish tradition and thought; these interpretations in turn transform hasidism and support his Jewish Renewal views. In particular, he values the perspectives of the earlier Hasidic masters, and criticizes later hasidism for destroying the religion by excessive conservatism and by failing to restructure hasidism to take account of the shift from a rural style of life and worship to urban settings.⁴⁵⁷

At the same time, he maintains that there have been “radical teachers of Hasidism ... who did seek to restructure the Hasidic enterprise and reignite the embers of the Hasidism of the Ba’al Shem Tov (*sic*)”.⁴⁵⁸ In addition to the Bratislaver and Apter rebbes referred to earlier, Schachter-Shalomi points to Reb Mordecai Yosef of Ishbitz (1800-1854) as a source of the idea that some teachings in the *Torah* are eternal and others must vary from generation to generation. Reb Gershon Henokh of Radzyn (1839-1890) was interested in renewing a tradition (the blue thread in the prayer shawl) that had been lost. Reb Ariele Roth (1894-1947) considered some of the *mitzvot* to be commandments of consciousness, and used them to encourage people to spiritualize their basic quotidian activities.⁴⁵⁹ Reb Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), although not Hasidic, was a mystic and also the Chief Rabbi of Israel, worked for the renewal of the Jewish people by “embracing the maximum of tradition while acknowledging the evolving uniqueness of modern times, waiting expectantly to be made holy”.⁴⁶⁰ Reb Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942)

⁴⁵⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 162.

⁴⁵⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 204, 213.

⁴⁵⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 204.

⁴⁵⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 251-270.

⁴⁶⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 274.

encouraged the renewal of hasidism, going back to the work of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* for inspiration. He also was concerned that the degree of tension between Jews and non-Jews had become excessive and worked to broaden the Jewish perspective to respect that of non-Jews. Reb Shlomo Carlebach (1925-1994) had a vision of peace and harmony and recognized the divine spark in everyone. Furthermore, based on his interpretation of a Torah passage that discussed the need for *kohanim* (priests, spiritual teachers) to avoid corpses lest they become angry at God and unable to teach properly, he recognized the validity of other spiritual paths. He explained that many contemporary Jews had turned to the spiritual teachers of eastern religions because, after the Holocaust, many Jews who could be teachers were angry at God and could not provide the spiritual leadership needed.⁴⁶¹

All of these hasidic masters, and others, provide inspiration for Schachter-Shalomi's "rebooting" of hasidism, as well as authority to support his various ideas. Taken as a whole, the attribution of authority tends to focus on the earlier, purer versions of hasidism, particularly that espoused by the *Ba'al Shem Tov*. In this Schachter-Shalomi seems to be repeating a tendency that Shaul Magid has observed in kabbalistic transmission. Magid points out that the religious request for authenticity often is connected to a search for origins; both those in the "circle of the Zohar" and those later "in the Lurianic fraternity" maintained that the ancient esoteric tradition had existed from Abrahamic times, but had been corrupted in transmission and needed to be retrieved and restored to its original purer state.⁴⁶² Schachter-Shalomi's purpose, however, is not to restore hasidism to its original state, but to "reboot", that is, go back to the beginning to find a usable base on which to build a contemporarily meaningful hasidism. This recycling of older ideas as the source material for developing new concepts is a postmodern marker, as I will discuss further in Chapter 7. The older ideas need not be ancient, as the next section demonstrates.

⁴⁶¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 287-295.

⁴⁶² Shaul Magid, *Hasidism on the Margin* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 5-7.

3.3 Relationship with the Reconstructionist Stream

The Reconstructionist stream of Jewish thought is very much a product of 20th century North America, and remains vibrant today. It was founded by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, who was born in Lithuania in 1881 but raised in America. By the 1930s this orthodox trained scholar had become a perceptive critic of American Jewish life. Noting that large numbers of American Jews were not associated with synagogue life, and that Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism seemed unresponsive to contemporary thought in the sciences or philosophy, he concluded that American Jewish religious leadership did not grasp the essence of being Jewish in 20th century America.⁴⁶³ For Kaplan, the peoplehood of Jewish existence was paramount, and he asserted that Judaism is a religious civilization, rather than a religion as such. Reconstructionism rejected the classical Jewish ideas of a personal God and the direct revelation of the Bible. Rather, it deliberately reconceptualized the key ideas of Jewish tradition such as God, commandment, prayer and chosenness.⁴⁶⁴

Magid has pointed to “an interesting, yet still unexplored, correlation between Reb Zalman and Mordecai Kaplan”.⁴⁶⁵ To date, my study shows some interesting parallels, which suggest that further exploration is warranted. In 1984, Schachter-Shalomi himself suggested a potential future amalgam of neo-hasidism (and, by implication, Jewish Renewal) and Reconstructionism which would be post- and transdenominational.⁴⁶⁶ He felt that hasidism and kabbalah could provide the tools for Reconstructionism to update its philosophy, to inject needed emotional expression in its

⁴⁶³ Alan T. Levenson, *Modern Jewish Thinkers: An Introduction* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 2000), 159-168.

⁴⁶⁴ Reconstructionism remains the smallest group today, although a number of its ideas have found their way into Conservative and Reform thought.

⁴⁶⁵ Shaul Magid, “Rainbow Hasidism in America-The Maturation of Jewish Renewal”, *The Reconstructionist* (Spring: 2004), 50.

⁴⁶⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 127-133.

services and prayers, and to appreciate the contemporary recognition that altered states of consciousness exist. That this merger has not occurred may be due, in part, to Schachter-Shalomi's openly pantheistic theology, which goes beyond that articulated by either Kaplan or contemporary Reconstructionist thinkers.⁴⁶⁷

The son of a rabbi, Kaplan was fully grounded in traditional Judaic learning, but he had an eclectic approach and adapted his thinking to acknowledge the best in all cultures, readily drawing on the insights of other civilizations.⁴⁶⁸ Profoundly supportive of Jewish unity, he did not see it requiring uniformity, and held that "the right to a Jewish identity and participation in Jewish affairs must not be denied any Jew because of divergence from traditional beliefs or practices".⁴⁶⁹ Kaplan's concept of Judaism as a civilization rested on: his appreciation of the centrality of the concept of Jewish peoplehood to the understanding of God and Torah; his perception of the need to reconstruct the Jewish religion, for which *halakhah* is a guide rather than law, and the need to reinterpret Judaism's idea of God in a way that is meaningful for contemporary Jews; and his attraction to philosophical pragmatism's focus on experience as essential to understanding ideas and their importance in changing reality.⁴⁷⁰ He held that theology must be linked to experience, and Judaism provides a complete frame of reference in which to live one's life, it is not merely a point of departure for religious ritual and practice. Schachter-Shalomi's theology is underpinned by a similar approach, although his valuation of experience stems from his hasidic perspective. Jewish Renewal practice penetrates all aspects of life, and hallows the ordinary.

⁴⁶⁷ The Reconstructionist website features a range of articles and abstracts from the quarterly publication *Reconstructionism Today*, and in particular, the writing of Reconstructionist Rabbi and theologian Harold Schulweis. See <http://jrg.org/rt/twofaces.html> and <http://jrf.org/cong/res-recon-God.html>.

⁴⁶⁸ Jack J. Cohen, *Guides For An Age of Confusion: Studies in the Thinking of Avraham Y. Kook and Mordechai M. Kaplan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999).

⁴⁶⁹ Jack J. Cohen, *Guides for an Age of Confusion*, 13.

⁴⁷⁰ William E. Kaufman, "Mordechai Kaplan: The Natural and the Transnatural", in *Contemporary Jewish Philosophies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1992 [originally published in 1985]), 175-216.

Kaplan was a “theological revolutionary” in that he insisted that all theologies and religious cultures are human constructions and must, therefore, be approached with the same logic that applies to other human “ideational creations”.⁴⁷¹ In the concept of God both a striking resonance and dissonance exists between Kaplan and Schachter-Shalomi. Both focus not on defining God but on understanding how the meaning of the term operates in human discourse. Both avoid hypostatizing God by substituting the notion of process for that of entity.

Kaplan took a functional approach to the idea of God. He saw the God idea as derived “not from metaphysical speculation or supernatural revelation but naturalistically from the process of discovering the meaning of human self-fulfillment or salvation.”⁴⁷² Kaplan interpreted ‘God’ as a generic term describing the intuited, eternal, creative potentiality in the universe which generates the creative process that is fulfilled in man when he actualizes in his life godly values. In Kaufman’s view, Kaplan resolved the metaphysical challenge this poses to the idea of God’s unity by putting forward his idea of the transnatural (as opposed to supernatural), thus invoking the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The God-process is transnatural in that it interweaves throughout the elements in the universe, making nature and the universe an organic whole. In short, God is the total of all the universal forces which impel man to self-fulfillment (salvation) and make of the universe an ordered unity or cosmos. Creation, then, is a continuous process. The purpose of prayer is to open oneself up to the operation of the God-process in man, that is, to a higher level of reality which transcends mind. And evil, which cannot be explained in its natural (rather than moral) manifestation, is something to be conquered and surmounted by appropriate action.⁴⁷³

As described in Chapter 2, Schachter-Shalomi describes his understanding of God-as-process through discussion of the linguistic differences between English and

⁴⁷¹ Cohen, *Guides for an Age of Confusion*, 125.

⁴⁷² Harold Shulweis, “Reconstructionism”, pp.755-759 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.) (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987), 759.

⁴⁷³ Kauffman, “Mordechai Kaplan”.

Hebrew. The English noun God describes a thing, something static, the subject, in grammatical terms. On the other hand, the Hebrew word for thing is *davar*, which derives from the verb root for speaking and is closer to the sense of being in unfolding, in action. He suggests that we think of God as a process, and specifically as a verb. At the same time, kabbalistic understanding, based on experience in the higher levels of the four worlds, suggests that “God” also denotes the creative Source at the centre of the universe, radiating energy and consciousness out to the elements of the universe.⁴⁷⁴ He sidesteps potential accusations of inconsistency by pointing out that people experience God differently depending on their level of awareness, that is, their ability to navigate the four worlds and operate in more than one simultaneously. He maintains that, at the highest level, the paradoxical experience of being separate from, yet one with God is simply not explainable in human language. God is both immanent and transcendent and that the difference between the two is a thin line; being able to hold the tension between the two constitutes the experience of God as no-thing, the Void.⁴⁷⁵

Furthermore, while his descriptions of the God-process imply that he also sees God as a transnatural force, Schachter-Shalomi avoids the metaphysical challenge to understanding the unity of the God-process by declaring openly that the paradigm to which humanity is now shifting is pantheistic.⁴⁷⁶ As mentioned earlier, he locates within hasidism the idea that the divine resides within a person, which he sees as the most useful dimension of pantheism.⁴⁷⁷ Prayer is natural and intuitive, and properly done, opens us up to altered states of consciousness in which we can communicate with the universe and experience the divine within ourselves. While the response to evil as such is not

⁴⁷⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 53-73.

⁴⁷⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 53-56.

⁴⁷⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 294.

⁴⁷⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*; Magid, “Rainbow Hasidism in America-The Maturation of Jewish Renewal, 40.

discussed in Schachter-Shalomi's theology, there is an implication that it can be overcome by appropriate human action.⁴⁷⁸

Kaplan was faced with explaining how a person can pray to an objective process, and addressed the issue by reconstructing the theory and practice of prayer. But his reconstruction did not rely on reason and logic; it incorporated a somewhat mystical perspective.⁴⁷⁹ He saw prayer as an activity of the worshipper, rather than the divine, yet felt it had to be a dialogue between a person and God, because God must be a felt presence, not merely an intellectual idea. Such an experience of God, which arises from the confidence that we can detect God's workings during our earthly existence, requires a leap of faith. This requires high standards of both moral and intellectual integrity, so that prayer offers worshippers not only the moral but also the intellectual foundations on which to build their lives. This in turn requires that the prayerbook be a "living text expressing the spirit of the age".⁴⁸⁰ In consequence Kaplan and other reconstructionists have reworked the Jewish liturgy, incorporating liturgical tradition but amending and supplementing it in accordance with contemporary sensibilities with regard to morality, spirituality and ethics. Jewish Renewal has taken the same approach, but I will not expand on this here as I explore it fully in the next chapter.

As Cohen points out, traditional Judaism is founded on the notion of election or covenant, and down through the centuries, the persistent faith in *Israel's* special role in the divine scheme has helped to explain the Jewish people's will to survive despite centuries of persecution.⁴⁸¹ In traditional understanding, election or chosenness means that *Israel* has a mission to bring other nations to a worship of God, with obedience to Torah being the means to achieve this end. It does not mean racial superiority but the possession of a faith that will some day become the universal property of human beings. Reflecting theologically and philosophically on the Jewish doctrine of election by God or

⁴⁷⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, and *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*.

⁴⁷⁹ Cohen, *Guides for an Age of Confusion*, 138-162.

⁴⁸⁰ Cohen, *Guides for an Age of Confusion*, 151.

⁴⁸¹ Cohen, *Guides for an Age of Confusion*, 223-246.

covenant, David Novak suggests that the theological perspective on covenant will serve contemporary Jews better than the secular. He maintains that in the modernist versions of the covenant (deriving from Spinoza), “covenantal intimacy”, the relationship between God and Israel that gives “ultimate meaning to the relationships between humans themselves”.⁴⁸² When this is lost, as it is with secular Jewish identity, morality loses its ultimate justification.

Kaplan saw the idea of chosenness as highly problematic and a stumbling block to the development of a meaningful contemporary Judaism. For him, in times past it might have had some psychological value in bolstering Jewish identity and counteracting the humiliation to which Jews had been subjected for centuries, and it served to bolster the biblical myth of *Israel*'s origins from wandering desert tribes. Yet for contemporary Jews, its psychological, moral and theological implications are unacceptable, as it presumes a supernaturalistic God, and implies an ethical superiority as well as a racial one. Kaplan, faced with the challenge of retaining loyalty to Torah yet rejecting its doctrine of chosenness, reconceived of Torah as symbol, content and process. As symbol, Torah is the covenant, representing the fact that the Jewish nation becomes such through the consent of its members who have common goals. As content, Torah emphasizes the fact that a nation is not a fighting unit but a cultural group. And as process, Torah is expressed in education, where its moral standard serves as a glue that binds together those who study it to discover and adhere to its wisdom. In consequence, *Israel* must divest itself of the sense of chosenness in order to develop a nationalism that is spiritually and morally universal.⁴⁸³

Kaplan substituted the idea of vocation for that of Jewish chosenness. Jewish vocation involves the Jewish people's dedication to giving humanity the universal values which have been revealed to Israel through its experiences, so that the Jewish way of life gives primacy to those values that are essential to human progress. It also signifies that

⁴⁸² David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 145.

⁴⁸³ Cohen, *Guides for an Age of Confusion*, 238-240.

the Jewish people live well and make the most of their existence, but does not downgrade the value of other religions.⁴⁸⁴ Novak has analyzed Kaplan's thought to demonstrate that, while his theological views were radical relative to traditionalists, those views are linked to a philosophy which is not original, but is founded on the liberal Jewish view that *Israel* elected God, rather than that God elected *Israel*.⁴⁸⁵

Schachter-Shalomi does not discuss the ideas of covenant and chosenness *per se* at any length, but tends to link these concepts to issues regarding identity, universalism and particularism, and his perspective on non-Jewish religious paths. Yet, he sees the idea of covenant as "the core without which I could not even imagine the existence of Judaism".⁴⁸⁶ By comparing the idea of *brit* (covenant) to feudal, commercial and spousal contracts, as well as the teacher-student relationships, he explains that Jews see themselves as "contracting partners with the Creator".⁴⁸⁷ He also examines the idea of Jewish chosenness through his four worlds approach, ultimately concluding that, at least at the intellectual level, it is not possible to establish a universally acceptable definition of what it means to be a Jew, and the Jews are a people continually in search of self-definition. He suggests that they are a group of people who share a commitment to perpetuating "the organ called Jews within the larger human organism".⁴⁸⁸ These ideas of shared commitment, and covenant as contract, echo Kaplan's concept of covenant as a vocation; I suggest that Schachter-Shalomi's proposal that there are many paths to *ashrei*, his stress on the importance of being open to dialogue with other religions and his emphasis on the option of contemporary individuals to choose to be Jewish or not, also speak to Kaplan's vocational redefinition of the traditional concept of covenant.

⁴⁸⁴ Kaufman, "Mordechai Kaplan".

⁴⁸⁵ David Novak, Mordechai Kaplan's Rejection of Election, *Modern Judaism*, vol. 15, no.1, Feb.1995,pp. 1-19.

⁴⁸⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 22.

⁴⁸⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 25.

⁴⁸⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 167.

It can be seen, then, that while Schachter-Shalomi does not appeal to Reconstructionist thought to provide authority for his reinterpretations of the classic Jewish themes of God/Torah/*Israel*, he seems to use its reconceptions of those themes, particularly as presented by Kaplan. In this he is probably pointing the way to the potential amalgamation of Jewish Renewal and Reconstructionism that he foresaw in the early 1980s.

Jewish Renewal, and in particular Schachter-Shalomi, also maintains a dialogue with other streams of discourse, and I now turn to those.

3.4 Dialogue with Non-Jewish Contemporary Discourse

3.4.1 The New Age Stream of Thought

Jewish Renewal has been described as a “New Age Judaism”.⁴⁸⁹ The vagueness of the term “New Age Judaism” reflects the imprecision of the term “New Age” in the broader culture. Sutcliffe maintains that New Age is not a movement but a predominantly North American and European set of mixed social processes, a diffuse collectivity of questing individuals, which arose immediately after the second world war, but by the 1970s was shifting from an apocalyptic focus to a broad humanitarian idiom.⁴⁹⁰ Lyon depicts New Age as less a social or religious movement than an international network of spiritual seekers, marked by a rather ambiguous pastiche of beliefs which differ with the specific cultural milieu. These include belief in a pantheistic monism, in the importance of inner enlightenment, in the experiential basis of knowledge (*gnosis*), and in the centrality of the self.⁴⁹¹ Wouter Hanegraaff, on the other hand, discerns a core belief

⁴⁸⁹ Jeffrey K. Salkin, “New Age Judaism”, pp.354-370 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003),354.

⁴⁹⁰ Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁴⁹¹ David Lyon, “A Bit of a Circus: Notes on Postmodernity and New Age”, *Religion* 23 (1993): 117-26.

structure implicit in a broad array of New Age texts.⁴⁹² He perceives New Age thinking not as a homogenous ideology but as a pattern of criticism of the two dominant cultural trends: the dualism of Christianity and the rationalism of modern science. New Age thinking does not reject either of these, but exists in dialectical tension with them.

Hanegraaff locates the roots of New Age thought and cultural criticism in secularized Western esotericism. By the late 19th century, the Renaissance hermeticism of the 14th and 15th centuries had been creatively reinterpreted due to the impact of modernism. The hermetic worldview based on correspondences was blended with romanticism (the desire to re-enchant the world), occultism, and theosophy, to produce an esotericism which in turn blended with pragmatic American transcendentalism, the psychologization of religion following William James, and, in the 20th century, Jungian thought (which Hanegraaff argues is a religious worldview rooted in German romanticism rather than a scientific theory). This produced the amalgam which is New Age thought, an amalgam which provides western culture with an alternative to both dogmatic Christianity and dogmatic rationalistic ideology. Through this amalgam, New Age perceives itself as a higher synthesis of religion and science, assimilating the understanding of science while retaining the sacred dimension.

This synthesis is intimated in New Age healing practices, which offer an implicit criticism of western medicine. The New Age approach, which has an affinity with naturalistic approaches from traditional cultures, emphasizes the overall situation of the unwell person, rather than a specific disease. In so doing, it blurs the dichotomy between physical and mental illness. Illness is seen as life experience, replete with meaning. In New Age thinking, healing is regarded as promoting harmony in the world, and, as Hanegraaff points out, carries overtones of salvation, which tends to be expressed as personal growth.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998).

⁴⁹³ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 42-46.

The synthesis of science and the sacred is particularly evident in the New Age quest for a unified worldview. New Age thinking has a high regard for science, which it interprets in ways that attack the existing scientific consensus and legitimate the New Age spiritual worldview, in which the reductionist paradigm of western culture is seen as being replaced by a holistic perspective. While critics of New Age scientific models consider it pseudo-science, or at best marginal, New Agers believe that their science, and their selected scientific heroes, can help to explain the workings of the ubiquitous divine in the cosmos, and thus provide a scientific basis for their religious views.⁴⁹⁴

Among the key esoteric ideas retained in New Age thinking are the emphasis on an intuitive gnosticism, an organic cosmos and the importance of the human role in that cosmos. Those esoteric ideas drew on two streams of Renaissance thought: that of the occult sciences (alchemy, magic and astrology), and that of Christian kabbalah, which had adapted Jewish kabbalah to reflect Christian theology. Hanegraaff points out that “the study of kabbalistic sources provided western esotericism with a rich reservoir of theosophical speculations, which, not least due to a common neoplatonic background, could be syncretized with hermeticism and the occult sciences”.⁴⁹⁵ He maintains that the specific contribution of Christian kabbalah to New Age religion is insignificant, although the occultist form in which Christian kabbalism eventually survived has emerged in the contemporary neopaganist stream of New Age.

On the other hand, while no specific aspect of Christian kabbalah may be identifiable in New Age thought, I suggest a general attitude may well have been inherited. That attitude relates to the acceptance of spiritual or religious plurality. Steven Wasserstrom describes Christian kabbalah as an “original effort, at the outset of modernity, to address the emerging question of religious plurality”.⁴⁹⁶ He argues that it was never a consistently Christian tradition but had engaged in dialogue with Jews and Jewish kabbalists throughout the early modern period. It stressed the idea of reintegration

⁴⁹⁴ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 62-64.

⁴⁹⁵ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 396.

⁴⁹⁶ Steven Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 49.

of all humans into a cosmic whole, of many revelations but one original source of truth.⁴⁹⁷

Interestingly, the New Age tendency to accept religious diversity also parallels an ecumenism which Arthur Versluis identifies as a hallmark of twentieth century Christianity.⁴⁹⁸ He links this pluralism to the theosophic literature, particularly that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which emphasized direct spiritual experience or gnosis, and which he suggests is “profoundly resonant, not with conventional ‘orthodox’ Christianity, but with the inward disciplines of Sufism, Kabbalism and Buddhism ... in theosophy is a deeper foundation for interreligious encounter than just ‘dialogue’ ”.⁴⁹⁹ He suggests that aspects of Jewish kabbalah, including Lurianic kabbalah, were syncretized into Christian theosophy through the work of Oetinger in the 18th century.⁵⁰⁰

Whether or not specific traces of kabbalah, Lurianic or Christian, can be found in contemporary New Age thought, it is clear that there is a resonance. The two approaches share an emphasis on direct experience of the Divine, the important role for humanity in restoring harmony to an organic cosmos, and the acceptance of spiritual plurality and dialogue.

3.4.2 Jewish Renewal and New Age Thought

Sutcliffe and Hanegraaff both describe a range of New Age tendencies, which are heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting, but exhibit observable patterns. While Schachter-Shalomi’s theology rejects some of these tendencies, such as the embrace of neopaganism, it seems to align with other aspects of New Age thought. Both New Age

⁴⁹⁷ Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 37-51.

⁴⁹⁸ Arthur Versluis, “Christian Theosophic Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, pp.217-237 in Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 231.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ Versluis, “Christian Theosophic Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, 228-229.

thinking and Jewish Renewal can be considered popular religious quests for a simpler, more direct divine-human relationship, one which does not depend on institutional authority figures for legitimacy. The shift from the institutional focus is toward small group practice and worship, and a common discourse of “spirituality” rather than religion.

As referenced earlier, New Age spirituality is perceived to be a potential global unifier, linked to an evolution toward a universal consciousness within a holistic universe. Various versions of this holism exist. One version is expressed by a blend of ideas appropriated from earlier thinkers such as Teilhard de Chardin and legitimized by idiosyncratic interpretations of contemporary scientific thought.⁵⁰¹ Schachter-Shalomi follows this model by incorporating Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of a noosphere or layer of unified consciousness of the earth’s inhabitants⁵⁰² with Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, interpreted idiosyncratically as implying that the planet itself is “alive with its own self-governing intelligence”.⁵⁰³ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Schachter-Shalomi derives authority for this Gaian interpretation from the Hasidic Apter Rebbe.

Another dimension of this idea is expressed in Schachter-Shalomi’s concept of the imaginal, for which he derives support from the biologist Rupert Sheldrake’s theory of morphogenesis. In the next chapter, I discuss the imaginal and trace out the way in which Schachter-Shalomi derives authority for it by locating the concept in Hasidic thought. The point I make here is that, in developing his idea of the imaginal as a realm of consciousness in which spiritual adepts work together to heal the world, Schachter-Shalomi is reflecting a New Age concern regarding the role humans play in the progression toward a higher consciousness. One New Age view is that a critical mass of humans who have individually achieved a higher level of consciousness can effect significant change in the world by working together. Some New Agers support this view

⁵⁰¹ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 114-181.

⁵⁰² Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 283.

⁵⁰³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 165.

by invoking Sheldrake's theory of morphic resonance, in which the whole energy level of a group of organisms is greater than the sum of its parts.⁵⁰⁴

Reflecting the attempt to synthesize religion and popular culture via holism, New Age discourse employs metaphors from modern science and popular culture. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Schachter-Shalomi's expressive language also uses such metaphors, although he also draws extensively on both traditional and kabbalistic Jewish language.

The language of psychology is also a prominent feature of both New Age expression and Schachter-Shalomi's discourse. Both see religious experience as psychologically profound, and stress the importance of integrating the shadow in order to heal and change the reality one experiences. As Hanegraaff points out, this combination of Jungian theory and American pragmatism tends to sacralize the mundane, so that each individual becomes the centre of his/her own symbolic world, where experiential reality is key, an approach that is more gnostic than rationalistic or faith-based. New Age tends to emphasize the individual's spiritual healing via integration of his shadow, whereas the body of Schachter-Shalomi's work emphasizes the collective spiritual healing of both the people *Israel* and humanity in general. This is particularly evident in my discussion of the imaginal, in the next chapter.

In considering the resonance of some New Age thought with that of Jewish Renewal, it is helpful to keep in mind that Schachter-Shalomi received ordination within the Lubavitcher or Habad movement.⁵⁰⁵ This school of hasidic thought developed in the late 18th century in Byelorussia and Ukraine, centered around the *Tanya*, written by Rabbi Shneur Salmon of Liadi. While adhering rigorously to the framework of *halakhah* and traditional Jewish practice and ethos, Habad Hasidism developed a new conception of God and a new sense of the world.⁵⁰⁶ The core of Habad theology is the absolute nature

⁵⁰⁴ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 348-352.

⁵⁰⁵ Habad is an acronym of the Hebrew terms *hokhmah* (wisdom), *binah* (understanding) and *da'at* (knowledge), the first three *sefirot*. It is transliterated variously as Habad, Chabad, and HaBaD.

⁵⁰⁶ Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, 19-23.

of God's existence, that is, the Divine is the only true reality. Habad's conception of the relationship between God and the world is acosmic: God is the exclusive substance of existence – the world is nothing but an expression of that infinite being and from the divine viewpoint lacks any discrete existence; the world is constantly being created by, and dependent on, the divine being; the Divine is immanent, present everywhere in equal substantiality; the world is an essential and necessary manifestation of God, who incorporates the world within Himself, so that there is a dialectical relationship wherein the divine infinite substance transforms into finite substance (*hashwa'ah*) and the finite substance transforms back into the infinite (*yihud*). Though all existence is one, there are two viewpoints, the divine and the human, which correspond to infinity and finitude. These ideas led to the development of a body of literature describing a complex theosophy based on a set of dialectics concerning the mystical theology of the Godhead as well as the soul and the related psychology and practice of worship and service.⁵⁰⁷ As in other forms of hasidism, these doctrines drew on various conceptions available in earlier kabbalistic literature.

In general, although kabbalistic literature pivoted around the theological rather than the psychological, there is considerable resonance between kabbalistic premises and the field of modern psychology. Kabbalah sees everything as a unity, and psychology recognizes that individuals are affected by their contexts. The kabbalistic recognition of a range of human impulse and states of awareness (“worlds”) finds a parallel in contemporary ideas on altered states of consciousness. The kabbalistic emphasis on intentionality (*kavannah*) is echoed in humanistic psychology's emphasis on the importance of willpower in therapy. The kabbalistic premise that mind and body affect each other is similar to some of the more recent work in behavioural medicine linking physical disease to mental states. Finally, some kabbalistic writings suggest a focus on what today we would consider elements of the study of parapsychology – dreams, out-of-

⁵⁰⁷ Rachel Elior, “HaBaD: The Contemplative Ascent to God”, pp. 157-205 in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality: From the Seventeenth Century Revival to the Present* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

body experiences and reincarnation.⁵⁰⁸ These notions are all associated with New Age thought.

There is, then, considerable resonance between Jewish Renewal theology and several motifs of New Age thought. Hanegraaff points out that the New Age movement is correctly regarded as rooted in the 1960s counterculture, although New Age does not share the counterculture's widespread use of psychedelic drugs or commitment to radical left-wing political beliefs and actions.⁵⁰⁹ The affinity between the North American counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s and hasidic Judaism is referenced by Ariel, who points out that both have a messianic, albeit somewhat different, vision of humanity, both saw the world as needing reform and healing, and both tended to embrace the supernatural and mystical.⁵¹⁰ Magid also links them through their pantheism, and points out that the American counterculture of the 1960s and the Beat culture in the 1950s were twentieth century manifestations of the transcendentalist and theosophist thought that introduced pantheism to American spirituality in the late nineteenth century.⁵¹¹

I suggest that, in effect, Schachter-Shalomi refracts certain attributes of New Age thought back through the older Jewish lens of kabbalah, hasidism and Habad, to produce a distinctly Jewish approach to New Age ideas. For example, Hanegraaff identifies a tension in New Age holism between belief in a generative ultimate Source and organic universal interrelatedness; this tension leads to contradictory views of reality – monistic versus hierarchical.⁵¹² Schachter-Shalomi uses the kabbalistic four worlds approach to resolve this tension. By describing the hierarchical worlds of *assiyah*, *yetzirah*, *briah* and *atzilut* as universes of discourse in which to understand concepts and experiences, and the

⁵⁰⁸ Edward Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor: Jewish Mysticism and Modern Psychology* (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1981).

⁵⁰⁹ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 10-11.

⁵¹⁰ Yaakov Ariel, "Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius: The House of Love and Prayer in San Francisco, 1967-1977", *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 13.2 (2003), 139-165.

⁵¹¹ Shaul Magid, "Jewish Renewal and American Spirituality", *Tikkun*, May/June (2006), 58-59.

⁵¹² Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 76.

four letters of the tetragrammaton as representing the four levels of existence, he suggests that reality is monistic but may be perceived as a hierarchical continuum, depending on the level of awareness or conscious development of the perceiver.⁵¹³

In a similar vein, by sacralizing psychological experiences, New Age thought also tends to use transpersonal experiences (altered states of consciousness) as the foundation for a spiritual worldview.⁵¹⁴ Schachter-Shalomi points out that while the rabbis of traditional Judaism discouraged questions about psychic experiences, today we understand that there are multiple levels of consciousness. He holds that Torah itself recognized that revelation comes to individuals when they are in altered states of consciousness, via its depiction of revelation at Sinai. The kabbalistic four worlds are ways of describing different levels of consciousness, thereby helping Jews to develop an understanding of what is being revealed. The revelation is aligned with the particular contemporary levels of spiritual awareness, both individual and collective. As mentioned earlier, he cites several Hasidic masters as having understood the need to radically restructure hasidism (and by implication, Judaism) by focussing on human consciousness.

In my view, Schachter-Shalomi does not look to New Age thought for authority. Rather, he interacts with it, adopting some of its concepts and locating them in Hasidic thought, adapting others to resonate with Jewish ideas, and in general, using New Age thinking to stretch the boundaries of hasidism and Judaism. Again, this permeability and borrowing is a postmodern marker, as I discussed in Chapter 2.

3.4.3 Jewish Renewal and Ecospirituality

Like New Age thinking, Schachter-Shalomi's theology exhibits a millenarianism where the messiah is a principle or process rather than a person. This millenarianism is based on a macrohistorical view of history unfolding in epochs and ages, with a current paradigm shift to a new epoch in which humans understand that they are in partnership

⁵¹³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 57-77.

⁵¹⁴ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 203-229.

with the Divine to bring about salvation. However, where New Age thinking tends to emphasize salvation in terms of personal healing and growth, Schachter-Shalomi expresses the messianic process in terms of the realm of the imaginal and the collective responsibility for stewardship of the earth and global awareness (again, this is discussed more fully in the next chapter). This emphasis on the stewardship of the planet draws on yet another stream of contemporary thought, ecological spirituality.

It will be seen that ecospirituality has much in common with New Age thinking. Nevertheless, I treat it separately, following David Kinsley who has identified a contemporary North American discourse that focuses specifically on the relationship between ecology and religion. He maintains that it is “a rediscovery of a central human intuition, namely, that human beings are part of a moral order that extends beyond the human species”.⁵¹⁵ Kinsley holds that because ecology deals with humanity’s role in the wider scheme of the natural world, there is a philosophical convergence between ecology and religion or spirituality. He perceives a contemporary morality that is strongly grounded in ecological issues and that is expressed by a wide range of people engaged in contemporary discussions of environmental problems. Furthermore, he suggests that the contemporary scientist James Lovelock’s idea that humans view the land as a living being is both ancient and widespread in the history of human religiousness.⁵¹⁶

Kinsley points to a complex contemporary discussion about morality and ecology that encompasses theological, ethical, social, political and spiritual perspectives. For participants in this discussion, a new ecological consciousness can only come about if western culture can overcome outdated and ecologically insensitive religious traditions (such as the Bible and Christianity). It must also forgo the narrow scientific, objective view of reality, and must reject a consumer ethic that assumed unlimited industrial and

⁵¹⁵ David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995), xiii.

⁵¹⁶ Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, xv-xvi. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between certain elements of the contemporary scientific Gaian perspective and the philosophical view of nature found in ancient Greek thought, see Bruce Scofield, “Gaia, The Living Earth”, pp.150-159 in *Scientists Debate Gaia: The Next Century*, Stephen H Schneider (ed.) (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004).

economic expansion. Human beings are seen as part of a wider community of life which imposes a morality of reciprocity. In addition, the ecosystem itself transcends the human species and is somehow sacred.⁵¹⁷ These views are expressed in various subsidiary discourses, of which two, ecotheology and deep ecology, appear to be dialectically related to the Jewish Renewal movement.

The Christian theologian Matthew Fox has identified certain aspects of Christian spirituality which have negative theological implications. For him, a new Christian ecotheology is needed, a creation spirituality, that will involve a paradigm shift from viewing Christ as a personal saviour to conceiving of Christ as the pervasive reality that provides an inherent sacrality to the cosmos. The incarnation refers not to the divinity of one individual, but to the process of cosmic divinization, in which Mother Earth is identical to the Cosmic Christ. This is, then, a pantheistic theology which tends to a mystical piety.⁵¹⁸ Hanegraaff points to Fox's idea of a cosmic Christ as an element of "New Age christology", in which the New Age's need for a personal relation to the divine exists in tension with its need for a non-personal, monistic approach to the divine.⁵¹⁹ Schachter-Shalomi has pointed to the thinking of Fox as exploring a spiritual territory similar to his own.⁵²⁰

The ecological view of reality emphasizes the interconnectedness and relational character of the world. Deep ecology refers to a philosophical and ethical outlook that attempts to articulate fundamental metaphysical assumptions underlying the ecological view of reality. This outlook recognizes the value of the idea of human stewardship for the natural world, but argues that humanity's view of itself must go beyond species centeredness to include other species and the whole ecosystem. In addition, for ecosystems, the whole is greater than the parts, so that individual (or species) rights are subordinate to the well-being of the whole. This holistic view conceives of the individual

⁵¹⁷ Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 161-163.

⁵¹⁸ Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 166-168.

⁵¹⁹ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 192-194.

⁵²⁰ Personal communication, April 2, 2006.

as emerging from the ecosystem, unable to exist apart from its habitat and merging back into it at death. An emergent and relational individual can be thought of as the transmutation of an underlying form of energy. In other words, human beings are embedded in a cosmic web along with a range of other mutually interdependent beings, all of whom are permutations of the same underlying reality. Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis is sometimes invoked by deep ecologists to defend their ecological view of reality.⁵²¹

Jewish Renewal thinkers are in dialogue with this ecological stream of thinking. Recently the ALEPH website offered a workshop on Deep Ecology.⁵²² Arthur Waskow recently published *The Torah of the Earth*, an anthology of Jewish writings related to the environment.⁵²³ Schachter-Shalomi sets out a linkage to this ecological stream of thought in his discussion of meaningful Jewish practice: "strengthening this whole-Earth cooperation is to me the most urgent and important way we have of serving God, the holiest and most pressing invitation of our time".⁵²⁴ Referring to the Gaian approach and the authority for it in Jewish scripture and Hasidic texts, he suggests that the Torah advanced an ecological worldview that was very sophisticated for its time, through its injunctions to let land lie fallow every seven years, agricultural instructions for observing sabbatical and jubilee years, and various animal husbandry rules. He points out that *kashrut* (the Jewish dietary laws) is concerned not only with the end results of food production, but with the methods used to obtain those results. He proposes a new kind of *kashrut*, which he calls *eco-kashrut*. This way of thinking combines "ancient concerns about thoughtful consumption and avoidance of cruelty and violence with the new awareness of the wider repercussions of some of our actions".⁵²⁵ This *eco-kashrut*, which he sees as an evolving rather than legislated practice, is concerned not only with the

⁵²¹ Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, 184-192.

⁵²² ALEPH.www.Aleph.org

⁵²³ Arthur Waskow, *The Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought* (New York: Jewish Lights, 2006).

⁵²⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 152.

⁵²⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 157.

origin and production of things consumed, but with the environmental and human toll associated with human action. It also is less clear-cut than traditional *kashrut*, which very clearly specifies what is kosher and what is not, because all consumption has multiple repercussions. Thus *eco-kashrut* seeks to maximize the ‘kosherness’ of a given product or action.⁵²⁶

3.4.4 Dialogue with Other Religions

The ALEPH listserv frequently refers to interreligious dialogue, joint Jewish/Christian/Muslim social and political actions, and various workshops featuring discussions of concepts from other religions by practitioners of those religions as well as Jewish Renewal. The movement’s emphasis on interreligious dialogue and learning seems to flow from Schachter-Shalomi himself. Earlier in this chapter I pointed to examples in which he derives authority from Hasidic sages to engage in dialogue with other religions. His writings contain many references to the importance of that dialogue and to the ideas associated with thinkers of other religions. For example, a chapter in *Paradigm Shift*, called “Peace, Paradigm Shift and Shadow”, weaves in not only a wide range of secular thinkers, but also: the Hindu concept of *karma*; the similarities between the kabbalistic four worlds universes of discourse and ideas in both Hinduism and Sufism; various theories about epochal changes and human tasks including talmudic, kabbalistic, and Christian mystical as expressed by the 13th century Christian kabbalist Joachim de Fiore.⁵²⁷

Schachter-Shalomi uses concepts from other religions to help stretch the boundaries of Jewish thought. For example, in a 1993 discussion concerning Jews who turn to eastern religions, especially Zen, he describes a moment of insight, during recitation of the *Aleinu* prayer, when he realized that the Jewish idea of the highest

⁵²⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 159

⁵²⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 283-298.

attribute of God being “no-thing” is similar to the Zen concept of Void.⁵²⁸ This is not the same as adopting or incorporating ideas. Rather, Schachter-Shalomi borrows attitudes.

Yaakov Ariel, in his article describing the 1960s-era outreach work of Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Shlomo Carlebach, perhaps unintentionally provides an example of such attitude- borrowing; he refers to Schachter-Shalomi’s belief that Judaism could “learn from Asian religions a love of God untainted by anger”.⁵²⁹ Schachter-Shalomi uses other religions as external sources for comparative purposes, to deepen the understanding of Judaism and stretch the boundaries of hasidic and mystical theology. A very good example of this is his borrowing and adapting the concept of the imaginal, to which I now turn in the next chapter.

⁵²⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 41.

⁵²⁹ Yaakov Ariel, “Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius”, 141.

Chapter 4

Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World Through the Imaginal

Tikkun (or *tiqqun*) is a Kabbalistic term meaning restoration or repair. In Lurianic Kabbalah, it is a central concept which refers to the reparation of the divine situation to its original perfect state, that is, the completion and perfection of the deity.⁵³⁰ *Tikkun olam* refers to the reparation of this world, rather than to the realm of the divine. In Schachter-Shalomi's vision, a vehicle for accomplishing this repair is the imaginal, a concept and term which he imports from the work of Henry Corbin, but also locates in hasidism.⁵³¹ The concept allows him to emphasize the importance of kabbalistic and hasidic tools of consciousness development and also to stretch the theological boundaries of Judaism, and thus "reformat" its theology to be useful for Jewish Renewal.

The word "imaginal" seldom appears in his texts.⁵³² Yet he maintains that in the contemporary period, many religions are undergoing renewal, and the development of the "imaginal" is essential to that process.⁵³³ In the following pages I explore what the word "imaginal" means, and why it is important to Jewish Renewal theology.

4.1 What Is the Imaginal?

⁵³⁰ Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 249.

⁵³¹ In a private conversation on April 5, 2006, R. Schachter-Shalomi told me that he drew on Corbin for his understanding of the imaginal.

⁵³² In the body of his work that I have examined, it occurs only in his book *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, and in an article, *Accessing the Imaginal*. I discuss these later in this chapter.

⁵³³ Private communication, included in his comments to me at the Jewish Renewal Kallah, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, July 28, 2005.

4.1.1 The Imaginal in Hasidic Thought

Schachter-Shalomi defines the imaginal as a subtle world, a “realm ... (which) forms an intermediary plane of existence between the realm of pure spirit and the realm of physical manifestation”.⁵³⁴ He explains that it is a “different dimension from the one we are usually aware of inhabiting” and that it can be difficult to understand “because our thinking is limited by the reality maps that favor and support reason and sensation while devaluing the reality maps that come from feeling and intuition”.⁵³⁵ He implies that it is a common concept in Judaism by suggesting that in Hebrew the imaginal realm is called *olam hamashal* which appears to be a direct translation of the Sufi term ‘*alam al-mithal*, to which he also refers. Yet the term *olam hamashal* does not seem to appear in Hebrew or hasidic literature.⁵³⁶ Schachter-Shalomi seems to use it interchangeably with the terms *medammeh dik’ dushah* and *hush hatziyur*, both of which seem to refer to the holiness of the imaginal, but neither of which is readily found in the hasidic literature.⁵³⁷ Yet the concept of the subtle world of the imaginal does exist in hasidic literature, and particularly in the work of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. In a study of the life of R. Nachman, Arthur Green discusses the importance of the imaginative faculty (*koach hamedammeh*, sometimes rendered in ellipsis as *medammeh*), to the unique tales told by Rabbi Nachman.⁵³⁸ These tales, unique in hasidic literature of the time because they were fantastical, were for Rabbi Nachman the vehicle through which the imaginative faculty

⁵³⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, “Accessing the Imaginal Realm to Heal the Planet” , *Spectrum: Journal of Renewal Spirituality*, vol.2, No 1, winter/spring, 2006, 2.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ I base this conclusion on private communication from Rabbi Charles Popky (May 22, 2006), and also from Prof. Shaul Magid, who kindly searched his large data base of over 200 Hasidic and kabbalistic texts for me but was unable to find the term (May 24, 2006).

⁵³⁷ Private communication via email, May 26, 2006.

⁵³⁸ Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979), 339-343.

could be developed and the gradual spiritual awakening of the *Hasidim* of the time could be achieved.⁵³⁹

There appears to be an interesting parallel between Schachter-Shalomi's work and emphasis on the imaginal and that of Rabbi Nachman, whom Schachter-Shalomi identifies as one of the radical teachers of hasidism in the last two centuries who sought to "restructure the Hasidic enterprise and reignite the embers of the hasidism of the Ba'al Shem Tov".⁵⁴⁰ According to Yakov Azriel, R. Nachman believed that there was a need for a spiritual renaissance within Judaism which should be based on the insights of mystical Judaism and kabbalah. For R. Nachman, the solution to the spiritual ailment of the time was to teach kabbalistic understanding and knowledge not through its esoteric and philosophical terminology, but by encoding it in allegories and fables, thus making it more accessible and comprehensive to his contemporaries.⁵⁴¹ In addition, Shaul Magid and Arthur Green have pointed out that R. Nachman's program had clear messianic intentions.⁵⁴² His use of fantastic tales "transcends normative modes of Torah discourse" and serves to "perfect the imaginative faculty as a necessary precursor to the messianic era, as well as to make people aware of their exiled state and to universalize Torah by transcending its external rabbinic framework".⁵⁴³ I suggest that a similar approach underlies Schachter-Shalomi's use of contemporary metaphors, his appeal to New Age thought, and his emphasis on the imaginal, which resonates with postmodern sensibility.

⁵³⁹ In addition to the work of Arthur Green, the doctoral dissertation of Yakov Shammai Azriel provides an in depth discussion of the work of Rabbi Nachman and the importance of the imaginal. See Azriel, *The Quest for the Lost Princess in Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav's "Book of Stories from Ancient Times"* (Ph.D. Thesis). University of South Africa, November, 2003).

⁵⁴⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 204.

⁵⁴¹ Azriel, *The Quest for the Lost Princess*, 29-30.

⁵⁴² Shaul Magid, "Associative Midrash", pp.15-56 in *God's Voice From The Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism*, Shaul Magid (ed.) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav* (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1979).

⁵⁴³ Magid, "Associative Midrash", 18.

The idea of the imaginal also features in Jungian thought, as I will explain later, and as mentioned in an earlier chapter, Schachter-Shalomi sometimes uses psychological and in particular, Jungian, terminology in his explanations. Nevertheless, his understanding of the imaginal depends heavily on the work of Henry Corbin and on his own understanding of Sufism, to which he also occasionally refers.⁵⁴⁴ In this he seems to be drawing on the ecstatic branch of kabbalah. It is interesting to note that Moshe Idel has identified Sufi elements in the thought of the thirteenth century ecstatic kabbalist Abraham Abulafia.⁵⁴⁵ In referring to the term “*olam hademut*”, found in a kabbalistic text, he suggests it represents a concept similar to the (Latin) *mundis imaginalis* discussed below, and to (Arabic) *alam al-mithal*, which he suggests is how *mundis imaginalis* appears in Sufi texts. Idel states that the term *olam hademut* is “a Sufi concept in Hebrew garb”.⁵⁴⁶ He also maintains that there was a “Sufic-Jewish stream of thinking” in the East before Abulafia’s work reached Palestine, and that there existed “a circle of Palestinian Kabbalists in which Sufic principles were blended with the Kabbalah of Abulafia”.⁵⁴⁷ Thus, Schachter-Shalomi’s search for conceptual tools in Sufism has ancient precedents in Judaism.

4.1.2 Corbin and Islamic Cosmology

Beginning in the 1930s and continuing to late in the century, Henry Corbin developed a cosmological vision that was rooted in Islamic and Christian mysticism and that addressed his critique of western civilization. In his view, western culture had developed a rupture between spirit and matter, the individual and the divine, thought and being, faith and knowledge, due to the loss of the “imaginal” dating back to the 12th

⁵⁴⁴ Private communication via telephone, April 5, 2006. Schachter-Shalomi maintains an ongoing dialogue with Sufi practitioners and thinkers. For example, his article, “Accessing The Imaginal” was published both in the on-line journal *Spectrum* and in the inaugural issue of the Sufi journal *Elixir*.

⁵⁴⁵ Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 73-89.

⁵⁴⁶ Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 75.

⁵⁴⁷ Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 93.

century when the West rejected what it interpreted as Avicenna's Neoplatonism and adopted Averroes' Aristotelianism.⁵⁴⁸ The Persian Avicenna, who lived in the late 10th and early 11th centuries, refined Islamic philosophy and its neoplatonic angelology to include religion and the notion of the philosopher as mystic. This aided the later development of esoteric Islam by Suhrawardi, who focussed on illumination, and by Ibn 'Arabi, who developed Sufism and the idea of gnosis. Averroes, who lived in 12th century Andalusia, through his interpretations of Aristotle tried to harmonize reason and revelation by seeing each as an independent way to truth. His works were misunderstood by his western interpreters, who identified him as somewhat of a religious free-thinker and developed that interpretation into a secular learning which started to flourish in the 13th century.⁵⁴⁹

For Corbin, the term "imaginal" referred to what he argued was the "ontological reality of the objects of visionary experience".⁵⁵⁰ He suggested that there is a "very precise order of reality, which corresponds to a precise mode of perception", and which he called the *mundus imaginalis*.⁵⁵¹ He equated this Latin term to the Sufi term *'alam al-mithal*, the world of the imaginal. He stressed that this world is very real, and preferred the term imaginal to refer to it, rather than imaginary which, in common usage, has come to denote that which is unreal.

This imaginal world was part of his tripartite cosmology, in which there exist three worlds. The world of body and phenomenon, the physical, sensible world, has the senses as its organ of perception. The world of mind, a world of "pure archangelic

⁵⁴⁸ Tom Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel: The Prophetic Tradition and the Battle for the Soul of the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 121; Henry Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1976), 15-17.

⁵⁴⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islamic Conception of Intellectual Life", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, (New York: Charles Scribner' Sons, 1973), Vol. II, 638-651.

⁵⁵⁰ Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 148.

⁵⁵¹ Henry Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis*, 3

Intelligences”, is a suprasensible world for which the organ of perception is the intellect. In between these worlds is the *mundus imaginalis*, the imaginal plane, the world of spirit, for which the organ of perception is the imagination. This imaginative power or faculty has “a cognitive function, a noetic value which is as real as that of sense perception or intellectual intuition” and must not be confused with the imagination which contemporary humanity identifies with fantasy.⁵⁵² He describes the *mundus imaginalis* as a “fully objective and real world with equivalents for everything existing in the sensible world without being perceptible by the senses”.⁵⁵³ The *mundus imaginalis* is a mediator between the other two worlds, and the “imaginative function makes it possible for all the universes to *symbolize with each other* [sic]”.⁵⁵⁴ Thus the world of spirit, the imaginal, mediates between the worlds of body and of mind and maintains the balance between them. That balance was lost with the triumph of Averroes, with a resulting rupture of mind and spirit in western civilization. The solution is to re-establish the balance, by interiorizing the literal, material world and experiencing the death of the ego. In this way we change our view of reality, eliminate the schism between inner and outer, subjective and objective, mind and spirit, and learn to re-establish and re-inhabit the world of the imaginal.⁵⁵⁵

Corbin’s vision draws on a variety of sources, including Islamic cosmology. This cosmology, which is inseparable from its theology, holds that the material world is part of an unbroken continuum of worlds, a hierarchical cosmos in which “all beings are in perpetual descent from God as aspects of Revelation, and simultaneously ... in perpetual ascent toward God, in longing and love, aiming at their final resurrection in the

⁵⁵² Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis*, 9.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.* Although it is well beyond the scope of this research, it would be interesting to examine Corbin’s description of the imaginal world in the light of contemporary neurological research on how consciousness functions, which seems to suggest the same possibility of a mirroring within the human brain. See, for example, Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, 2000).

⁵⁵⁴ Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis*, 11.

⁵⁵⁵ Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 16-21.

Absolute".⁵⁵⁶ Revelation is revealed in nature. The journey toward the Divine requires that wholeness be attained, not by inclusion of that which is lower, but by overcoming it. Thus, the relationship between the world and the Divine is one of polarity rather than separateness, and encourages a holographic interpretation of the world, where there are multiple foci interconnected, interdependent, complementary and intrinsically related.⁵⁵⁷ Ancient Persian Zoroastrian cosmology envisaged a supreme being of light, accompanied by six other celestial beings, who infuse energy into all beings. These seven Presences or Archangels of Light support the existence and the salvation of all creatures, who, by cooperating with them, can ascend to the heaven from which they originally descended. This return requires struggle because the powers of light are in constant battle with the powers of darkness. Countless intermediate celestial beings exist, however, to aid the creatures in the struggle. In fact, every being has a celestial counterpart, and the quest to unveil this heavenly twin is the moral and spiritual destiny of the soul of every human being and the soul of the world itself. The 12th century Persian mystic, Suhrawardi, fused this Zoroastrian angelology with Platonic and Neoplatonic cosmology, and also with the prophetic tradition of Islam to define a world intermediary between sensation and intellect. Corbin refers to this as the imaginal and saw it as coalescing with the school of Sufism put forth by the medieval Andalusian Arab Sufi mystic Ibn 'Arabi, who elaborated a doctrine of continuous creation.⁵⁵⁸ Corbin's explication of the imaginal world that emerges from this fusion describes a realm that is populated by myriad beings of light, sacred events, images, visions and seven prophet guides who operate at different levels of this world.⁵⁵⁹ The divine descent into the forms of creation in the material world

⁵⁵⁶ Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 48.

⁵⁵⁷ Roger Ames, quoted by Cheetham, in *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 50.

⁵⁵⁸ Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (trans. Ralph Manheim; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 8-9.

⁵⁵⁹ According to Corbin, Islamic prophetology presents a series of prophets at levels increasingly closer to the Divine, with the last being not the prophet Jesus of ancient Ebionite prophetology, but after Jesus, Mohammed as the True Prophet. Among the Shi'ites, the Twelfth Imam (the Hidden Imam) is sometimes

via the imaginal world never ceases, nor does the simultaneous rise of those forms. This is why both worlds exist in each other. The individual's gnostic journey through these worlds interiorizes the material world and is a process of becoming conscious at a higher level. This coming to consciousness requires the development of a subtle, imaginal body, a refinement of the material body, which can only exist in the imaginal world.⁵⁶⁰

4.1.3 Depth Psychology

In Corbin's vision the active imagination, the intermediary power between the physical organism and the pure intellect, engages in perceiving and symbolizing, which leads to inner knowing. He maintains that Western scientific culture has lost the ability to use the active imagination to fulfill the symbolizing function which leads to inner meaning, and tends to degrade images to the level of sensible perception. Undegraded images make possible narrations which establish meaning, and are founded on the irruption of archetypal images into our world, the daily world of body and phenomenon.⁵⁶¹

Via this theory of archetypes, Corbin's work is linked to Carl Jung's approach to depth psychology. Steven Wasserstrom suggests that Corbin appropriated Jung but that it seems to have served a transitional purpose for him, as his later work generally excludes Jungian thought.⁵⁶² Robert Sardello maintains that Jung conflated spirit with soul, a concept to which he was strongly committed, and which limited his ability to understand the archetypal longing for wholeness which motivates humans to search for the ultimate inner meaning of existence, and which underlies Corbin's explication of Sufism.⁵⁶³

identified with this final manifestation of the True prophet; quoted and explained in Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 77.

⁵⁶⁰ Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 11, 63-65.

⁵⁶¹ Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis*, 19.

⁵⁶² Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 186-7.

⁵⁶³ Robert Sardello, "Foreword", pp. xi-xvii in Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*.

Corbin, like his contemporary Gershom Scholem, the historian of Jewish esoteric thought, believed that the religious approach to studying and understanding religion was superior to the psychological approach. Yet both shared with the depth psychology of Freud and Jung the assumption that there exists in individuals an unconscious or internal depth which provides access to universal truths by means of symbols as a superior form of cognition and perception.⁵⁶⁴ In Corbin's view, Jung failed to differentiate clearly between levels of being in the unconscious, so that he did understand the reality of the inner world (the imaginal) but did not understand the structure of that world.⁵⁶⁵

Corbin influenced post-Jungian psychological thought, particularly via the interpretation of his work put forward by James Hillman in his *Archetypal Psychology*. Sardello implies that this psychology is limited because it is based on a misinterpretation of Corbin, and confuses spiritual phenomena with soul phenomena. Thus, it tends to sacralize the exploration of the darker aspects of an individual's nature, rather than emphasize the importance of spirituality.⁵⁶⁶

4.1.4 Philosophical Links

Although Corbin based his explanation of the imaginal on his study of Sufism, he recognized that it had emerged in Sufism via the Arabic study of Greek philosophy, particularly Plato. Plato's conception of the Good, and of Ideas, lead eventually to the formulation of the idea of the *Chain of Being*. This understanding of the nature of the universe, in many guises and variations, has underpinned the western scientific and

⁵⁶⁴ Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion*, 198-99.

⁵⁶⁵ Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 31-61.

⁵⁶⁶ James Hillman, *Archetypal Psychology: A Brief Account, Together with a Complete Checklist of Works* (Dallas, Tex : Spring Publications, 1985). We also see here a potential source for the New Age movement's focus on the individual, given the movement's tendency to assimilate, adapt and sacralize the psychological, especially Jungian derivation, as discussed in Chapter 3.

philosophical understanding of the universe for much of the last two millennia.⁵⁶⁷ In this conception, the universe is organically yet hierarchically constituted so that a continuum of created creatures tends to culmination in the uncreated highest, the *ens perfectissimum*, or God. The term came to include three general features of the universe: plenitude, continuity, and gradation. As Lovejoy pointed out, these principles “presupposed ... a complete rational intelligibility of the world”; thus, the “history of the idea of a chain of being is a history of failure” even though the idea proved to generate many other useful ideas in Western thought.⁵⁶⁸ Among other things, the fact that we experience the world as temporal and changing constantly undermines the theory of a Chain of Being. By the 19th century, with the advance of scientific thought, the Chain of Being as the organizing metaphor for western metaphysical thought was being replaced by the idea of the Tree of Life. In that conception, emerging out of Darwin’s theory of evolution, creatures emerge out of evolutionary lines of development, and are connected not hierarchically but rather as branches on a tree.⁵⁶⁹

Plato saw the path to the highest form of knowledge as a combination of discursive, dialectical means and an inner vision including images and perceptions. Over the subsequent centuries, many thinkers addressed the question of the function of imagination in the quest for philosophical, theological or magical knowledge. In particular, esoteric thought, especially in the neoplatonism and hermeticism of the Renaissance, worked out variations of these ideas, and they remain embedded in the more contemporary speculative thought of poets and surrealists, as well as some continental philosophers and writers such as Carl Jung. This conception of the cognitive significance of imagination considers it as intuition into the true nature of God and ultimate reality. At the same time, a quite different conception, deriving initially from the early Enlightenment, scientific inclination of Francis Bacon and then developing throughout

⁵⁶⁷ Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960, originally 1936).

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁵⁶⁹ Lia Formigari, “Chain of Being”, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol. I, 325-335.

the Enlightenment, the work of Kant and the rise of psychology, portrays the imagination as both a necessary condition for the growth of human knowledge and a source of illusion and wish fulfillment. The two conceptions were somewhat reconciled by the middle of the 20th century, in the work of Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer reasserted Kant's view that human consciousness by its nature seeks to associate experiences as parts of a whole. He then built on that view by suggesting that humans symbolize in order to make sense of experience and thus provide for themselves knowledge and understanding of experience. Symbolization via the imaginative process not only aids in organization of experiences, it aids in anticipation and shaping of future expectations, which may influence the course of events even if it is not confirmed by them.⁵⁷⁰

It can be seen then, that while Corbin introduced the word "imaginal" to contemporary metaphysical discourse, the concept of an interior world, the world of the spirit, subtle but very real, has a much longer history and has appeared in various guises over the centuries, including that of contemporary depth psychology. Recently Cheetham has reviewed the work of Corbin and explored its message for the contemporary situation. In his view, humanity is now experiencing the consequences of the rupture between the individual and the divine through the contemporary spiritual crisis. It is living out the result of the rupture between human beings and the living earth through the environmental crisis. And the breakdown of long-held assumptions about the nature and function of language is experienced as a crisis of meaning. He points to Corbin's vision of the unity of the Abrahamic religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism), whose mystical traditions give precedence to the inner significance of religious experience.⁵⁷¹ We can access this inner experience, the imaginal, by being open to, and actively in dialogue with, "voices that speak to us from beyond the bounds of the known", through poetry, art, music and certain kinds of natural science. As well, the imaginal can be accessed by an "asceticism of the body" that manifests as refusal to participate in the excesses of

⁵⁷⁰ Michael Moran "Metaphysical Imagination", pp.208-222 in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol. III.

⁵⁷¹ It is notable that Schachter-Shalomi has stated "experiencing and staying in touch with the inner life was what Lubavitch gave me", in *Paradigm Shift*, 251.

consumer culture. Developing a “poverty of the ego” (in contrast to the ego inflation common in western society), and an openness to darkness and the unknown, through, for example, quiet contemplation and wordless prayer, also helps the individual to enter the imaginal.⁵⁷²

In Cheetham’s view, this darkness and unknown opens us to the angelic function of beings. He suggests that this may be a way of saying that all things have some kind of consciousness, and a vast web of images ties together inner and outer. In this he seems to echo the thinking of Schachter-Shalomi who expresses a similar idea in his Gaian perspective and emphasis on the imaginal, to which I now turn.

4.2 Why the Imaginal Is Important

Schachter-Shalomi suggests that western society is moving from a hierarchical conception of the universe based on the hierarchical chain of being to one founded on an image of a non-hierarchical but interconnected chain of life. In this conception, which he interprets as the Gaia hypothesis, every part of the chain is integral to and necessary for life to exist, and the planet itself is alive with an innate, self-governing, self-sustaining and self-healing intelligence.⁵⁷³ He attributes a similar conception to the Torah and hasidism, particularly as interpreted by the Apter Rebbe (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt, 1745-1825). As mentioned in Chapter 2, according to Schachter-Shalomi, the Apter interpreted *Leviticus* 7:10-11 (in which Moses was instructed to anoint with oil all the surfaces of the tabernacle and its holy vessels) as suggesting that “if we look at something with *chokhmah*, with our deep intuitive wisdom, even the seemingly inanimate takes on a life and a holiness of its own. We see life where we saw none before”.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² Cheetham, *Green Man, Earth Angel*, 115-117.

⁵⁷³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 161-168.

⁵⁷⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 102.

4.2.1 Discovering Spiritual Truth

For Schachter-Shalomi, Jewish thought speaks of the *partzufim*, the faces of God, to refer to the core images we use to express our understandings of the concept of God. He maintains that Gaia represents a newly emerging *partzuf*, or metaphor for God. It is not God, but it can help us connect to God through the imagination.⁵⁷⁵ In his view, the older language of Torah, which is the Jewish mythology, is rigidly authoritarian and hierarchical and threatens to stifle our deepest intuition about God. In consequence, there is a need for a new, more vital, yet still Torah-based mythology which reshapes the *partzufim*, the “inner templates that govern manifestation on this plane”; this Torah of the future can be built on the Torah of the past by interpreting it in the context of contemporary ecological concerns about the health of the planet.⁵⁷⁶ In addition, before the modern period, the paradigm that shaped western and mainstream Jewish understanding of the cosmos was developed largely by Rabbis, sometimes influenced by non-Jews. Today, Jews in general are more aware of the process of growth that is occurring, and thus “become obligated to collaborate with this process. So we are involved in myth-making and myth - shaping, therefore making the new *partzufim*/faces (*sic*) that are manifesting for the new cosmology.”⁵⁷⁷

This appreciation of myth as a creative and living force, and of its ability to revitalize Judaism, has a precedent in the relatively recent past-- the German speaking European world of Schachter-Shalomi’s youth. After World War I, in Weimar Germany there was a sense of fundamental civilizational shift, an anxiety linked to the disenchantment with more optimistic Kantian humanism and positivism. Leading German social and philosophical thinkers favoured a somewhat more romantic approach to understanding the nature of the universe and there was a general return to myth as a source of historical wisdom and contemporary meaning. In the broader German populace, this eventually turned into the scourge of Nazism. Within the Jewish world, however, the

⁵⁷⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 168-169.

⁵⁷⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 178-179.

⁵⁷⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Kabbalah of Tikkun Olam*, 32.

new appreciation of the role of myth, as evidenced in the writings of Ernst Cassirer and Franz Rosenzweig, led to a focus on Judaism's origins and development and to an emphasis on the ability of Judaic symbolism and mythology to link past, present and future ages in an organic and generative manner. With the coming of the excesses of Nazism and the horror of the Holocaust, many thinkers abandoned the turn to myth. Gershom Scholem, however, continued to champion the importance of Jewish myth, through his studies of the Jewish mystical tradition. He was careful though, not to position myth as a regressive return to the archaic, but as a history of meaning as expressed in Judaism.⁵⁷⁸

The contemporary understanding of myth, then, is that it is a way of ordering reality and experience through narrative and symbol. Thus myth can convey a community's answers to ultimate human questions. The community makes the myths true by canonizing them in scripture, then committing to them and living them, through interpretation of their applicability to contemporary life.⁵⁷⁹ They are seen as emerging from and speaking to other layers of our being, whether that layer is described as the unconscious of the psychologists or the imaginal of the metaphysicians. When aspects of a myth are no longer meaningful, a community will replace that element through remythologization.

In Judaism, remythologization, found in the Talmud and other bodies of writing, is called *midrash*, an interpretation of a passage from Torah. *Midrash* can serve the purpose of homily, illustration or commentary, as can other Jewish literature which is not linked to a specific passage of Torah and is thus not called *midrash*. One genre of *midrash* is the *mashal*, or midrashic parable. *Mashal* derives from the ancient Near Eastern tradition of wisdom literature.⁵⁸⁰ David Stern maintains that in early postbiblical

⁵⁷⁸ Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 112-124.

⁵⁷⁹ Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for a Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society), 84-90.

⁵⁸⁰ David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 185-233.

Jewish discourse, parables and fables were probably types of popular literature, delivered orally. It was adapted by the early rabbis as a literary-rhetorical form as a technique to join exegetical and narrative discourses. *Midrash* is an exegetical discourse, and the technique of midrashic interpretation is built on the realization that the *mashal* is simultaneously a story and a dialectic between text and reader and thus has affective force. Rabbinic exegesis of the Torah is a complex mixture of interpretation, commentary, and comparison of texts and opinions, often woven through with *mashal*.⁵⁸¹ The technique for studying *midrash* and learning from it requires considerable effort to acquire. It tends to be intellectually demanding and is generally considered a specialized form of learning.

By the early medieval period, classical rabbinic *mashal* was being transformed by some writers to serve a more illustrative purpose, and was not necessarily linked closely to scripture. The medieval philosophers, with their innovative and intellectualized approach to Judaism, further adapted the *mashal* as a literary form, as a way of imbuing the appearance of tradition to their works.⁵⁸²

Jewish mystical literature of the period used the *mashal* for esoteric purposes. Eventually hasidism adapted the *mashal* form, limiting the reference to torah, and using the narrative as a way of capturing “the most profound and elusive ultimate truths”.⁵⁸³

In Schachter-Shalomi’s view, this hasidic use of the parable provides access to the imaginal, just as the esoteric traditions of many “spiritual lineages” make the realm of the imaginal available to “adepts and intuitive geniuses”.⁵⁸⁴ Hasidic masters practiced entrance into *olam hamashal* (the imaginal realm) as a precise art, in order to “seek deep wisdom--from which they derived sermons and teachings--and also to draw down

⁵⁸¹ Simi Peters, *Learning to Read Midrash* (New York: Lambda Publications, 2004).

⁵⁸² Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 226-7.

⁵⁸³ Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 233.

⁵⁸⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Accessing the Imaginal Realm to Heal the Planet*, 3.

healings and blessings for their flock”.⁵⁸⁵ This statement points to two reasons for the importance of the imaginal in Jewish Renewal: gaining wisdom and spiritual truth, and healing.

Jewish Renewal emphasizes the importance of the experiential dimension to the practice of faith in order for individuals to access spiritual truth. It is this experiential dimension that underlies the value of hasidism as a model. But for those on the path, those who have not yet had the experience of faith or a spiritual awakening, other forms of learning are key. The hasidic masters extensively used mythology via the parable or *mashal*. And in the parable, we are in the realm of the imaginal. Through the metaphor of “chewing your cud”, Schachter-Shalomi explains that developing the facility to understand hasidic parables requires an internal dialectical process akin to rumination: “You’ll never be able to handle a Hasidic teaching if you don’t learn to chew your way through this material”.⁵⁸⁶ Given that the world of the hasidic parable is very different from the one which contemporary Jews inhabit, that chewing requires having a “certain kind of imaginal empathy”, and reading the tales as if watching a movie, accepting our pre-existing mental images and learning to use them to understand the tale: “Dig in and find the place in you that understands where these teachings were coming from, even when the thought is outdated or not so nice, and the experience will be one of profound depth”.⁵⁸⁷ Thus, through contemplating that vast collection of parables that comprises Hasidic mythology, one can develop the ability to access the imaginal and work towards spiritual awakening. A similar idea is found in the work of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, as Azriel points out. For him, faith must be linked to the emotions of sanctity, to a “yearning for divine beauty and sublime splendor”.⁵⁸⁸ This yearning in the imaginal could be developed through the art of sacred music and melody, through contemplation of the beauty of nature and through the art of literature.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped In a Holy Flame*, 24.

⁵⁸⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped In a Holy Flame*, 26.

⁵⁸⁸ Azriel, *The Quest for the Lost Princess*, 282.

Chava Weissler has explored, from a feminist perspective, the link between Jewish Renewal's emphasis on artistic expression and its concept of *shekhinah*, thus demonstrating that for some, artistic expression is a way of accessing the imaginal.⁵⁸⁹ She points to a central myth of kabbalah, that pain and suffering in this world reflects the exile of the *shekhinah* and her separation from her divine spouse. For kabbalists, the myth of *shekhinah* is about the fate of Israel (at least in part), whereas for hasidism it is about the life of the soul, but for both it is about redemption and healing of the cosmos. For some of Weissler's sampling of Renewal adherents, *shekhinah* represents the feminine half of inner psychological balance; for others it is the motherly aspect of divinity. For all it represents the empowerment of women. Yet some Renewalists do not find *shekhinah* a particularly important figure. Some Renewal adherents prefer "to go beyond anthropomorphic or mythological ways of imagining the divine", and prefer to focus on the concept of divine immanence rather than transcendence.⁵⁹⁰ This is where the emphasis on experiential and artistic dimension among Renewal Jews is of interest, because that emphasis provides an "opening to the imaginal dimension, to creativity and to the mythic".⁵⁹¹ For the artistically inclined, "*shekhinah* is far more than a metaphor", it is the indwelling of divinity.⁵⁹²

4.2.2 Healing the Planet

Schachter-Shalomi sees the planet as being gravely ill and in need of healing due to pollution, war, the plundering of natural resources, and warring cosmologies as well as their resultant policies and practices. He suggests that healing the planet's ills requires untangling the conflicting impulses of its inhabitants, and that this in turn cannot be done at the exoteric level. It can only be achieved by untangling the "messed up connections"

⁵⁸⁹ Chava Weissler, "Meanings of Shekinah in the Jewish Renewal Movement", *NASHIM: A Journal of Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, No.10, 2005, 53-83.

⁵⁹⁰ Weissler, "Meanings of Shekinah in the Jewish Renewal Movement", 64.

⁵⁹¹ Weissler, "Meanings of Shekinah in the Jewish Renewal Movement", 75.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*

within the planet's "hidden operating" files, and these in turn reside in the subtle realm of the imaginal plane.⁵⁹³ This healing work requires a corps of committed adepts, from various faith lineages, working to direct the healing through "dreaming healing dreams".⁵⁹⁴ As in each realm of existence, "intelligent entities", that is messengers or angels, exist in the imaginal realm and are urging humanity to heal the planet.⁵⁹⁵

It should be noted that this reference to angels reflects ancient Jewish beliefs that find expression not only in biblical literature but also rabbinic thought. The medieval thinkers expressed the belief in a highly spiritualized fashion. Maimonides saw angels as pure spirits, possessing form without matter, differentiated by purpose. As well, Kabbalistic literature is replete with references to angels.⁵⁹⁶ Louis Jacobs suggests that, while most contemporary Jews do not believe in the existence of angels but see the angelic references common in Jewish liturgy as fine poetry, there is still, for some, a vague sense that the liturgy may actually express a reality of which we today are largely unaware.⁵⁹⁷

In Schachter-Shalomi's view, the imaginal realm has been neglected since the end of the Renaissance, with "only mystics, Sufis, Hasidic Rebbes and Vedantists" paying attention to it.⁵⁹⁸ He suggests that, by accessing this imaginal realm, the adepts, much like the hasidic masters, can draw down blessings and healing for the rest of humanity.⁵⁹⁹ This function of the *rebbe* or *zaddik* was referenced in the previous chapter. The *zaddik* acts as a channel by which the divine influx can be drawn from the supernal source and distributed to this plane of existence in the form of emanations of mercy. Idel associates

⁵⁹³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Accessing the Imaginal*, 3.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Accessing the Imaginal*, 4

⁵⁹⁶ Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (London: Behrman House, 1973), 109-113.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Accessing the Imaginal*, 3.

this belief with the magical thread running through Hasidic thought and suggests that “the most sophisticated and elaborate treatment of the mystico-magical model is to be found in the most influential Hasidic sect to emerge out of the Great Maggid’s entourage: the Habad movement”.⁶⁰⁰ Idel points out that, at least in some Hasidic writings, in principle the drawing down of the divine may be achieved by anyone whose soul is rooted in the world of *atzilut*. However, in the period when hasidism flourished, such persons were considered to be few, so that the drawing down could generally be achieved only by adherence to the spiritually elite *zaddik*. As explained in previous chapters, Schachter-Shalomi emphasizes the importance of the four worlds and the ability of ordinary Jews, not just hasidic masters, to enter those worlds. He also emphasizes the need for practicing Jews to develop their spiritual skills so that they can be *rebbe*s for each other as needed. The explanation of the “magico-mystical” role of the *zaddik* or *rebbe* presented here provides a deeper understanding of the *rebbe* function and an appreciation of the ability of ordinary individuals to advance spiritually to becoming “adepts” who can function in the imaginal. Thus, the Jewish Renewal perspective on healing emerges out of a melding of the ecological perspective with the kabbalistic/hasidic tradition.

4.3 The Imaginal and Redemption

Schachter-Shalomi cites his personal experience with an “energy healer” who assisted him, through use of guided imagery, to enter the imaginal realm and address his own emotional, behavioural and mental issues through deliberate re-imagining, and that as a result he was healed of an ailment. This personal experience leads him to suggest that a similar technique may work “on a macro scale”, to heal the planet.⁶⁰¹ The cadre of adepts that is now emerging can work together in the imaginal realm, if not on this earthly plane (that is, the realm of physical manifestation), to ensure that healing.

⁶⁰⁰ Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, 123.

⁶⁰¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Accessing the Imaginal*, 2.

He claims some scientific support for this idea, by pointing to the (controversial) work of the biologist Rupert Sheldrake. Sheldrake has updated an older theory of developmental biology, to propose that the development and maintenance of groups of organisms are guided by the information contained in morphogenetic fields. These fields, so far invisible to scientific investigation, surround the organism or group of organisms, which in turn conduct their activities in resonance with the morphic field. This can produce a shared or pooled memory to which the individual organisms have access, a concept that is similar to Jung's idea of the collective unconscious.⁶⁰² For Schachter-Shalomi, "the planet's morphogenetic field is akin to what in many esoteric disciplines has been called the imaginal realm".⁶⁰³

In the last few decades, studies by quantum physicists and psychologists have suggested the possibility of "field consciousness", that is, the idea the consciousness may have the properties of a quantum field, being non-local and existing outside the boundaries of space and time.⁶⁰⁴ Implications of this research, as yet inadequately explored, suggest that groups of people can have a group consciousness, which, when synchronized for maximum coherence, can affect physical systems. These field-consciousness effects may lend credibility to the concept of a Gaian world-mind which could occur under conditions of a "grand alignment" when billions of individual minds are focussed on the same object.⁶⁰⁵

It is noteworthy that Schachter-Shalomi stresses the pan-religious nature of the esoteric adepts he points to. This universalizes the purpose of healing the planet and provides Jews and Judaism with a role equal to and alongside other peoples and faith traditions. Hans Jonas, in a discussion of myth and mysticism among ancient gnostic

⁶⁰² Scott F. Gilbert, "The Rediscovery of Morphogenetic Fields" (Abstract), <http://devbio.com/article.php?3&id=18>.; David Pratt, "Rupert Sheldrake, A Theosophical Appraisal", <http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/science/prat-shl.htm>

⁶⁰³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Accessing the Imaginal*, 2

⁶⁰⁴ Dean Radin, *The Conscious Universe* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), 157-174.

⁶⁰⁵ Radin, *The Conscious Universe*, 174.

belief systems, puts forward the idea that myth, rather than being an objective representation of experiences and perceived reality, is an objective external projection of a subjective, total and inner attitude toward being. The mystic then interiorizes the myth via the adoption of various theological strands, to achieve subjective mysticism.⁶⁰⁶ I suggest that a somewhat similar process may be operating in the Jewish Renewal approach to the imaginal (or at least, Schachter-Shalomi's representation of it). A belief in the interconnectedness of all things, rooted in an ecological worldview, combined with a Kabbalistic belief in the human responsibility to maintain cosmic harmony, is projected into the contemporary Gaian myth of an intelligent, alive planet, via the selection of supporting scientific thought, and then reappropriated as a collective level of consciousness (or unconsciousness) via the theological idea of an imaginal realm, in order to accomplish the universal purpose of healing the planet.⁶⁰⁷

As referenced in Chapter 2, Schachter-Shalomi associates the idea of working “to ensure the health of our species ... and the planet into the future” with the concept of *mashiach* which he defines as the Jewish way of daring to hope that the future will be better than the past.⁶⁰⁸ In his metaphor of the lion and the lamb, he suggests that the struggle for survival is an essential element of the cosmos and that the messianic time does not mean all struggle ceases, it means that struggle is conducted within the framework of an overall harmonious cosmic energy balance. In his view, all Jews even today have “a *mashi'ach* seed within us, an undying hope for the future”.⁶⁰⁹ Thus, Jews need to bring a monistic approach to *gemillut chasadim*, at both the individual and the group level, so that humanity works together to come to the “realization that all individual souls are but expression of one Soul” and translate that realization into healing

⁶⁰⁶ Hans Jonas, “Myth and Mysticism: A Study of the Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought”, *Journal of Religion* 49 (1969): 315-329.

⁶⁰⁷ I discuss this universalization in Chapter 6.

⁶⁰⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 195.

⁶⁰⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 223.

action.⁶¹⁰ The imaginal realm, then, is the vehicle for that redemptive action, both for the individual and for the collective, groups of “adepts” working together. In addition, the metaphor of groups working in the imaginal realm to untangle “messed up connections” in the operating files of the planet suggests an operation that is repetitive. As any computer owner knows, connections in the files repeatedly become “tangled” and then have to be sorted out by someone with the appropriate expertise. Thus this untangling to maintain the operating files of the planet is Jewish Renewal’s never-ending redemptive process, which was discussed from the theological perspective in Chapter 2.

4.3.1 Spiritual Tools

Schachter-Shalomi points out that all religions have developed a spiritual technology that helps the individual get past the intellect and tap into the inner world of soul and feeling.⁶¹¹ The Jewish view of spiritual practice is based on action via *mitzvot*, the commandments. For the contemporary individual, though, the commandment cannot come from the external, it must come from within, in order to become “a prayerful or worshipful action.”⁶¹² Torah sets out three categories of *mitzvot*. The *mishpatim*, loosely thought of as ethical commandments, appeal mainly to our logical faculties. The *edot* (or *edyot*) are those commandments which create a sense of witnessing and history, aiding Jews to maintain a sense of memory and identity as a people. And the *chukim* are ritual commandments, which defy logic but speak to the soul, and summon a sense of mystery, power and submission to the divine will. The *mitzvot*, then, encompass actions that speak to different levels of the psyche.⁶¹³

Yet, there is a strong need today to develop the ability to access the deepest levels, to heal the world by entering into the imaginal world through the portal of the

⁶¹⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 246.

⁶¹¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 215

⁶¹² Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 117.

⁶¹³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 115-145.

imaginative faculty. And there are various ways to enter this portal. For example, we can work on directing our dreams: “the river of dreams shows a way to the imaginal realm”.⁶¹⁴ It is generally in the esoteric disciplines that we will find the “empirical know-how to enter these regions and bring healing to them”.⁶¹⁵ One such spiritual technology resides in kabbalistic and hasidic practices: “Kabbalah and Chasidism gave back to us this imaginative faculty, the *m'dammeh di-k'dushah*, in which we can, in the small space of the heart, see the infinite”.⁶¹⁶ He believes that the Hasidic (especially Chabad) and Kabbalistic masters of the past “developed a technology for staying in touch with emanations from the higher worlds”⁶¹⁷ and for experiencing the holiness within oneself as well as the redemptive action possible in those worlds.⁶¹⁸ For example, if one learns to chant Torah with the kabbalistic interpretation of the Hebrew letters and their markings, the four worlds of *asiyyah*, *yetzirah*, *bri'ah* and *atzilut* can be experienced simultaneously.⁶¹⁹ Praying with deep intention, using *nigunim* (joyous tunes or melodies, many specially developed by Hasidic tradition) can help entry into the inner world by facilitating entry into the four worlds.⁶²⁰ And digesting the deeper truths available in Hasidic parables and tales also develops the imaginal. There are, then, a number of spiritual tools within the hasidic tradition that are available to anyone willing to devote the energy to using them. These tools facilitate access to the imaginal and thus aid the individual or a group working together to engage in redemptive healing focussed on individuals, groups or the entire planet.

⁶¹⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Accessing the Imaginal*, 3.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 333.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Gate to the Heart*, 4-6.

⁶¹⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Gate to the Heart*, 91-116.

⁶²⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Gate to the Heart* 213-244.

4.4 Redemption and Messianism in Kabbalah and Hasidism

This sense of a universally available messianism, whether focussed in individuals or groups, is deeply rooted in the kabbalistic and hasidic traditions of Judaism. Scholem saw the social and religious phenomenon that was rabbinic Judaism as embedding conservative, restorative and utopian forces.⁶²¹ In his view, “the Messianic idea crystallizes” in rabbinic Judaism only out of the tension between the intertwined but contradictory restorative and utopian forces.⁶²² He held that Jewish messianism is essentially a theory of catastrophe, associated with apocalypticism. In his view, although the redemptive impulse is interiorized in Jewish mysticism through the Lurianic treatment of the concept of *tikkun*, it nevertheless is simultaneously directed outward. In contrast to the Christian mystical tradition, in later Jewish mysticism “the re-establishment of all things in their proper place, which constitutes the redemption, produces a totality that knows nothing of a division between inward and outward”.⁶²³ Yet the mystical interiorization of redemption dilutes its catastrophic aspect, because it is framed by an ideology “which connects traditional Judaism with the hidden forces operating in the world at large”.⁶²⁴ In this ideology, redemption equates to restoration; once the people of Israel has fulfilled its duty and completed the restoration of all things, redemption will come. That is, “redemption merely signifies the perfect state, a flawless and harmonious world in which everything occupies its proper place”.⁶²⁵

Moshe Idel holds that Scholem overemphasized the national and historical aspects of Jewish messianism via his theory of catastrophe, and neglected to appreciate that Jewish messianism is a constellation of ideas, including spiritual concepts.⁶²⁶ Rather, he holds that kabbalistic and hasidic mysticism is constituted of several different paradigms

⁶²¹ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 1-36.

⁶²² Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 3

⁶²³ Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 17.

⁶²⁴ Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 47.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁶ Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 29-37.

or models of messianism, which contain an array of processes leading to redemption, and which are shaped by a variety of currents of thought.⁶²⁷ These models are differentiated in part because they group around two main ideals. The ideal of perfection, the *via perfectionis*, assumes that the messiah gained a special knowledge which can be imparted to others, allowing them to imitate the messianic figure and be redeemed. This way of thinking is inspired by the belief in the perfectibility of nature and human character, and may be related to Greek forms of thought. On the other hand, the ideal of suffering, the *via passionis*, assumes the messianic figure is salvific either by vicariously relieving the suffering of others through his own suffering, or by battling with the powers of evil in apocalyptic wars, or by descending into the realm of evil in order to release captive souls. Expression of this much older view, although associated with Christianity, can be found in ancient royal sacral rites, the Pentateuch, and the Talmud. In the *via perfectionis*, the concept of redemption is linked to that of perfection; in the *via passionis*, it focuses on imperfection. Following from this approach is Idel's suggestion that, rather than conceiving of messianism as primarily a collective phenomenon, we should recognize that there are moments of decisive inner experience which may precede the collective manifestations.

The kabbalistic and hasidic traditions place significant emphasis on these decisive inner experiences. Scholem and others held that the emphasis on individual, spiritualistic redemption did not exist in Jewish tradition before the middle of the 18th century, but emerged as a neutralization of messianism in reaction to the disastrous Sabbatean upheaval.⁶²⁸ Idel, as referenced earlier, argues that an example of the mystical model of spiritual redemption exists within the 13th century writings of the ecstatic kabbalist Abraham Abulafia. Idel links the shift in emphasis from the collective to the individual to

⁶²⁷ These models as describe in *Messianic Mystics* are: the ecstatic, the magical, the astrological, the descent model and the theosophical-theurgical. In his earlier book, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Idel identifies 3 models, as mentioned in Chapter 3. My understanding of his presentations suggest that the additional 2 models, astrological and descent, are a further parsing of the models so that they can be useful to developing a deeper understanding of mystical messianism.

⁶²⁸ Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 236-240.

medieval Jewish encounters with Greek philosophy, particularly neoplatonism. Greek concepts of the soul, its descent into exile in this material world, and its return to its source, penetrated medieval Muslim, Jewish and Christian intellectual streams of thought, as alluded to earlier in this chapter. During the 10th to 13th centuries, Arabic neoplatonism and Sufist thought was particularly influential in shaping the more individualistic kabbalistic interpretation of redemptive thinking.⁶²⁹ In Idel's view, hasidism "exhibits strong affinities to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century spiritualistic trends both in its terminology and its concepts", although there is not yet enough scholarship on the comparison to link their development directly.⁶³⁰ He suggests that the spiritual messianism of hasidism may be an expression of a broader phenomenon in Jewish tradition and should be studied as a complete system of thought possessing its own internal logic, rather than perceived merely as a reaction to socioeconomic factors.

Although in the writings of later generations of hasidic leaders' views closer to the apocalyptic model of messianism become conspicuous, Idel's view is that in the work of the early generations there is a clear emphasis on the spiritualistic conception of messianism. He points out that Lurianic kabbalah, following the theosophical-theurgical model, emphasized the need to perfect the divine as a prelude to redemption in this world. Some early Hasidic authors, though, echoing ecstatic kabbalah, are less concerned with supernal theosophical structures and more concerned with the improvement of terrestrial man by imparting salvific information through practices related to the divine names.

Idel illustrates this move from "a more Lurianic to a more anthropological understanding of the messianic topic" through a hasidic story about the *Ba'al Shem Tov's* intention to meet a kabbalist living in Jerusalem, so that the former's spirit could be unified with the latter's soul in order to bring down two higher spiritual capacities or

⁶²⁹ Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 50-53.

⁶³⁰ Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 238.

souls so that redemption would emerge.⁶³¹ Idel's interpretation of this story suggests that it describes in psychological terms-- the descent of the higher souls -- the joint efforts of the two hasidic and kabbalistic masters to bring about the messianic event.⁶³² I suggest that there is a striking resonance between this story and Schachter-Shalomi's description of adepts working together in the imaginal to effect planetary healing.

While it is beyond the scope of this research to explore this resonance further, it is clear that the Jewish Renewal approach to the imaginal and redemption appears to draw on early hasidism's approach to messianism and redemption, even though the descriptive language and terminology used to describe the Jewish Renewal view is distinctly contemporary, quasi-scientific and syncretic. Schachter-Shalomi himself nuances his position that hasidism is a model for Jewish Renewal by pointing to the importance of early hasidism and the teaching of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, as referenced earlier in this chapter.

Idel describes hasidism as "a vital form of literature, praxes and experiences that combine a great variety of models" and that this "vitality of Hasidic mysticism draws from the creative appropriations of a full gamut of messianic ideas and models".⁶³³ By combining these models, which include the importance of experience (via the ecstatic model), hasidism emphasizes the move from messianic hope to experience, both in the realm of this world and other three of the four worlds- that is, the imaginal. Thus the rich and varied range of hasidic traditions provides the foundation for Jewish Renewal's reinterpretation of the theme of redemption as a continuous process.

The imaginal, then, is an important vehicle for the development of Jewish Renewal's theology. Schachter-Shalomi develops the concept by drawing on ancient

⁶³¹ Kabbalah postulates several levels of soul: *nefesh*, *ru'ah*, *neshama*, *hayyah* and *yechidah*. For a detailed and fascinating discussion of the evolution of kabbalistic ideas of the soul and its transmigration, see the article by Gershon Scholem, "Man and His Soul (The Psychology and Anthropology of Kabbalah)", in *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

⁶³² Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 239-240 and Note 99, 410.

⁶³³ Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 242.

esoteric thought as refracted through both kabbalah and hasidism as well as the Sufist interpretation put forward by Corbin. By borrowing Corbin's relatively contemporary concept of the imaginal as an inner realm through which humans can access the divine, and then reflecting the ecstatic kabbalistic approach by re-embedding it in hasidic cosmology combined with a contemporary, ecological worldview, he contributes to the development of an emerging Gaian cosmology. By pointing to hasidic and kabbalistic spiritual tools that can aid in accessing the imaginal, he ensures that the redemptive purpose is both particular and universal, personal and collective. By melding the ecological perspective with an appeal to scientific authority in the context of hasidic-sufic thought, he updates the concept of redemption to reflect the universalist, non-elitist, process-focussed postmodern sensibility.⁶³⁴

Thus, by relying on the authority of contemporary science (the theory of morphogenesis) and the consciousness-expanding spiritual tools of hasidism, Schachter-Shalomi nuances the imaginal in order to embed it in a contemporary and developing Gaian cosmology which is pan-religious and ecologically oriented. In this cosmology, the group working together to achieve redemption encompasses all of humanity, beyond the people *Israel*. Echoing Cassirer, Schachter-Shalomi assigns to this group the responsibility for influencing events and shaping the future, through his use of contemporary computer terminology. Membership in this spiritually adept group is available to anyone who chooses to develop their individual messianic capacity. Spiritual tools for this project can be found in kabbalah and hasidism.

Prayer and liturgy are key tools for developing the ability to access the imaginal. In the next chapter, I examine how Jewish Renewal's theological interpretations are reflected in its approach to prayer and liturgy.

⁶³⁴ I discuss the postmodern aspects of Jewish Renewal more fully in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5

Barukh Attah: Prayer and Liturgy as Reflections of the Reconstructed Theology

Barukh attah Adonai (Blessed are You, Lord) are the opening words of a *brakhah*, a blessing, which is a basic unit of Jewish prayer. In proclaiming the blessedness of God, the *brakhah* expresses a Judaic sense of awed reverence, gratitude and praise of God as the source from which all of humanity's blessings flow. Through the use of the familiar term "*attah*", it also expresses a sense of nearness to, or intimacy with, God.⁶³⁵ This dual conception, of an exalted, majestic, and transcendental God, as well as an intimate, close, and immanent God, pervades Jewish prayer. It reflects an inner tension in Judaism's understanding of humanity's relationship with the Creator. The tension is also reflected in the different aspects of prayer-ritualistic or personal-emphasized by various Jewish communities.⁶³⁶ In Judaism, prayer is one aspect of worship (*avodah*, service), which also includes the study of Torah, the observance of the *mitzvot*, and an individual's ethical conduct and character formation.⁶³⁷

Prayer is essentially direct speech in which a human confronts the Divine. Such speech can be to request, to supplicate, to thank, to complain, or even just to converse. The English "to pray" is derived from the Latin *precare*, which means 'to implore'. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for "to pray", *l'hitpalel*, as well as the word for prayer, *tefillah*, stem from a root, *palal*, which can mean to intercede but also connotes arbitration and judgement. Hayim Donin asserts that Judaism sees prayer as a form of judgment before God to which the individual subjects him/herself; prayer, then, is seen as

⁶³⁵ R. Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Pray as a Jew* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 65-66.

⁶³⁶ R. Adin Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer* (New York: Schocken, 2000), 10-13.

⁶³⁷ Steinsaltz, *A Guide To Jewish Prayer*, 186-88.

helping to make people into better human beings.⁶³⁸ On the other hand, Louis Jacobs maintains that this view of the meaning of *tefillah* is incorrect; rather, it is a later interpretation, which was not part of the understanding of prayer in classical Jewish sources.⁶³⁹

The interaction with the Divine can be individual or communal, and Judaism values both kinds of prayer, although fixed prayer is preferred. At the same time, Judaism has always particularly stressed the individual's link with and relationship to others, and has developed regular, fixed, mandatory communal prayer, expressed liturgically in the *siddur* (prayer book), which reflects basic Jewish values and articles of faith as well as historical experience and future aspirations. Prayer, then, both individual and that reflected through the communal liturgy, is a reflection of a community's worldview and ethos.

Lawrence Hoffman, in a discussion of liturgy as a reflection of group identity, argues that prayer books deliver messages about a group's values and beliefs through a combination of manifest content, design or layout, and choreography.⁶⁴⁰ At the same time, precisely because liturgy reflects a group's identity, it is conservative, and dominant theological themes are not easily revised. Changes in key liturgical elements can be as instructive as the actual wording used.⁶⁴¹ Thus, to understand Jewish Renewal's liturgy, it is essential to understand how it differs from the traditional liturgy. This in turn requires an understanding of the Jewish liturgical context in which Jewish Renewal liturgy is shaped. In this chapter I present the context, beginning with an overview of the development of Jewish liturgy over the centuries, and then move to an analysis of the structure and content of Jewish Renewal liturgy.

⁶³⁸ Donin, *To Pray as a Jew*, 5-7; also see Bernard Martin, *Prayer in Judaism* (Basic: New York, 1968), 12-14.

⁶³⁹ Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, (London: Behrman House, 1973), 183-187.

⁶⁴⁰ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 60-74.

⁶⁴¹ Tzvee Zahavy, *Studies in Jewish Prayer* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990), 87-101.

5.1 An Overview of Jewish Liturgical Development

5.1.1 Pre-modern Development

Jewish worship today includes private prayers to be said at specific times, or before specific day-to-day activities, as well as a communal liturgy with structured prayer services. The weekday communal liturgy includes morning (*shacharit*), afternoon (*mincha*) and evening (*ma'ariv*) services. The time and order for these were established by ancient rabbinic authorities, based on both the diurnal cycle and the specified times for Temple sacrifices.⁶⁴² Torah reading is added for some weekdays, as well as for *shabbat* and festivals, which also include additional services.⁶⁴³

Although these services all share a common structural framework as well as various other common elements, the two key components of all services are recitation of the *shema* (also *sh'ma*) and the *amidah*. The *shema* is actually not a prayer, but a declaration of faith, accompanied by some verses from the biblical books of Deuteronomy and Numbers as well as blessings and a communal call to prayer. As an indication of its importance, in traditional services the opening declaration of the *shema* appears in a number of places.⁶⁴⁴ The *amidah* (which means “standing”) is the heart of the service. Also called *shemoneh esreh* (eighteen blessings), it consists today of nineteen blessings grouped in a particular order. It is an “ingenious collection of Biblical words and phrases pieced together to form a new composition that reflects a broad spectrum of

⁶⁴² Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 18.

⁶⁴³ See Donin, *To Pray as a Jew*, and Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*.

⁶⁴⁴ The declaration is: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai eloheinu, Adonai echad* (Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One), from Deuteronomy 6:4. See Donin, *To Pray as a Jew*, 144-146.

personal needs, communal needs, and Jewish convictions”.⁶⁴⁵ I discuss both these prayers at more length later in the chapter.

The origins of Jewish prayer and liturgy are ancient. Stefan Reif suggests that the precise origins cannot be determined, but locates them in the context of the liturgical practices of the ancient Egyptian, Hittite, Mesopotamian and Canaanite civilisations. He suggests that there is evidence of some degree of continuity in terminology, formulae, ritual and the organization of personnel since the period of the Hebrew monarchy.⁶⁴⁶

Although the structure and content of the Jewish liturgy was largely fixed in the late medieval period, its development is rooted in the existence of the Temple in Jerusalem. That development is also marked by a relatively high degree of democratization, as, during its long period of development, Jewish liturgy was subject to a wide range of competing views on liturgical policy, all vying with each other and exercising mutual influence. Reif has suggested that “it could be argued that the essence of Jewish liturgy is that it carries within it all these competing tendencies and successfully absorbs them all”.⁶⁴⁷

Reif holds that there is evidence of personal prayer recorded in the Bible, and that it constitutes a particular form of Israelite spirituality essentially distinct from that achieved by the sacrificial cult.⁶⁴⁸ Private prayer and some forms of communal worship existed in parallel, and in tension, in the Second Temple period. In the early part of the period, the fifth to third centuries BCE, the order and basic content of Temple ritual was fixed by the religious leaders who guided *Israel*.⁶⁴⁹ Specifically, the Temple cult had been restored after the return from Babylonian exile, with its daily sacrifices, priestly

⁶⁴⁵ Donin, *To Pray as a Jew*, 69-108. Note that *tefillah*, currently used to mean prayer, originally referred in the tannaitic and amoraic period specifically to the *amidah*, which was considered the most important prayer.

⁶⁴⁶ Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22-33.

⁶⁴⁷ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 75.

⁶⁴⁸ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 35-38.

⁶⁴⁹ Steinsaltz is quite unequivocal in his conviction on this point. See *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 49-56.

rituals and levitical choirs performing sacred hymns.⁶⁵⁰ At the same time, the personal prayer of previous centuries expanded in content and form into the psalm genre, took on ceremonial aspects, and projected themes of confession, the lessons of Israelite history and the need for forgiveness and improvement. Reif points out that these developments to some extent reflect liturgical trends of a wider Near Eastern context and may be due to Israelite exposure to a broader range of religious ideas after the exile. There was some preliminary merging of the ideas and practices of personal prayer with those of the Temple cult.⁶⁵¹

While the primacy and centrality of the Temple cult was supported by Jews, some, particularly in the diaspora, were more ambivalent and found liturgical expression in a different, and fairly independent context. Relatively early in the Second Temple period, a combination of geography, socio-economic circumstances, and individual attitudes led to the formation of the *ma'amad*, according to which those individuals who could not make the festival pilgrimage to Jerusalem gathered in their homes towns to fast, recite scriptural passages and pray, at least informally.⁶⁵²

By the late Second Temple period, there existed considerable religious ferment, with several currents of thought capturing the popular imagination.⁶⁵³ These currents or trends expressed themselves in private and communal worship in different ways, exerting reciprocal influence and promoting liturgical innovation. Acts of mystical piety, Temple sacrifice, and individual benedictions were options that individuals or groups could choose to express their spiritual yearnings. One common factor was the emphasis on acquiring a sound knowledge of the texts that described the Jewish people's history. Thus, an understanding of Judaism's authoritative sources was transmitted by the copying of scrolls, and the recitation of and exegesis on their content in family and larger social

⁶⁵⁰ Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 14-15.

⁶⁵¹ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 38-42.

⁶⁵² Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 53-87.

⁶⁵³ For a detailed discussion of the main currents, see Lester Grabbe, *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to Yavneh* (London: Routledge, 2000).

groups, in a language that could be understood by the common people, and in a way that made them relevant to the spiritual questions of the day. By the end of the Second Temple period, the preoccupation with scriptural reading and study was incorporated into the developing liturgy.⁶⁵⁴ That liturgy might be expressed in the biblical Hebrew dialect, in Greek or in Aramaic, by individuals or groups, in Jerusalem at the Temple or in a variety of other locations. It included regular recitations of core elements of the *shema*. It may have included recitation of the *amidah*, but this is less certain.⁶⁵⁵

In the first few centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, the rabbis of the tannaitic (mishnaic) and amoraic (early talmudic) periods gradually melded the mix of concepts and forms they inherited, including the mystical, into a liturgy in accordance with their own emergent, rabbinic ideology. That rabbinic ideology took several centuries to become dominant, and the liturgical development that accompanied it reflects many differences of opinion about the status, nature and mechanics of prayer, and the specifics of practice of communal worship and inclusion of individual prayers. It also reflects the reality that the wide range of prayers and blessings attested to were normally recited from memory and transmitted orally, thus ensuring some variation and creativity. In general, for the talmudic Jew liturgy included more than prayer, it included Torah study, the observance of *mitzvot*, and various domestic customs among which the rituals and prayers associated with the keeping of *shabbat* became significant.⁶⁵⁶

By the end of the fourth century, when the schism with Christianity was complete, the synagogal activity of reading and interpreting the Hebrew Bible was established, but the precise content and order of the readings was not standardized. The corpus of Jewish prayer included those that had been popular with ordinary Jews for centuries, those that were attached to specific occasions of various sorts, and those that were authoritative due

⁶⁵⁴ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 53-87.

⁶⁵⁵ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 82-84. Reif is not prepared to accept the argument put forth by Zahavy, in *Studies in Jewish Prayer*, 87-101, that the *shema* and the *amidah* were both recited and reflect their origins in competing scribal and priestly circles, respectively.

⁶⁵⁶ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 88-131.

to their origin in the Temple ritual. Specifically, parts of the *shema* were being recited (publicly and/or privately) morning and evening, preceded by a communal call to prayer as part of the synagogue activity. As well, the *amidah* was being recited morning and afternoon. In addition, efforts were being made to ensure continuity between these two prayers by the addition of linking passages. Overall, the early talmudic period is marked by the establishment of a skeletal liturgical framework within a context of notable liturgical plurality in regard to specific details.⁶⁵⁷

By the period of the ninth to twelfth centuries, the power of the once dominant Babylonian community was diminishing and the crusades had destroyed the Palestinian Jewish community and its influence throughout the diaspora. In consequence, leading rabbinic scholars throughout the diaspora issued written liturgical guidelines, setting out detailed regulations for prayer and explaining its theoretical basis and historical evolution. Some accretions to the basic talmudic liturgical framework were rejected, others were accepted based on thematic relevance or rationalized through reinterpretation if they could not be dislodged. During this period, prayer books or *siddurim* gradually emerged, and *piyyutim*, or liturgical poems based on scriptural texts, made their way into the *siddur*, as did certain mystical prayers, albeit in a restricted and controlled way, as well as certain prayers and benedictions associated with the domestic sphere. In addition, during this period, various groups of communities merged the liturgy they had inherited with that which had become acceptable, to establish identifiable rites, or *nusach*, of their own, generally known by geographic location. More elaborate synagogues began to emerge, with ceremonials, more structured services, special seats for important persons, a cantor (*chazzan*, or prayer leader) and choir. Prayer shawls (*tallit*) and phylacteries (*tefillin*) became integral parts of the ritual (for males), as did a more clearly defined annual cycle of reading from the Pentateuch (Torah) and the Prophets (*haftorah*). This reading became ritualized as part of the liturgy, with less emphasis on textual reading as study.

⁶⁵⁷ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 124-130.

Thus, by the middle ages, the pluralistic approach to liturgical development, with limited guidance and extensive creativity, gave way to a more authoritative one, which featured extensive guidance and limited creativity.⁶⁵⁸ The textual version of liturgy emerged to replace the predominantly oral version, variations generally dealt with minor details, and Hebrew became the dominant liturgical language. This transformation of Jewish worship was related in large part to factors associated with the breakup of the Islamic empire and the transformation to a written cultural base throughout Europe.⁶⁵⁹

In the 13th to 15th centuries, the Ashkenazi rite (*nusach ashkenaz*) arose in Europe, blending elements of Palestinian, Babylonian, medieval Italian and French rites with other innovations including some mystic thought. In the same period, the Sephardic rite (*nusach sepharad*) continued to crystallize in Mediterranean countries and the Near East. Reif notes that during this period, there arose Jewish pietist, mystical groups in both areas, the German *Hasidim* and an Egyptian Jewish *sufi* movement. He sees in both groups a “return to prayer as a transcendental experience, rather than a requirement of daily observance, with a renewed stress on the intensity of individual devotion”.⁶⁶⁰ It is not clear what effect these movements had on the respective liturgies.

From the 15th to the 18th centuries, the substantial Jewish migrations related to destructions of communities such as that of Spain, the invention of the printing press, and the rise and spread of kabbalistic ideology all affected the development of Jewish liturgy. Certain optional prayers which had originally surrounded the mandatory ones in the liturgical service became mandatory themselves, and other optional prayers were introduced. The emergence of rabbis, cantors and other synagogue officials became institutionalized, with a concomitant elaboration of both the synagogue building and the liturgical services, which became more formal and ceremonial. A few poems, unrelated to statutory texts but self-contained compositions reflecting the thought patterns of the time, entered the liturgy. A variety of benedictions related to the health of the local

⁶⁵⁸ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 122-152.

⁶⁵⁹ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 150-170.

⁶⁶⁰ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 195.

government and the supportive deeds of local community members were introduced. Various practices and prayers related to the dead were codified and expanded. The foundation for a greater involvement of women in services was laid, with a few halakhic authorities allowing for female participation in *minyan* and blessings under specific conditions. Printed *siddurim*, as well as other literature, became available and widely disseminated, with “authorized” versions appearing in some communities. A few *siddurim* were printed in languages other than Hebrew. At the same time, there was careful deletion of elements of text that were likely to offend the dominant Christian majority, such as prayers that called for revenge for Jewish suffering or those that described non-Jews as prostrating themselves before an ineffectual god.⁶⁶¹

A notable liturgical adjustment during this period was the inclusion of significant mystical contributions. The spread and acceptance of certain mystical practices into Jewish liturgy was aided by the wider availability of printed texts, including the mystical, the development of trade, the greater ease of travel, the improved communications among Jewish communities, and in particular, the economic, social and spiritual independence achieved by the mystical community at Safed. Benedictions performed before particular rites or prayers took on kabbalistic formulations, and other kabbalistic passages were introduced as a result of the deep religiosity they expressed or through the special numerical significance of their content. The most popular import into the liturgy was the set of Friday evening prayers known as *kabbalat shabbat* (welcoming or receiving the *shabbat*), which included the recitation of several psalms, the singing of poems such as *lekhhah dodi*, *shalom aleichem*, and *yedid nefesh*, as well as the blessing of children in the home and the introduction of table songs to create an atmosphere of joy at the Friday evening *shabbat* dinner.⁶⁶² As well, certain other poems and prayers with the theme of repentance were incorporated into specific services.

⁶⁶¹ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 207-241.

⁶⁶² Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 246-247. In my experience, even today the mystical tunes are some of the most beautiful and haunting in the liturgy, and it is difficult to leave a traditional *kabbalat shabbat* service without being profoundly moved.

By the 18th century, European hasidism was emerging and developing an alternate set of Ashkenazi rites. Hasidism, in contrast to rabbinic Judaism, valued prayer as much as Torah study and emphasized joy and love as motivations for prayer, rather than dry duty. Hasidim preferred to pray in small groups in meeting rooms (*shtiebel*) rather than synagogues, with prayers led by a lay leader rather than *chazzan* or choir, featuring communal chanting, movements, loud singing and shouting (in Yiddish as well as Hebrew). Hasidism developed its own rite, the *nusach haAri* (rite of Isaac Luria), but its contents varied and there was never a truly uniform Hasidic rite.⁶⁶³

Hasidim were deeply devout and traditional Jews, so hasidism found ways to balance the quietism of the mystical approach with the activist approach of traditional rabbinic Judaism. The Hasidic ideal was contemplative prayer, accompanied by practices which aided the individual to pass through various stages of speech and thought to strive for a state of annihilation of the ego (*bittul hayesh*) and attainment of *devekut* (cohesion with the divine). At the same time, hasidism valued the traditional liturgy, so petitionary prayers (which would focus attention on the ego) were reinterpreted according to the idea of prayer influencing the upper worlds. Rather than reject petitionary prayer as a hindrance to self-annihilation, early hasidism portrayed it as a request to God to satisfy His own needs in His aspect as the *shekhinah* (the passive, female element of the Godhead and the manifestation of divine power which brings life to all creation), that is, the need for celestial harmony. In kabbalistic mythology, that which man lacks is reflected as a lack in the *shekhinah*. This theme of prayer for the sake of the *shekhinah* was treated differently by different hasidic masters, but the main differences were with regard to the extent to which selfhood could be transcended during petitionary prayer. Although later hasidism emphasized purity of intention more than self-annihilation in prayer, and in some cases emphasized ecstatic rather than contemplative prayer, the contemplative ideal was never completely abandoned, and this dimension of prayer emerged again in Lubavitch (Chabad) Hasidism.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶³ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 249-253.

⁶⁶⁴ Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 20-35.

5.1.2 Modern Context

In the 18th and 19th century, modernism posed significant challenges to European Judaism.⁶⁶⁵ Jews found a place in the wider, non-Jewish world, and the authority of the Jewish community no longer held much influence on the ideas and behaviours of its members. Emancipated Jews adhered to the principles of naturalism and rationalism, and called into question the practices and underlying theory of Jewish liturgy. Particularly in Germany, educated Jews were living in an age and in a broader society that prided itself on reason, science, the rejection of superstition, aesthetics and to some extent, egalitarianism. As a result, the sights and sounds of a normal synagogue service were considered indecorous, the role of women was considered too limited, and the presence in the liturgy of mystical formulae, passages from the *Zohar* and references to angels were a source of embarrassment.⁶⁶⁶

In tandem with the emergence in Germany of the three main forms of modern Judaism, orthodox, positive-historical (Conservative) and liberal (Reform), various changes occurred in the traditional Jewish prayers and their recitation in the synagogue. Reform, over a period of several decades, and to different extents in individual congregations, led the way with truncation of some services, radical pruning of key but lengthy prayers such as the *shema* and *amidah*, elimination of some prayers, replacement of others by new compositions, extensive use of German rather than Hebrew, insistence on formality and decorum with services led by the rabbi, cantor and choir under strict rules approved by the congregation. At the same time, some modernists regarded this radical tendency to be a destructive and negative comment on the historical development of Jewish custom, and developed a more positive historical interpretation of Judaism. Positive-historical Judaism valued the genius of Jewish tradition, and felt that change should be an organic process, with still-vibrant traditions reinterpreted to provide contemporary meaning, but not eliminated or changed out of arbitrary, personal or

⁶⁶⁵ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 256-293.

⁶⁶⁶ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 256-260.

factional motives. Those who followed the positive-historical approach were devoted to both scientific enquiry and traditional practice, and were comfortable with a range of traditional *siddurim*.⁶⁶⁷

Outside Germany, British Jewry had organized itself along a centralist model that was a moderate form of orthodoxy. Both Reform and eastern European orthodoxy encroached somewhat on this hegemony, but for much of the century a unique feature of British Jewry was its largely traditional nature. Late in the century, the central organization, the United Synagogue, was formed, and produced an authorized *siddur* which blended the traditional rabbinic aversion to inclusion of mystical elements with a modern predilection for shorter prayers, simple translations, and deletion of particularistic references. American Jewry, through much of the 19th century, sanctioned a pluralistic rather than centrist, approach, but also suffered from significant assimilation. With regard to *siddurim*, European versions, mainly orthodox, were widely adopted. Late in the century, the Reform movement became stronger and produced its own *siddur*, which generally followed the European models.⁶⁶⁸

By the end of the 20th century, the largest Jewish population outside Israel was in the United States, and it is the liturgical situation there that is of most interest in the context of my research. The three dominant varieties of Judaism are (Modern) Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, with Reconstructionist being a much smaller segment, along with various smaller orthodox populations which include the various Hasidic sects. Reif identifies a “new vibrancy” among the Orthodox, who now include young professional and intellectual members, in contrast to generations past.⁶⁶⁹ These Orthodox have a preference for traditional rites, see the home rather than the synagogue as the main focus of religious life, and use a range of traditional prayer books. Most of these include kabbalistic and hasidic material.

⁶⁶⁷ Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer*, 270-277.

⁶⁶⁸ Reif, *Judaism and Modern Prayer*, 284-290.

⁶⁶⁹ Reif, *Judaism and Modern Prayer*, 294-303.

Conservative Judaism established itself in North America early in the 20th century. Originally very traditional, its liturgy gradually became more progressive and American, and reflected a limited number of innovations, retaining the traditional text but with English supplements, modern prayers and readings and non-literal translations that permitted reinterpretation, and prayers for the State of Israel and in remembrance of Holocaust victims.⁶⁷⁰ A more recent edition of the approved Conservative *siddur* includes egalitarian language and more detailed explanations of the origins of prayers, but retains the traditionally oriented service, including the kabbalistic *kabbalat shabbat* hymns as well as various mystical *piyyutim*.⁶⁷¹

Reconstructionist Judaism initially published its own *siddur* in the mid 1940s. It also reinterpreted traditional texts, but explicitly rejected those texts which referred to the exclusive election of the Jewish people or the revelation of the Torah as the only doctrine expressing divine will. The current version continues this orientation, and also takes account of the Holocaust and the State of Israel, as well as underscoring Reconstructionism's commitment to lay leadership, pluralism and feminism, and universalism.⁶⁷²

The Reform movement was the strongest of the American versions of Judaism in the early part of the 20th century, and somewhat aggressively liberal. As the century progressed, the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel gradually led to the emergence of a sense of Jewish identity as American. Hoffman points out that in the past, American Jewish liturgy had adopted the approach and orientation that was deemed appropriate by the various European expressions of Judaism, but by the latter part of the century, there was an Americanization of Reform, Conservative and even some Orthodox

⁶⁷⁰ Reif, *Judaism and Modern Prayer*, 314-319.

⁶⁷¹ Rabbinical Assembly, *Siddur Sim Shalom* (New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2003).

⁶⁷² Harold Schulweis, "Reconstructionism", pp. 755-759 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.) (New York: The Free Press, 1988). See also *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat VeChagim*, (3rd edition, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania: The Reconstructionist Press, 2004).

rites.⁶⁷³ This Americanization was partly expressed in the “proliferation of ‘creative services’ in the late sixties and seventies ... American Jews were imbued with a sense of democracy that allowed anyone at all to write a service; and almost everyone did”.⁶⁷⁴ These services featured discussions about the Vietnam war, expressions of American authors and poets, dominance of English, as well as instruments such as the guitar, used to play tunes taken from American folk music. By the mid 1970s, there was a growing conviction among Reform Jews that traditional sources and ancient customs could still provide religious inspiration. Thus, the Reform *siddur* was revised to include once again the traditional prayers in Hebrew and English, some Sefardi material, a role for the cantor and choirs, but also an acknowledgement of the emerging Americanization as expressed in experimental English texts and works of American poets. It also adjusted some prayers to align with the Reform emphasis on social justice and non-violence.⁶⁷⁵ At the end of the century, the *siddur* was revised once again, to make it a better teaching tool by inclusion of transliteration, to reflect many different perceptions of God, and a balance of particularism and universalism.⁶⁷⁶

From this necessarily limited overview of the development of Jewish liturgy over two millennia, it can be seen that for much of Jewish history, there has been no monolithic approach to prayer and liturgy; rather, Jewish worship practice is marked by its elasticity. Since early talmudic times, the constant element has been the basic framework of the services and of individual prayers. The services are linked to the sacrificial ritual of the Temple via their order and some prayer content, but incorporate the rabbinic emphasis on Torah study. Over the centuries, there has been a pluralistic approach to the specific content of the services. Some prayers have been revised to reflect contemporary sensibilities; others have been added or deleted. Contemporary poetry has

⁶⁷³ Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 72-74.

⁶⁷⁴ Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 73.

⁶⁷⁵ Reif, *Judaism and Modern Prayer*, 322-325.

⁶⁷⁶ R. Elyse D. Frishman, “Entering Mishkan T’filah”, *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Fall, 2004, also at www.urj.org/mishkan.

been added, and either retained or deleted in future revisions. Hebrew has generally been a constant element, with the variable being the extent to which it is transliterated, translated, or supplemented by the inclusion of the vernacular. Until the modern era, the emphasis was on God's historical, personal and transcendental presence, and on the particularist Jewish mission.

With modernity came a greater proliferation, and more frequent revisions, of *siddurim*. Liberal North American Jewry has shown itself to be particularly creative and independent in its approach to the *siddur*. The idea, then, of revising the prayer book to reflect the values and approaches of the particular worshipping community is deeply rooted in Jewish history. With this background, I now turn to the revisions which the Jewish Renewal community has enacted to reflect its beliefs and values.

5.2 Jewish Renewal Liturgy

Jewish Renewal emphasizes the importance of prayer. Schachter-Shalomi differentiates among prayer, which he defines as asking God for help, worship, which he sees as joyous acclamation of God as sovereign, particularly at events related to the life-cycle and annual seasonal cycle, and *davennen*, which he refers to as “living the liturgical life in the presence of God”.⁶⁷⁷ *Davennen*, which is a Yiddish word, is a particular approach to prayer, “a unique Jewish prayer practice which combines modal chanting of sacred text, meditation and movement”.⁶⁷⁸ It is intended to provide the individual with an intimate connection to the Divine, and a sense of its palpable presence. To achieve this state, the ego must be dissolved and the self annihilated, which in hasidism is called *bittul hayesh*. *Davennen*, then, refers to the contemplative and transcendent aspects of prayer. The technique of hasidic prayer stresses the ascent of the individual's soul through the four worlds, to achieve self-annihilation in *atzilut*. For hasidism in general, contemplative prayer is approached through the emotions, but for Chabad hasidism, the emotional

⁶⁷⁷ Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1993), 162.

⁶⁷⁸ Marcia Prager (ed.), *P'nai Or Siddur for Shabbat Morning* (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, undated), iii, www.aleph.org.

rapture which is part of the self-annihilation follows from contemplation, but is not part of it. Various techniques to aid contemplation exist; all are intended to bring about the realization that in reality there are no separate processes in the “higher realms” but that the entire universe and all it contains is one unity.⁶⁷⁹ Jewish Renewal liturgy incorporates the four worlds approach to its prayer, as will be seen later. Services are seen as journeys of consciousness and development of the imaginal faculty, and the emphasis is on inner psychological transformation, aided by body movement, chanting, use of meditative aids, and praying alone or sharing the prayers with others in small groups including both males and females, not limited to the traditional *minyan* of ten males.⁶⁸⁰

Schachter-Shalomi has called for Jewish Renewal to produce a *siddur* which would differ from existing *siddurim*, in which he suggests “the devotional vocabulary is ... very anemic”.⁶⁸¹ It is to be characterized by: an understanding of the psychospiritual process associated with the four worlds; a revision of language to eliminate masculine bias; a view of the individual that stressed wellness and the blessing of Creation rather than worthlessness and self-abasement before the Divine; an emphasis on the relationship of humans to nature and ecology; an emphasis on the use of the body in prayer, incorporating techniques learned from hasidism, yoga, and other practices.⁶⁸² Initially an experimental prayer book was produced (*Or Chadash*, A New Light). It was eventually superseded by *Kol Koreh* (A Voice Calls), which is in loose-leaf format, and intended to reflect an evolving liturgy. Users are invited to customize and share their liturgies, and updates can be added to the *siddur*. In addition, the ALEPH website currently features other *siddurim*.⁶⁸³ There is, then, no “official” Jewish Renewal liturgy, but a range of creative interpretations from which individuals or groups can choose. I have examined several of these: the *Siddur Kol Koreh*, the *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, the *P'nai Or*

⁶⁷⁹ Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, 70-92.

⁶⁸⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 179-194.

⁶⁸¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 191.

⁶⁸² Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 195-197.

⁶⁸³ <http://www.aleph.org/catalog.html#Anchor-Siddurim-47857> (July 26, 2006).

Siddurim for *Erev Shabbat* and *Shabbat Morning*, *A Weekday Siddur- As I Can Say It*, and *The New Kehila Makhzor*, as well as a resource book called the *Meta Siddur*.⁶⁸⁴ For purposes of comparison I have also examined, and will occasionally refer to, the *Chabad* prayer book, *Siddur Tehillat Hashem*, as well as the Conservative *Siddur Sim Shalom*, as these both indicate the traditional, inherited liturgy, the latter with some contemporary adjustments.⁶⁸⁵

5.2.1 Traditional Structure of Siddurim and Liturgy

A *siddur* can comprise one volume or several, and features the individual prayers for morning, afternoon and evening, as well as the communal services. In addition, it can contain instructional material, specific children's prayers, and meditative aids such as poetry. Services include those for weekdays as well as for shabbat and festivals. Services for the High Holydays (*Rosh Hashanna*, the New Year, and *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement) have a somewhat different liturgy (although the overall structure and content are consistent) usually found in a separate prayer book called a *machzor*.

⁶⁸⁴ R. Daniel Siegel, ed., *Siddur Kol Koreh* (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2001) www.aleph.org; R. David Zaslow (ed.), *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 1993) www.aleph.org; R. Z. Schachter-Shalomi, *A Weekday Siddur- As I Can Say It* (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2006) www.aleph.org; R. Marcia Prager (ed.), *P'nai Or Siddur for Erev Shabbat*, and *P'nai Or Siddur for Shabbat Morning* (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, undated) www.aleph.org; R. David Shneyer (ed.), *The New Kehilah Makhzor* (Rockville, Maryland: Kehila Chadasha, Am Kolel Resource and Renewal Center, 2003); R. David Wolfe-Blank, *Meta Siddur: version 5.0, A Jewish Soul-Development Workbook*, (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, undated) www.aleph.org. This book is a compilation of written creative offerings, thoughts, meditations, and references to various aspects of the *siddur*. It strongly emphasizes the learning *davennen* and the mystical and hasidic perspectives and aligns them with certain aspects of buddhist thought as well as contemporary psychology.

⁶⁸⁵ *Siddur Tehillat Hashem, Nusach ha-Ari Zal* (annotated edition, Brooklyn: Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, 2003); *Siddur Sim Shalom* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, revised edition, 2003).

Service liturgies consist of seven consecutive, basic units: *birkhot hashachar* (morning blessings), *p'sukei d'zimrah* (verses of song), *shema* and its blessings (*kriyat shema*, the creed), *amidah* (petitions), silent prayer, Torah reading, and conclusion. The content of each of these units, and the specific prayers, can be somewhat fluid, although certain prayers tend to be found in all services. For example, all services include the *amidah*, which is largely petitionary on weekdays, but not on *shabbat* or festivals. As well, each unit has a purpose, as laid down by the rabbinic sages centuries ago.

The core of the liturgy is the *shema* and its blessings, the *amidah*, and the Torah reading. The *shema* and its blessings are essentially the Jewish credal statement, and largely about God. The *amidah* is a conversation with God. The Torah reading is an attempt to discover the divine will through scripture. The *shema* and *amidah* are recited every day; the Torah is read only on *shabbat*, festivals and Mondays and Thursdays (market days in antiquity, when the crowds were larger).⁶⁸⁶

To aid in achievement of focus and concentration (in light of the distractions of daily life), these units are preceded by the daily blessings and the verses of song, which serve as a warm-up component intended to create a sense of community. For the same reason, the *shema* is preceded by a call to prayer (*bar'khu*). Before the Torah reading, the silent prayer provides an opportunity to meditate and reflect.⁶⁸⁷ After the Torah reading, the closing prayers include the *kaddish* (sanctification), which praises God and focuses on the future and God's ultimate reign of justice, and the *aleinu*, a prayer of praise, declaration of faith and witnessing God. The *aleinu* was added in the 13th century, possibly inspired by the 12th century persecutions of Jews in western Europe. The *shema* and the *aleinu* had become the songs of the dying, chanted by Jewish martyrs.⁶⁸⁸ On *shabbat* and festivals, as well as the key holy days, the basic structure expands to include the *musaf* (additional) which is an entire additional service after the Torah reading, and

⁶⁸⁶ Lawrence Hoffman, *The Way Into Jewish Prayer* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2000), 20-26.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. Note that the *kaddish* has come to be associated with mourning, but does not actually deal with death.

⁶⁸⁸ Donin, *To Pray as a Jew*, 212-217.

follows the reading of the *haftarah* (a scriptural piece from the Prophets, usually complementing or somehow related to the theme of the weekly Torah reading), and various *piyyutim* and songs.

Spread throughout the service are blessings (*b'rakhot*), a key element of the liturgy. Short blessings are customarily recited before certain actions such as eating, performing a commandment, grace after meals, lighting shabbat candles. Other blessings, sometimes longer, may refer to admiration of nature, the wish for health of those who are ill, safe travel, or a host of daily or life-cycle events, as well as to specific theological themes. Traditional Jews rely on an official list of blessings compiled by the 10th century, although more liberal Jews compose new ones. All blessings begin or end with the words *Barukh attah Adonai* (Blessed are You, Lord). Traditionally, Jews were encouraged to recite blessings many times a day, whenever an opportunity arose to recognize the sacred, particularly within the ordinary. Blessings offer praise and thanks to God, and can transform an ordinary act into a sacred one.⁶⁸⁹

5.2.2 Structure of Jewish Renewal Siddurim and Liturgy

All the Jewish Renewal *siddurim* examined follow the same basic service structure as more traditional *siddurim*, and include many of the same prayers and songs, although the interpretations vary (I discuss this later). While there are references to the prayer leader or service leader, there are few references to the *chazzan* (cantor). Traditional *siddurim* contain several such references, as in traditional services the *chazzan* serves as the prayer leader for much of the service, as well as the leader of the singing, both communal and his own solo pieces. This lack of emphasis on the *chazzan* probably reflects Jewish Renewal's concern that religious officials not take over the service, but that it be owned by lay practitioners, as well as the limited finances with which most Jewish Renewal groups must contend.

⁶⁸⁹ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Way into Jewish Prayer* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2000), 135-151.

For key prayers, several interpretations are offered. There is a strong presence of English, with detailed translations of the Hebrew prayers as well as a large variety of meditative readings, poems, and other contemporary literature. Included in the liturgy are materials from Reconstructionist and Reform *siddurim*, as well as the more traditional, in some cases along with kabbalistic, Ladino, Yiddish, and Sufi offerings.⁶⁹⁰ All the *siddurim* feature compositions by various individuals associated with Jewish Renewal, as well as idiosyncratic translations of specific traditional prayers. This is in keeping with Renewal's emphasis on the arts, including literature and poetry, as a way to develop the imaginal.

At the same time, a number of the traditional prayers are abbreviated, although the overall theme is retained. The *musaf* service is not included in the Jewish Renewal *siddurim*, but an abbreviated version is offered in the *Rosh Hashanna* service of the *Kehila Makhzor*.⁶⁹¹ In general, the Jewish Renewal *siddurim* eliminate the repetitions associated with traditional liturgy, whether the *musaf* or specific prayers.⁶⁹² The Jewish Renewal *siddurim* also eliminate the prayers for the government and for the State of Israel, which are included in the Conservative *shabbat* service, but retain the prayer for

⁶⁹⁰ For example, Prager's *Siddur for Erev Shabbat* contains a short piece by the contemporary American Judy Chicago, on p.47, interjected into the *Aleinu* at the end of the service, later followed by a poem by the early 20th century Hebrew poet Chaim Bialik on p.53, then a Ladino song of praise, on p. 56, as well as a chant adapted from the *Zohar*, on p. 57. Her *Siddur for Shabbat Morning* features a Yiddish song on p. 84, an Arabic phrase interjected into the Ladino version of the traditional song *Ein K'eloheynu*, and the Pete Seeger version of the popular song *Turn, Turn, Turn*, which was an adaptation of *Kohelet* 3:1-8. Zaslow's *Ivdu* offers an English translation of a Sufi chant, p. 21.

⁶⁹¹ However, its place in the overall service is discussed in the *Meta Siddur* (p. 60.903)

⁶⁹² In this, Jewish Renewal *siddurim* are closer to Reform and Reconstructionist practice, and the editors acknowledge either their own past association with Reconstructionism, or that it is the source of some material included in the Jewish Renewal *siddur*. For a detailed comparison of several *siddurim* including the Jewish Renewal *Or Chadash*, from the Reconstructionist perspective, see Eric Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2002), 295-366.

the congregation. None of these prayers is included in the Chabad *siddur*.⁶⁹³ Although the Renewal *siddurim* examined do not contain detailed instructions for body movement, there are some references.

These structural deviations from more traditional services do not necessarily indicate a desire to shorten the service. Rather, they point to the four worlds approach that Jewish Renewal takes to worship and prayer.⁶⁹⁴ The Renewal *siddurim* all set this approach out clearly in their introductory comments. The service is seen as a movement up through the four worlds, a climbing of “Jacob’s ladder”⁶⁹⁵ and back down again, a journey of “body-heart-mind-soul”.⁶⁹⁶

The *Birchot hashachar* corresponds to *Asiyyah*, the world of the physical. The worshipper is enjoined to come awake and alive as a distinct being, acknowledge the body and its functioning, accept the multiplicity of the world and its connection to the Divine Source. With the *p’sukei d’zimrah*, verses of song, usually the psalms, one is taken into *yetsirah*, the world of feeling, myth, archetype, to connect with wonder and amazement, praise Creation and celebrate God as creator of the natural world. The *shema* and its blessings correspond to *bri’ah*, the world of creation and intellect, where the worshipper opens to the highest wisdom, comprehends his/her own mission, connects with holiness and dissolves self-limiting boundaries. As the *shema* is recited, God is accepted as both transcendent and immanent. From there one moves into *Atzilut*, the world of emanation, connecting with *Ein-Sof*. In reciting the *Amidah* and meditating quietly, the worshipper expresses personal needs with an understanding that he/she is a

⁶⁹³ This *siddur*, the *Tehillat Hashem*, amends the Hebrew and provides an English translation, but follows the traditional text by R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who founded Chabad at the end of the 18th century.

⁶⁹⁴ *Siddur Tehillat Hashem*, 352-3. Caplan, analysing the earlier Jewish Renewal *Or Chadash*, points out that Jewish Renewal services are not always shorter than those of the other liberal forms of Judaism, particularly if body movement is incorporated.

⁶⁹⁵ Prager, *A Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, iii.

⁶⁹⁶ Zaslów, *Ivdu Et Hashem B’Simcha*, 3.

vessel for the Divine energy.⁶⁹⁷ Next, the Torah service moves the worshipper back down into *br'iah* and then *yetsirah*, to reintegrate the individual self. The closing prayers, including the *kaddish* and *aleinu*, help the worshipper re-enter the physical world and attune to normal reality, while also holding onto an expanded consciousness.

The image of Jacob's ladder refers to the four letters of the tetragrammaton, *yud*, *heh*, *vav*, *heh*, with *yud* corresponding to *atzilut* (the top of the ladder) and the second *heh* corresponding to *assiyah* (the bottom of the ladder).⁶⁹⁸ This four worlds approach draws on the teachings of early hasidism, in which prayer was seen as a contemplative system whose goal was *deveikut*, and meditations of the Hebrew letters aided the ascent through the worlds. Chabad's approach to ascending through the four worlds is much more complicated and demanding, involving of the visualization of the various *sefirot* and the paths between them, and a resultant focus on all aspects of creation as emanations from the *Ein-Sof*. Chabad contemplation is associated more with the recitation of the *shema*, than with the *amidah*, as the *shema* is the heartfelt declaration of divine unity, and thus essentially the blessings and supplications that form the *amidah*.⁶⁹⁹

This four worlds approach is not unknown to the traditional perspective of Jewish prayer. Steinsaltz, using a metaphor that incorporates both the ladder and the physical structure of the Temple on its mount, with its steps and inner rooms, describes the structure of the services as a path of ascent and descent, entry and exit into the four worlds.⁷⁰⁰ The concept is not mentioned, however, in the *Siddur Sim Shalom*, where the introduction explains the structure of the service and links the components to their historical development rather than to the four worlds.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁷ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, 5.

⁶⁹⁸ Prager includes a diagrammatic presentation of this "ladder" approach, combining the tetragrammaton with the four worlds, in her introduction to the *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, iii. Wolfe-Blank also presents a ladder image in *Meta Siddur*, 18.

⁶⁹⁹ Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 70-92.

⁷⁰⁰ Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 84-103.

⁷⁰¹ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, vii-xiv.

For Jewish Renewal, the prayer service is clearly a vehicle for the mystical experience: “once we’ve learned that these four levels of our being (heart, mind, body, soul) correspond to the four letters of the Divine Name, then we can experience our prayers as audio-visual devices for merging our own isolated selves with the Divine Unity of All Selves”.⁷⁰² The prayers, often severely pruned from their traditional forms, are not intended to be said for the sake of completion; they are intended to assist the individual to have an intimate conversation and communication with the Divine. To this end, *kavannah*, intention or heartfelt focus, is important. The words of the prayer must be understood, spoken slowly enough to allow for that, and using language the individual comprehends. One Renewal siddur includes a set of *kavannot* to help the worshipper. These are short sayings or quotations from ancient Jewish sages, contemporary sages (such as Buber, Heschel and Schachter-Shalomi), or the Talmud, which deal with the nature of prayer and its various aspects.⁷⁰³

In Hebrew, *kavannah* can mean many things, including intention, attention, purpose, devotion, and concentration of thought during prayer or in the performance of *mitzvot*.⁷⁰⁴ Donin refers to different degrees of *kavannah*, and states that song in general, and *nusach* and cantillation specifically, are aids to achieving *kavannah*.⁷⁰⁵ Steinsaltz describes different levels of *kavannah* in traditional Judaism. At a basic level, it refers to simple comprehension of the prayer being recited. At the next level, the worshipper identifies with the prayers, and uses them as an expression of inward feeling and emotional experiences. This kind of identification includes a sense of cosmic connection to the Creator and the created world. For a select few who have prepared themselves well

⁷⁰² Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Smicha*, 3.

⁷⁰³ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 6-8.

⁷⁰⁴ Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 34, n. 22

⁷⁰⁵ Donin, *To Pray as a Jew*, 20-22. Note: cantillation refers to the specific “trop”, or musical notations, used to chant scripture--Torah is not actually read in a service, it is chanted by a Torah reader who can be a specialist, called a *baal koreh*, the rabbi or cantor, or a volunteer who has learned the trop.

through their personal being and actions, there is a higher or deeper kind of *kavannah* which is more complex and constitutes the mystical experience.⁷⁰⁶

It is interesting that Steinsaltz does not actually use the word mystical to describe the deepest level of *kavannah*, although that is clearly what his description implies. He points out that the talmudic sages held that heartfelt prayer delivered with *kavannah* was more worthy than the levels attained by those who used even the most sophisticated *kavannot*.⁷⁰⁷ This points to an interesting history of the meaning of *kavannah*. In talmudic times *kavannah* meant mainly awareness of the plain meaning of the words of prayer and an awareness of being in God's presence. Medieval thinkers such as Maimonides stressed the importance of the inwardness of prayer, and made greater demands on the worshipper to achieve *kavannah*. The Lurianic kabbalists thought in terms of *kavannot*, where the plain meanings of words were ignored in favour of concentration on combinations of the divine names which were hinted at by the plain words of the prayer. These divine names were linked to the *sefirot* and the balance among them. By focussing on these *sefirot*, the kabbalist was able to correct imbalances (*tikkun*) and promote the flow of divine grace through all worlds. Hasidism rejected this type of *kavannah*; instead, hasidism saw prayer with *kavannah* as referring to a powerful attachment to God (*devekut*), so that the hasidic ideal became contemplative prayer to break out of nature towards the spirit, and to achieve the sense of connection to God. Chabad saw *kavannah* not as contemplation on particular words or letters of prayers, but on the kabbalistic sefirotic scheme in general.⁷⁰⁸

The Jewish Renewal *siddur Ivdu* provides a set of *kavannot* in English, that deal with how and why to pray as well as the nature of prayer. In doing this, it is invoking the definition of *kavannah* as purpose, rather than as concentration during prayer. It implies an intellectual component (understanding) as a first step to contemplation and entering the mystical realm of prayer. Although use of the Lurianic term *kavannot* ties this to earlier mystical tradition, there has been a subtle refocusing to emphasize the effort, in

⁷⁰⁶ Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 34-38.

⁷⁰⁷ Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 38.

⁷⁰⁸ Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 167-182; *Hasidic Prayer*, 70-92.

this case intellectual, that is needed for proper prayer. There is a concomitant subtle emphasis on the drive to become an adept, which speaks to the path of personal development, and perhaps even hints at an elitism. Reference is made to an image of the prayerbook as both ladder and Temple - as the individual enters more deeply, there is an inner change to a more complicated being. *Davennen* is described as joyous, profound, misunderstood, but requiring practice, with perfection only as acceptance of ultimate imperfection.⁷⁰⁹ In addition, Jewish Renewal holds that *davennen* must be learned with a teacher, and supplemented with specific teachings from hasidic and kabbalistic writings, tales and stories about the techniques of masters, *niggun* (melodies, where *davennen* is said to be hidden within the tunes), and *nusach*, where the mode of prayer or respected davenners can help an individual who is struggling to learn.⁷¹⁰ *Davennen*, then, is definitely an acquired skill not readily mastered.

It is clear that the structure of Jewish Renewal liturgy aligns with the theology's emphasis on the mystical, as well as the path of personal development and self-improvement through prayer and the art of *davennen*. At the same time, the services are clearly intended to be communal, as is traditional Jewish liturgy. *Davennen* is also seen as a path to building community through development of consciousness.⁷¹¹ Jewish Renewal encourages working in dyads or small groups during parts of the service, with one person chanting a line of prayer or hymn and another chanting the next line.⁷¹² This type of prayer is intended to aid individuals to access the Divine by first accessing it in each other, a reflection of Buber's I-Thou perspective.⁷¹³

⁷⁰⁹ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 2-3.

⁷¹⁰ David Wolf-Blank, *Meta Siddur*, 14.1.

⁷¹¹ Wolf-Blank, *Meta Siddur*, 6

⁷¹² For example, see Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 81, and 84. In addition, at a *Kabbalat Shabbat* service that I attended in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, July, 2005, we were encouraged at one point in the service to turn to the person next to us and chant a line, then wait for the person to chant the next line in response.

⁷¹³ Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy*, 354-355.

In my view, the liturgical structure points to a curious tension in Jewish Renewal's approach to prayer, which is on the one hand democratic, communal, inclusive and accessible, yet on the other oddly elitist and exclusive in its focus on the importance of the art of *davennen* to achieve the mystical state of the spiritual adept. This focus on spiritual development and the non-rational approach reflects the Jewish Renewal ethos. In the *Ivdu*, Schachter-Shalomi is quoted as encouraging worshippers to use the prayer services for personal spiritual development, and to understand that the *siddur* is not a book of information, but rather a guide "for offering the heart's feelings to God ... you have to see the siddur in an entirely different way ... like a colouring book with outlines. People have to fill it in with life, background and context".⁷¹⁴ Following this approach, the *siddurim* all emphasize creativity, whether by offering several interpretations of traditional prayers, by including creative contemporary writings, by suggesting different ways to pray, by including musical instruments.⁷¹⁵

I turn now to the content of the liturgy, to examine the extent to which it, too, creatively reflects Jewish Renewal's theology.

⁷¹⁴ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 6.

⁷¹⁵ It would be interesting to study the effect of this high degree of creativity. My personal experience suggests mixed reaction. At the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service which I attended, there was a wonderful, joyous feeling in the room, as some 500 people enthusiastically sang throughout the service, lines of people holding hands snaked through the crowd, and tambourines were shaken and bongo drums beaten. Despite that, the guitar-accompanied solo performances of rather pedestrian individual compositions, the very limited amount of Hebrew in the prayers, and the radical abbreviation of many of the key traditional prayers all left me with a feeling of emptiness and dissatisfaction at the end of the service. My sense of having just been part of a summer camp sing-along, rather than a *Kabbalat Shabbat* worship service, was exacerbated by the apparent Jewish Renewal tradition of wearing white at the service, a normal part of Jewish summer camp experience. Despite the sometimes stifling decorum of the more traditional Conservative service, I find it on the whole much more moving, beautiful, reflective and mystical.

5.2.3 The Content of Jewish Renewal Liturgy

In Chapter 2, I described three clusters of terms which together described the foundational themes in Jewish theology: God/Torah/*Israel*, Creation/Revelation/Redemption, and *Avodah /gemillut chasadim /Torah study*. As discussed in that chapter, these clusters, as Schachter-Shalomi pointed out, correspond to the force in the universe/its function or action/humanity's response. Thus, if the clusters are grouped differently, they underscore the fact that each of the key themes in Jewish theology has several dimensions: God/Creation/*Avodah*; Torah/Revelation/*gemillut chasadim*; and *Israel*/Redemption/Torah study. In this section I will look at the general treatment of these themes in the Jewish Renewal *siddurim*, across a range of prayers, and then examine the specific treatment of two key prayers: the *shema* and the *amidah*, as these are traditionally considered obligatory, to be recited daily, whether in congregation or individually. For purposes of comparison I will refer to the formulations found in the Conservative *Siddur Sim Shalom*, which still adheres to the traditional service and prayers. Unlike the *Tehillat Hashem*, however, it is somewhat liberal in that it attempts to be gender-sensitive (although not gender-neutral) and to reflect the more egalitarian attitudes of contemporary society in its translations, particularly with respect to the masculine imagery traditionally used for God.⁷¹⁶

5.2.3.1 God/Creation/*Avodah*

The Jewish Renewal *siddurim* attempt to be gender-neutral. Like the *Siddur Sim Shalom*, they rarely include in the English translations any evocative terms for God, such as King, Ruler, Lord. The term *adonai*, often translated "Lord", was actually a substitute centuries ago for the tetragrammaton, the unpronounceable name of God. Current Jewish

⁷¹⁶ Aviva Goldberg has examined Jewish Renewal's liturgy, ritual and theology in her analysis of the movement's feminist assertions. For a feminist discussion of the liturgy, see Chapter 2 of her doctoral thesis: *Re-Awakening Deborah: Locating the Feminist in the Liturgy, Ritual and Theology of Contemporary Jewish Renewal* (Toronto: York University, 2002).

scholars and translators consider it merely a name, not a title, and do not translate it, but retain the untranslated term in English translations.⁷¹⁷ For example, in the

Conservative *siddur*, “Sing to Adonai, you righteous” is given as the opening line of Psalm 33, one of the *p’sukei d’zimra*.⁷¹⁸ Jewish Renewal *siddurim* occasionally retain the untranslated term *adonai*, and one translation even uses the English word “lord”.⁷¹⁹ More common, however, is the substitution of the term “Yah”. For example, *kol adonai* is translated “the voice of Yah”.⁷²⁰ The appellation *Yah* is taken from the psalms, where it appears frequently; it is considered a gender-neutral reference to the tetragrammaton, as it contains the first two letters. Hoffman points to a rabbinic *midrash* on Psalms which associates these two letters with the divine requirement to care for society’s poor and disinherited, suggesting the universe will remain intact only if it is governed justly.⁷²¹ Thus the Jewish Renewal use of *Yah* also speaks to its concern with social justice.

In addition, in the way *Yah* is pronounced, it suggests a link between the name of God and breath.⁷²² Breath is a motif that runs through Jewish Renewal writings, and is often associated with meditation techniques.⁷²³ It is a key symbol of life and the unity of all in the Jewish Renewal *siddurim*. For example, traditionally, the closing of the *p’sukei d’zimra* includes *nishmat*, a prayer that is intended to provide a transition from the more personal intimacy of the psalms to the more formal public worship. The Conservative translation opens with a reference to breath: “The breath of all that lives praises You,

⁷¹⁷ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, xxviii; see also Everett Fox, “Translator’s Preface”, pp. ix-xxvi in *The Five Books of Moses, vol. 1, the Schocken Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1995).

⁷¹⁸ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 93.

⁷¹⁹ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B’Simcha*, psalm 23, 165.

⁷²⁰ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, psalm 29, 14.

⁷²¹ Lawrence A. Hoffman (ed.), *The Sh’ma and Its Blessings* (vol. 1 of *Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*) (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 1997), 38.

⁷²² Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, Introduction, p. 6.

⁷²³ For a feminist perspective, see Aviva Goldberg, *Awakening Deborah*, Chapter 2, Section B, Part 4: Transcendent/numinous.

Adonai our God”; it then continues with words of praise for God as transcendent, loving rescuer and redeemer, ruler, guide and creator, but no other references to breath.⁷²⁴ The Jewish Renewal version offered in *Ivdu* features a translation by Schachter-Shalomi that is generally consistent with the theme of the Conservative translation, starting with the opening line, “All breathing life adores Your Name”. Yet the specific wording of the translation emphasizes both the idea of breath and breathing, and the immanence of God, using phrases such as: “You ultimate cause and ultimate effect, Source of all Creation, you manifest in all birthing” and “Yahhh! breathes my soul out to You; all my inners pulse with You! Potent God Force!”.⁷²⁵ In addition to this creative translation, the *Ivdu* features three other English selections which emphasize breath. One, by Arthur Waskow, is a highly condensed version of the traditional *nishmat*, which opens with “You whose very Name, YyyyHyyyWwwwHhhh, Is the Breath of Life”, refers to breath and breathing in nine of its twenty-two lines.⁷²⁶ Toward the end of the prayer, there is a reference to trees, which are not mentioned in the traditional version:

“You are the breathing that gives life to all the worlds.

And we do the breathing that gives life to all the worlds.

As we breathe out what the trees breathe in,

And the trees breathe out what we breathe in,

So we breathe each other into life,

We and You. YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh.”⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 104.

⁷²⁵ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 60-61.

⁷²⁶ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 63.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.* Note that the same two translations of *nishmat*, by Waskow and by Schachter-Shalomi, are featured in Prager's *A Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 12-14.

These few lines sum up the pantheistic Jewish Renewal view of God as the continuous creative process in the universe that is the source of all, and its view of humanity as a partner in creation.

Another example can be found in the Jewish Renewal prayers associated with the Torah reading portion of the service. The reading is traditionally preceded by a song as the Torah is carried around the room. The Conservative *siddur* translates the first few lines of this song (*l'kha Adonai*) as: “Yours, Adonai, is the greatness, the power and the splendor. Yours is the triumph and the majesty, for all in heaven and on earth is Yours”.⁷²⁸ In contrast, the Jewish Renewal *Kol Koreh* renders this: “Yours, Wholly One, is greatness and power, beauty, triumph and splendor! For everything in heaven and on earth is one with you.”⁷²⁹ With a subtle change in translation, the *Kol Koreh* shifts the emphasis from God’s possession, and complete otherness, to God’s unity with the world.

Elsewhere, the translation changes are less subtle. For example, the opening line of one of the blessings after the reading of the *haftarah* is traditionally translated as: “Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, Rock of all ages, righteous in all generations, steadfast God whose word is deed whose decree is fulfillment, whose every teaching is truth and righteousness.”⁷³⁰ A Jewish Renewal rendering is: “A Fountain of Blessings are You, Our God and Guide, pouring creation-energy into the unfolding universe”.⁷³¹

5.2.3.2 Torah/Revelation/*gemillut chasadim*

The Torah reading section of the service traditionally highlights God’s giving of Torah as revelation, and links it with the chosenness of the Jewish people. Before the reading, a blessing is recited, which is traditionally translated as: “Praised are You,

⁷²⁸ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 141.

⁷²⁹ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, V. Torah Service & Closing Prayers for Shabbat Morning, 4.

⁷³⁰ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 147.

⁷³¹ Prager, *A Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 52.

Adonai our God, who rules the universe, choosing us from among all peoples by giving us the Torah. Praised are You Adonai, who give the Torah!”⁷³² The *Kol Koreh* generally follows this translation; the *Ivdu* provides an option in Hebrew and English, to say “You have chosen (with all, or from all) peoples and gives us Torah”.⁷³³ Prager’s *A Siddur for Shabbat Morning* points out the sensitivity of the idea of chosenness and provides several options in Hebrew and English, including the traditional wording, “... who has chosen us from among all the Peoples”; a wording which emphasizes inclusivity, “who has chosen us along with all the Peoples”; a more neutral and transformed wording to emphasize praise, “who has chosen us with love and desire”; and a wording taken from Reconstructionist liturgy which eliminates any reference to chosenness: “who has drawn us close to Your service”.⁷³⁴

After the Torah reading is complete, the Torah scroll is raised up for the congregation to see and the Priestly blessing given (*v'zot ha torah*): “This is the Torah that Moses set before the people Israel: The Torah, given by God, through Moses”.⁷³⁵ All three Jewish Renewal *siddurim* use a similar translation, clearly recognising the revelation of Torah to the people Israel through Moses, but not written by him.⁷³⁶

The Torah reading follows an annual cycle and specific sections (a *parasha*) are read each *shabbat*, successively. Traditionally an individual or couple (husband and wife, parent and child) who is chosen to be honoured (for example, to celebrate an event, to recognize a contribution of some sort, to commemorate the anniversary of the death of a loved one) is called to recite the blessing before the reading, and the actual reading is

⁷³² *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 142.

⁷³³ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, V: Torah Service & Closing Prayers for Shabbat Morning, 6; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 117.

⁷³⁴ Prager, *A Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 48-49.

⁷³⁵ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 146.

⁷³⁶ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, V: Torah Service & Closing Prayers for Shabbat Morning, 13; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 119; Prager, *A Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 53. Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy*, notes on page 361 that the earlier Jewish Renewal *siddur*, *Or Chadash*, eliminated the reference to Moses.

done by the Torah reader, either a professional (*baal koreh*) or a volunteer who has prepared the reading in advance. The entire *parasha* is read during the service. Caplan says that the earlier Jewish Renewal *Or Chaddash* suggested that the Torah reading be personalized by having the Torah reader scan the portion for specific themes and read only those passages; also those called up should include all participants for whom the theme has special relevance.⁷³⁷ None of the Jewish Renewal *siddurim* examined contain such a suggestion, but all contain a reference to individuals or groups being called up to the Torah reading.⁷³⁸ The *Ivdu* also includes a quotation from Schachter-Shalomi, urging individuals to relate to the Torah reading in a personal way:

“Do you know the difference between a restaurant and a hospital? In a restaurant, there is one menu, and everybody eats the same food. In a hospital, everybody gets different medicine made especially for them. Torah is the same. God makes it special, just for you!”⁷³⁹

The *Siddur Kol Koreh* is intended to be coordinated with the *Meta Siddur*, which serves as a resource for those wishing to think more deeply about the liturgy.⁷⁴⁰ In the section on the Torah service, the *Meta Siddur* provides a Jungian interpretation of the ten commandments. This interpretation stresses self-development. For example, the third commandment is rendered: “Exodus 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain/ Do not act, speak or claim about yourself that you are in harmony with the Self, operating out of wholeness. This is a dangerous disregard for the reality of the shadow”; the sixth

⁷³⁷ Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy*, 360-361.

⁷³⁸ Prager, *A Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 48; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 117; Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh V: Torah Service & Closing Prayers for Shabbat Morning*, 6.

⁷³⁹ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 118.

⁷⁴⁰ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, Introduction, 3.

commandment is rendered: “Exodus, 20:13 Thou shalt not kill/ Do not repress yourself overmuch, this is self-killing; do not deny the right of one of your psychic contents to exist in your consciousness.”⁷⁴¹

The liturgy then, does seem to place less emphasis on the reading of the Torah as a collective educational and moral discussion, and more on individual grappling with its messages as well as its potential to aid in personal growth and psychological healing. Judaism traditionally promotes Torah as a source of wisdom and encourages its study, as discussed in Chapter 2. The *Meta Siddur* provides a table of the weekly *parshiyot* (readings) and links them to specific *sefirot* to which are assigned the various qualities of expanding, contracting, persevering, purifying, intimacy and grounding, all terms that refer to personal growth. It provides a set of questions “towards a healing- directed, faith based Torah study”, as well as a set of guidelines for hasidic-style Torah study. It stresses: the need to sacralize the study, seeing each snippet of phrasing as a hologram, a world unto itself; the need to assume that every element has a personalized message relevant to the individual’s life at any point in time; and the need to regard certain descriptions as metaphors for personal growth, such as interpreting any mention of capital punishment or death as a “quantum drop in awareness, a regression to a more primal energy state from which to begin anew”.⁷⁴²

5.2.3.3 *Israel/Redemption*

A variety of songs can be used to close the service. One of these (*ein keloheinu*) is a song of praise to God as Sovereign and Deliverer.⁷⁴³ The Jewish Renewal treatment of this idea of deliverance varies. The *Siddur Kol Koreh* translation refers to God as “our

⁷⁴¹ Wolfe-Blank, *Meta Siddur*, 124-125.

⁷⁴² Wolfe-Blank, *Meta Siddur*, 122-123.

⁷⁴³ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 182. Note that in Hebrew prayers, songs and chants are usually known by their opening words, as *ein keloheinu* (there is none like our God) are the opening words of this particular prayer.

sovereign, our redeemer”.⁷⁴⁴ The *Ivdu* does not include the song. And the *Siddur for Shabbat Morning* refers to “our Saving Power”.⁷⁴⁵

Another, ancient, closing prayer, the *aleinu*, expresses Judaism’s universalist hope that someday all of humanity will worship God. The first part of the prayer stresses the unique destiny of the people *Israel* to worship the awesome God who is creator and sovereign. The second part expresses hope for the future, that eventually all people will recognize God’s sovereignty, and that God will perfect the world. It is included in all the Renewal *siddurim*, each of which modifies either the structure or the interpretation to interpret the first part to downplay the uniqueness of the people *Israel*, and the second to emphasize the hope for a just and harmonious future for all of humanity.⁷⁴⁶

However, it is the *aleinu* featured as part of the High Holyday services that is most telling in its emphasis on the universality of redemption.⁷⁴⁷ The Hebrew of the first part is shortened to omit any reference to *Israel’s* lot or to other peoples. God is referred to as the greatest of rulers, but also as the “Artist within Creation”. The Hebrew of the second part is radically shortened to diminish references to God’s sovereignty and the hope that it will perfect the world, as well as the need for all humanity to accept God. The translation is adjusted to emphasize hope that “there will come a time when greed and injustice will be gone from the earth. We hope for a world completely repaired, all the inhabitants of this planet turning to each other, in reconciliation, understanding that no one shall be excluded from the security of life”.⁷⁴⁸ In addition, the last sentence is translated to emphasize not the unity of God, as in the traditional version, but the unity of humanity: “on that day all peoples will realize their unity”.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁴ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, V: Torah Service & Closing Prayers for Shabbat Morning, 17.

⁷⁴⁵ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 59.

⁷⁴⁶ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 56-57; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B’Simcha*, 21-23; Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, 19-24.

⁷⁴⁷ Sheneyer, *New Kehilla Makhzor*, 85.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

The *Kehilla Makhzor* also relates redemption to personal growth, which it characterizes as personal liberation. In the section on prayers to be said during the sounding of the *shofar* (horn) on *Rosh HaShannah*, various contemporary readings in English and Hebrew, dealing with peace, and liberation for nations, are provided. Included in these readings is a quotation attributed to Martin Buber that speaks to personal growth as well as national growth:

“A person cannot find redemption until that person sees the flaws of the soul and tries to efface them. Nor can a people be redeemed until it sees the flaws in its soul.....whoever shuts out the realization of those flaws is shutting out redemption. We can be redeemed only to the extent to which we see ourselves.”⁷⁵⁰

This quotation resonates with the view expressed by Schachter-Shalomi that the Jewish people needs to recognize its shadow in order to heal after the Holocaust. It also unites the Jewish Renewal themes of personal growth and redemption of humanity.

I turn now to examine the Jewish Renewal treatment of the two key prayers of the liturgy.⁷⁵¹

5.3 The *Shema* and Its Blessings

According to Jewish tradition, the *Shema* is not only recited during services, it is also recited at bedtime. It is thus both a personal and communal prayer. Traditionally,

⁷⁵⁰ Sheneyer, *New Kehilla Makhzor*, 80.

⁷⁵¹ I will restrict my analysis to the plain meaning of the words, rather than explore the mystical interpretations, which is outside the scope of this work. For discussions of various interpretations of these two prayers, including the mystical, see Lawrence Hoffman (ed.), *Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, vol.1: *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, and vol.2: *The Amidah* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 1997 and 1998 respectively).

even the obligatory prayers recited alone are said at fixed times relating to the diurnal cycle, recalling the set times of the Temple sacrifices. The setting of fixed times also creates a sense of unity and community, because even while praying alone, the individual is aware of other Jews praying the same prayers at the same time. While the exact formulations of the bedtime *Shema* may vary with the individual, it includes the essential components of the prayer said in services.⁷⁵²

The core of the *Shema* was recited during Temple times. Today, the *Shema* consists of three units: the biblical citations that make up the *Shema* itself (Deut. 6:4-9, Deut. 11:13-21, and Num. 14:37-41), the call to prayer which precedes it (*bar'khu*), and the three blessings that surround it (*brakhot*). The entire structure is called *k'riat sh'ma*.

The call to prayer is: *Bar'khu et Adonai ha-m'vorach*, recited by the prayer leader. In liberal liturgy it is translated as either "Praise Adonai, the Exalted One"⁷⁵³ or "Bless Adonai who is to be blessed".⁷⁵⁴ These two translations point to a tension associated with the idea of blessing God--the inappropriateness of humans blessing God, who is the source of all blessings. The tension is resolved in the translation of *bar'khu* as "praise". Where it has traditionally be translated as "blessing", it is understood to refer to a familial concept of God as father or as an acknowledgement of humanity's creatureliness before the Creator.⁷⁵⁵

Jewish Renewal liturgy reflects this theological tension. The *Siddur Kol Koreh* follows the Conservative translation as praise.⁷⁵⁶ The *Ivdu* translates the Hebrew as "we bless the Source of Blessing who is to be blessed", or "Bless the Source of Being who is always blessing us", thus clearly shifting the emphasis to human agency.⁷⁵⁷ *The Siddur for Shabbat Morning* takes an intermediate position, not translating the *bark'khu*, but

⁷⁵² Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, 18-19.

⁷⁵³ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 107.

⁷⁵⁴ Hoffman, *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, 29.

⁷⁵⁵ Hoffman, *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, 29-33.

⁷⁵⁶ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, III: Shacharit for Shabbat, 16.

⁷⁵⁷ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 66-67.

offering prior quotes from contemporary thinkers who translate it as “As we bless the Source of Life so we are blessed”.⁷⁵⁸ Traditionally this call to prayer is followed by a doxology, a congregational prayer which blesses and praises the supremacy and eternity of God. The Jewish Renewal *siddurim* do not include this doxology.

The call to prayer is followed by two separate blessings. The first, *yotser or* (maker of light), is a blessing for creation and focuses on light. Although wordings vary, it refers to the vastness and grandeur of creation, acknowledges that God makes both light and darkness, orders the universe and brings peace, and renews creation daily.⁷⁵⁹ The Jewish Renewal *siddurim* offer several poetic, and shorter versions, which all follow the same general themes and pattern of praise, although the *Siddur for Shabbat Morning* inserts words to emphasize healing and continuous creation: “to the Source of all Healing, who with goodness makes creation anew again at every moment”.⁷⁶⁰ The Renewal *siddurim* also tend to emphasize the image of light and illumination, reflecting a more kabbalistic perspective which associated illumination with inner growth.⁷⁶¹

The second blessing, *birhkat haTorah*, or *ahavah rabbah* (great love), focuses on revelation, praising God for loving humanity and giving the gift of Torah and acknowledging *Israel's* calling to proclaim the unity of God.⁷⁶² Dorff points out that this signals the transition from focus in the first blessing on a God concerned with the universal to focus in the second blessing on a God who cares especially for a particular

⁷⁵⁸ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 17.

⁷⁵⁹ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 107-108. Hoffman, *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, 41-42. Hoffman notes on p. 50 that this ancient blessing attributes both light and darkness to God, reflecting the philosophical preoccupation in late antiquity--where the universe was seen in terms of light and darkness, good and bad, spirit and matter. In contrast to some among the surrounding peoples who attributed light/good with an all powerful deity and dark/bad with a lesser power, the Jewish sages attributed both to the one God.

⁷⁶⁰ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 21.

⁷⁶¹ Hoffman, *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, 52.

⁷⁶² *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 111; Hoffman, *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, 67-68.

people, that is, a transition from a transcendent to an immanent God.⁷⁶³ At the same time, the specific reference to chosenness (“you have chosen us from among all peoples”) in the blessing has troubled both traditional and contemporary liberal liturgy. It has generally been interpreted as referring to being chosen for a duty, rather than as a superior people. Some liberal *siddurim* have chosen to eliminate this phrase from the blessing, others include it in recognition of the emotional attachment of the Jewish people to the prayer.⁷⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that all the Renewal *siddurim* include the phrase in their translations, even the *Siddur for Shabbat Morning* which has radically shortened the Hebrew version of the blessing, and incorporated an English poem that stresses God’s unending love.⁷⁶⁵

The *Shema* itself is a declaration: “*Sh’ma yisrael, adonai eloheinu, adonai echad*” (Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai alone; also sometimes translated as Adonai is One).⁷⁶⁶ This and the following two verses from the Bible were considered by the ancient rabbis to articulate the core of the Jewish faith. The first paragraph proclaims the sovereignty of God, the second the duty to obey the commandments. The third paragraph, which deals with the need to put tassels or fringes (*tzitzit*) on clothing as a constant reminder of the supremacy of God and the importance of the commandments, establishes the “educational system by which we are to remember these assertions of faith and these demands of action”.⁷⁶⁷ The Jewish Renewal *siddurim* all include the three readings, but offer a range of interpretations that reflect the traditional themes but some also emphasize the pantheistic monism of Jewish Renewal, or the ecological importance of keeping the commandments. They also use more contemporary and informal language. For example, the translation by Schachter-Shalomi, offered in two *siddurim*, interprets the first reading as: “Listen, you Yisrael person, *Yah* who Is, is our God. *Yah* who Is, is one, Unique, All

⁷⁶³ Elliot Dorf, “Commentary” in Hoffman, *The Sh’ma and Its Blessings*, 71-72.

⁷⁶⁴ Hoffman, *The Sh’ma and Its Blessings*, 76-82.

⁷⁶⁵ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 222-3.

⁷⁶⁶ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 112.

⁷⁶⁷ Dorff, in Hoffman, *The Sh’ma and Its Blessings*, 89.

there is.”⁷⁶⁸ This is in keeping with the radical monism of the founder of Chabad who maintained that nothing exists but God.⁷⁶⁹ The *Siddur Kol Koreh* offers several interpretations of the three biblical passages, none of them Schachter-Shalomi’s. Its translation of the opening line of *shema* is essentially the Conservative version.⁷⁷⁰ In his interpretation of the second paragraph of the *shema*, which focuses on reward and punishment, Schachter-Shalomi emphasizes the ecological: “Be careful-watch out! ... Don’t let your cravings become your Gods ... Earth will not produce ... And Earth will not be able to recover her good balance ... ”⁷⁷¹

The *shema* ends with *g’ullah*, the blessing on redemption. It refers to the truth of God’s teachings for every generation, and to God’s willingness to redeem every generation just as the ancestors were redeemed from bondage in Egypt. It also refers to the destruction of *Israel*’s enemies.⁷⁷² The Jewish Renewal *siddurim* all revise this prayer, shortening it and also emphasizing the truth of God’s teachings for all generations, and either eliminating the references to *Israel*’s enemies or the reference to their being killed by God.⁷⁷³

Arthur Green is a postmodern Jewish theologian and historian of mysticism who has produced several works which express the attempt by contemporary Jews to grapple with the understanding of the divine and its presence in the world, in language which is

⁷⁶⁸ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 27; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B’Simcha*, 74-75.

⁷⁶⁹ Lawrence Kushner and Nehemia Polen, in Hoffman, *The Sh’ma and Its Blessings*, 939-4. Note that the current Chabad *siddur*, *Tehillat HaShem*, translates the line as “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One”, 207.

⁷⁷⁰ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, 35.

⁷⁷¹ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 272-8.

⁷⁷² *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 113-114.

⁷⁷³ In this they reflect the Reform and Reconstructionist *siddurim*. See David Ellenson’s various comments on this and other similarities in Hoffman, *The Sh’ma and Its blessings*. As Caplan points out, Jewish Renewal liturgy has borrowed significantly from both Reform and Reconstructionist. See *From Ideology to Liturgy*, 346-366.

authentic for today.⁷⁷⁴ He refers to the calling out of *Shema Yisrael* as “the act for which the term kavannah, or inner direction, seems to have been made.”⁷⁷⁵ He portrays the *Shema* as an invitation to the worshipper to meditate on the concept of unity. He suggests that the *Shema* embraces two kinds of unity-- that of the one that is, as though there were no many, and that of infinity as One-in-many. These represent the One beyond, and the One within us. He points out that it is difficult for those who live in a western culture to hold in tension these two truths, which have a dialectical relation to each other, in the realization that the One beyond and the One within are the same One. The *Shema* charges Jews “to create a human community that lives and witnesses an ongoing response to that insight. This is what it means to be a Jew. Nothing less.”⁷⁷⁶ Western thinking accepts individual self-consciousness as the essential reality. The challenge, then, is to understand and live with this truth and accept a Oneness in which each human is but a part of a greater whole, yet function in a culture which values individuality. In my view, the Jewish Renewal reworkings of the *Shema* reflect this postmodern struggle of understanding the concept of unity within diversity.

5.4 The *Amidah*

The *amidah* is a collection of nineteen blessings, in a specific order, which, taken as a whole, speak to the theme of redemption. Its origin is unclear, but it has existed in substantially the current form since the second century.⁷⁷⁷ The middle blessings are petitionary, although still speaking to the theme of redemption, and are excluded on

⁷⁷⁴ See, for example, his *Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2003), and his *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2000).

⁷⁷⁵ Green, *Seek My Face*, 3-7.

⁷⁷⁶ Green, *Seek My Face*, 5.

⁷⁷⁷ Hoffman, *The Amidah*, 33. For his fascinating and highly accessible history of the scholastic detective work that has gone into uncovering the origins of the *amidah*, and why there are nineteen blessings in a prayer named for eighteen (*shemoneh esrei*) see 17-36.

shabbat. The first three blessings praise God's covenant with the ancestors (*avot*), God's power (*g'vurot*) and God's holiness (*k'dushat hashem*).⁷⁷⁸ Jewish Renewal *siddurim* offer several versions of these blessings. In general, the pattern of change is to modify the traditional wording of the first blessing to include the matriarchs among the ancestors, and the traditional wording of the second to eliminate references to reviving the dead, inserting instead references to sustaining life, although each of the *siddurim* retains some reference to giving life to the dead.⁷⁷⁹

On *shabbat*, the fourth blessing thanks God for the rest day of *shabbat* and offers it as a prayer.⁷⁸⁰ The multiple versions offered in the Jewish Renewal *siddurim* modify the wording of this blessing to portray *Israel* as transmitters of *shabbat*, rather than its sole possessors. The *Ivdu* practically eliminates it, retaining only one line of blessing for *shabbat*.⁷⁸¹

On weekdays, the fourth blessing asks for knowledge and wisdom. The *Ivdu* is the only siddur to offer the weekday *amidah* blessings. It follows the traditional themes for each of those petitionary blessings: repentance, forgiveness, redemption, healing, prosperity, ingathering of *Israel* from exile, justice, divine retribution, reward of the righteous, rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the coming of the messiah.⁷⁸²

The last three blessings ask God to find favour with the worship offered and to restore the Divine Presence (*shekhinah*) to Zion, thank God for sustaining faith, and ask God to grant universal peace so that all the other blessings might be enjoyed.⁷⁸³ The

⁷⁷⁸ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 115-117.

⁷⁷⁹ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 31-32; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hasem B'Simcha*, 87-88, Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, IV: Amidah for Shabbat Morning, 11-12.

⁷⁸⁰ Siegel, *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 117.

⁷⁸¹ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, IV: Amidah for Shabbat Morning, 17-24; Prager, *Siddur For Shabbat Morning*, 33-34; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 90.

⁷⁸² Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 101-105.

⁷⁸³ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 118-120.

Renewal *siddurim* follow this pattern while shortening the blessings and adjusting the interpretation to stress the universality of the need for peace.⁷⁸⁴

The *amidah* closes with a private meditation. Alternative prayers are suggested, focussing on refraining from speaking evil, being humble, being open to Torah, and asking for peace for all, but a more personal version can be substituted.⁷⁸⁵ The Renewal *siddurim* also follow this pattern.

Although all the *siddurim* follow the traditional pattern of the *amidah*, there is a strong emphasis on the meditative aspects of this section of the service. The *Ivdu* offers an alternative *amidah* for weekdays that focuses on “visualization and theme *davvenen (sic)*”.⁷⁸⁶ Each blessing is radically shortened, but the themes are retained. The worshipper is advised that the nineteen blessings of the *amidah* correspond to the vertebrae and carry divine energy through the spinal column in order to energize the body. For each blessing, an image and instructions are provided in English to aid the worshipper in internalizing the message of the blessing. The *Siddur for Shabbat Morning* offers two alternatives. One is the (*shabbat*) *amidah* in guided imagery, where, like the *Ivdu*, the blessing is radically shortened and an accompanying meditative image provided.⁷⁸⁷ The other is an “*Amidah* for English *davvenen* (chanting) (*sic*)”, which features the same radically shortened blessings, but also provides for each an additional blessing in English that expands on the specific theme.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁴ Siegel, *Siddur Kol Koreh*, IV: *Amidah* for Shabbat Morning, 25-34; Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 91-94; Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 34-35.

⁷⁸⁵ *Siddur Sim Shalom*, 120.

⁷⁸⁶ Zaslow, *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, 110-113.

⁷⁸⁷ Prager, *Siddur For Shabbat Morning*, 36-40.

⁷⁸⁸ Prager, *Siddur for Shabbat Morning*, 40-43.

5.5 Reflecting the Reconstructed Theology

Taken as a whole, the liturgy of Jewish Renewal reflects the long tradition of the development of Jewish liturgy. It echoes developments in other liberal Jewish liturgies in the late 20th century, and has somewhat revised the content and the structure of the liturgy, to maintain the links to tradition yet take into account the spirit of the time by demonstrating sensitivity to issues of gender and universality. By incorporating the approach of early hasidism, it echoes developments in late medieval Judaism, where some groups emphasize a return to prayer as a transcendental experience, and stressed the intensity of individual devotion. At the same time, it reflects the trends in liberal Jewish liturgies of the late 20th century.

The liturgy reflects key aspects of Jewish Renewal's reconstructed theology. Although the form and thematic content of the traditional liturgy is retained, the specific interpretations and translations portray an immanent God and continuous creation of a cosmos in which all humanity is an agent of reparation and ultimate redemption. Through selected changes in structure of the service, the *siddurim*, and some individual prayers, there is a subtle shift of emphasis in the services from the traditional focus on community and Torah reading to a more personalized concern with engagement and meditation.

Becoming a suitable agent, a spiritual adept, requires individuals to address their personal and spiritual growth, for which Torah reading and the prayers are valuable tools, to aid the worshipper both to draw on tradition and to forge new personal meaning. Engagement with the elements of the service and the individual prayers is strongly emphasized, through accessible translations and widespread transliterations of the Hebrew. As well there is borrowing of already familiar contemporary approaches from other liberal Jewish liturgies, particularly Reconstructionist. An emphasis on imagery of nature rather than the traditional royal imagery and changes to the Hebrew as needed to be inclusive and gender neutral make the liturgy appealing to contemporary sensibilities and reflect its theology. The clear emphasis on the work-in-progress nature of the liturgy, with encouragement to adapt and customize the service and prayers to be personally meaningful and meditatively helpful, extends to the inclusion of techniques such as

chanting, attention to breathing, and small group work as well as contemporary poetry and readings.

It is clear that Jewish Renewal's liturgy struggles to find a contemporarily meaningful expression for worshippers who are "awakening to the presence of God", as Abraham Joshua Heschel characterized the role of prayer.⁷⁸⁹ For Heschel, "prayer is a condensation of the soul", and involves an internal shift "from self-consciousness to self-surrender".⁷⁹⁰ It is, in effect, an act of immersion completely in an awareness of God: "prayer is a moment when humility is a reality ... humility is truth".⁷⁹¹ At the same time, Heschel warns of the importance of choosing contemporarily and personally meaningful words in prayer, because prayer involves a correct relationship between a person and a word, but in contemporary culture that relationship has been lost. He also warns against equating prayer with emotion. While emotion is an important component, the primary prerequisite for prayer is conviction: "the source of prayer is an insight rather than an emotion. It is an insight into the mystery of reality. As long as we refuse to take notice of what is beyond our sight, beyond our reason, as long as we are blind to the mystery of being, the way to prayer is closed to us ... the way to prayer leads to acts of wonder and radical amazement".⁷⁹² Prayer then, is a discipline that leads to discovery of the truth of the unity of the cosmos, which is an apt description of the Jewish Renewal approach.

In light of the Jewish Renewal struggle, it is not surprising to find that there are some underlying tensions in the liturgy, again reflecting two millennia of liturgical development. The obvious desire to make the liturgy meaningful by encouraging the democratic approach is somewhat at odds with the pervasive emphasis on personal growth in the direction of spiritual adeptness. As well, the respect for the beauty of traditional prayers and the wisdom of their themes resides rather uncomfortably alongside

⁷⁸⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Prayer as Discipline", pp. 254-261 in *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1966), 255.

⁷⁹⁰ Heschel, "Prayer as Discipline", 254-255

⁷⁹¹ Heschel, "Prayer as Discipline", 256.

⁷⁹² Heschel, "Prayer as Discipline", 259.

an impulse to efflorescent contemporary creativity. As Caplan points out in his discussion of the early Jewish Renewal liturgy, the primary allegiance appears to be to the spiritual function of the traditional texts, rather than to the transmittal of the texts themselves.⁷⁹³ In this, the Jewish Renewal liturgy reflects a notably postmodern approach.

It is clear that the liturgy is one of the strategies by which Jewish Renewal not only supports its reconstructed theology, but also forges a new Judaism rooted in but not limited by past tradition. The next chapter expands on this.

⁷⁹³ Caplan, *From Ideology to Liturgy*, 352. Caplan refers specifically to the creative liturgical work of Schachter-Shalomi.

Chapter 6

L’Dor Va-Dor: Bridging Past and Future

L’dor va-dor means “through all generations”. It is part of a passage, taken from Psalms 146:10: *Yimlokh Adonai l’olam, Elohayikh Tziyon l’dor va-dor, Halleluyah*, which is translated as “Adonai shall reign through all generations; Zion, your God shall reign forever, Halleluyah!”⁷⁹⁴ This passage forms part of the *kedushah*, which is part of the third blessing of the *amidah*, and recited only when a *minyan* (representing the people *Israel*) is present. During the *shabbat musaf* service, the passage is embedded in a longer *kedushah* which is chanted responsively by the *chazzan* or the prayer leader, and the congregation. This longer prayer acclaims God’s holiness (“*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*”); reiterates the *sh’ma*; asserts that God will redeem the people *Israel*; recognizes that God has revealed his sovereignty (*Ani Adonai Elokeikhem*, “I, Adonai, am your God”); and stresses the importance of declaring God’s greatness and holiness in every generation. The prayer ends: “We declare your greatness through all generations, hallow Your holiness to all eternity. Your praise shall never leave our lips, for You are God and Sovereign, great and holy. Praised are you Adonai holy God”.⁷⁹⁵

Kedushah means sacredness, that quality that transcends the mundane and can transform it. Recited responsively and in community, this prayer is a dynamic declaration of the human awareness of God’s greatness, and the hope for a future in which God will

⁷⁹⁴ *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (The Rabbinical Assembly, New York: The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2003), 167.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

redeem *Israel*. This hope is fundamental to Judaism, and a secular articulation of it is the poem that constitutes the Israeli national anthem, *Hatikvah* (hope).⁷⁹⁶

In the passage from Psalms we can discern the essence of Jewish theology, the themes of creation, revelation, and redemption, as well as the determination to carry the revelation, and in effect the entire theology, from the past into the future. The Jewish Renewal *siddurim* retain the classical understanding of the *kedushah*, stressing the need to reiterate the revelation and the theology in each generation.⁷⁹⁷ Thus Jewish Renewal accepts the responsibility of *l'dor va-dor*, of passing on a legacy of revelation and its theology to future generations of Jews.

At the same time, Schachter-Shalomi suggests that transmission of the legacy by mere reinterpretation of past thought may transmit past theological flaws. He sees a clear break in the continuity of Jewish theology after the Holocaust.⁷⁹⁸ As described in Chapter 2, Schachter-Shalomi's theory of paradigm shifts addresses different conceptions of God, and he uses the paradigm shift approach to link pre- and post-Holocaust Jewish theologies.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁶ Jules Harlow, "Commentary", in *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2003), 90-94.

⁷⁹⁷ R. Daniel Siegel, ed., *Siddur Kol Koreh, IV: Amidah for Shabbat Morning* (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2001) www.aleph.org, 16; R. David Zaslow (ed.), *Ivdu Et Hashem B'Simcha*, (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 1993) www.aleph.org, 89; Marcia Prager (ed.), *P'nai Or Siddur for Shabbat Morning* (ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, undated), *iii*, www.aleph.org, 33.

⁷⁹⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, xix-xx.

⁷⁹⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 247-281. For an interesting historical presentation of this idea, without reference to a paradigm shift and not extending to the pantheistic perspective, see Martin Jaffee, *Early Judaism: Religious Worlds of the First Judaic Millennium* (Bethesda: University of Maryland Press, 2006).

Schachter-Shalomi, for whom the Holocaust was a personal experience, considers it a call to Jews to redevelop their faith, using elements of the past, but reshaping them to be meaningful for the post-Holocaust, postmodern situation. In a discussion of Jewish Renewal's relationship to the Holocaust, Shaul Magid suggests that Renewal sees the pre-Holocaust Torah as somewhat deficient, encouraging Jews to be too inward-looking and parochial; the task of post-Holocaust Jewish theology is to progressively extend the divine "covenantal program" by recovering the intent of the original Torah, before it became xenophobic through burial under centuries of pain and anguish.⁸⁰⁰ In this chapter I discuss an example of how Jewish Renewal recovers that Torah from the ancient past through its concept of psychohalakah, and reshapes it to be meaningful for the contemporary Jew.

This action-oriented Torah in the new paradigm must take into account non-Jews, because post-Holocaust Jews must change the way they relate to the world. Schachter-Shalomi takes a somewhat psychological perspective on the renewal of Judaism, holding that renewal requires integrating the experience of the Holocaust and moving forward through the healing process. In his view, the Jewish people's failure to integrate the Holocaust into Jewish theology represents its failure to integrate its own "shadow" (a Jungian idea), and that shadow is Judaism's attitude toward the non-Jew. Writing at the end of the 20th century, he holds that this integrative failure has retarded Judaism's moral development, blocked its ability to renew its own spiritual drive, and prevented it from understanding that its task today is to focus not only on its own good, but the good of the entire planet.⁸⁰¹

For Schachter-Shalomi, integrating the experience of the Holocaust means that Jews learn from it and avoid emulating the victim-oppressor relationship they themselves suffered. This involves not only outreach to non-Jews but also accepting that there is

⁸⁰⁰ Shaul Magid, "Jewish Renewal and the Holocaust", *Tikkun*, www.tikkun.org/magazine/tik0603/magid,

⁸⁰¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal is Judaism Now*. In making the point, Schachter-Shalomi refers to the Kohlberg scale of moral development, a discussion of which can be found in James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995) 49-89.

probably no psychologically adequate explanation for the evil of the *Shoah* (Holocaust), although the hasidic system provides the tools to develop acceptance and a limited understanding. It also requires that, like Jeremiah, Judaism and the Jewish people lament the *Shoah* and then confront the evil that caused it, a confrontation that can take place through social activism and non-violent resistance.⁸⁰² Magid points out that this forward-looking approach to Jewish disaster is somewhat aligned with the prophetic approach, which calls for introspection, turning inward (*teshvah*), to preserve the covenant in the face of disaster.⁸⁰³

Both Schachter-Shalomi and Magid are referring to the classical, biblical institution of prophecy. The Talmud sets out two different views of what the prophet (and prophecy) actually is—a vessel for the transmission of the Divine word, or an active partner in the prophetic mission, processing divine thoughts in a human way, implying a dialogical relationship between God and man.⁸⁰⁴ Notwithstanding the different styles of the biblical prophets, the prophetic approach generally is both transformative and confrontational in the sense that the prophets confronted both man and God, in their attempt to transmit the messages which they perceived God had commanded them to impart. There was an emphasis on the supremacy of morality to cult, and on the universalistic applicability of ideas which were delivered in a nationalist context. Several of the prophets, such as Jeremiah, both reproached God when their faith was tested, and stressed the importance of man's repentance and return to the covenant, which is the turning inward to which Schachter-Shalomi refers.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰² Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 63-73.

⁸⁰³ Magid, "Jewish Renewal and the Holocaust".

⁸⁰⁴ For an interesting discussion of the Talmudic debate, see Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah, As Refracted through the Generations*, (Gordon Tucher, editor and translator), (New York: Continuum, 2006), 478-501.

⁸⁰⁵ Paul, Shalom M., "Prophets and Prophecy", *Encyclopedia Judaica* (CD-ROM edition, version 1.0, Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia Inc., 1997).

Schachter-Shalomi implies that this turning toward God can also facilitate the integration of the Jewish shadow. In his view, much of North American Jewry has adopted the dualistic values of neo-orthodox liberal Protestant Christianity. Yet, by living in an awareness of the Divine, and changing behaviours in accord with the values of the monistic perspective, North American Jews can come to grips with their relations with non-Jews, relinquishing the negative perception of non-Jews in traditional Judaism, accepting a leadership role for Judaism within humanity's moral domain, and presenting it in terms that are accessible and meaningful for contemporary people.⁸⁰⁶ Thus, he brings an ethical sensibility, emphasizing Judaism's relational and universalist dimensions.

In its reinterpretation of some specific concepts associated with the clusters of Jewish theology, Jewish Renewal both actualizes this idea of integration and provides a bridge linking pre-and post-Holocaust Judaism through its contemporary approach to key elements of early hasidism. While Renewal's post-Holocaust theological potential is not well developed in the Renewal literature, it exists below the surface level, and it can be teased out through its discussions of Void, evil and relationship. In this chapter I also look to other thinkers in order to explore a post-Holocaust metaphysics of negation and ethics that are embedded in Jewish Renewal and that could also speak to the contemporary, postmodern search for meaning in Judaism.

Within the clusters around which Schachter-Shalomi reconstructs the Jewish Renewal theology (described in Chapter 2), there can be found specific ideas which serve as clear links in the bridge between Judaism past and Judaism future. At the level of action and behaviour, I first explore the concepts of *psychohalakhah* and *ecokashrut*, found within the revelation and covenant clusters. At a more theological level, within the creation and redemption clusters, I discuss the ideas of void and *tzimtzum* as well as the universal redemptive potential identified in Jewish renewal, and I explore their resonance with postmodern metaphysics of negation and of ethics.

⁸⁰⁶ Magid, *Jewish Renewal and the Holocaust*.

6.1 Revelation and Covenant: *Psychohalakhah* and *Ecokashrut*

In the Jewish Renewal perspective, integration means not only integrating the shadow, but also recognizing and accepting that the old system of Judaism has to break down in order for Judaism to move forward. The new system of Judaism must stress living in an awareness of the Divine, and changing behaviours in accord with the values of the monistic perspective. Traditionally, Jewish behaviour is guided by Torah and *halakhah*, and Jewish Renewal is developing a new, contemporarily meaningful Torah through reinterpretation. The new Torah, or revelation, points to a revised *halakhah*.

More specifically, Schachter-Shalomi has introduced the concept of *psychohalakah*. He points to the importance of *halakhah* for the hasidism on which Jewish Renewal is founded: “Hasidism insisted on the need for halakha, since halakha served the most vital function of disciplining Man’s will”.⁸⁰⁷ *Halakhah* then, is seen as an important element of Jewish Renewal, but *halakhah* emerged from a theistic paradigm, and must be transformed to be meaningful in a pantheistic paradigm. According to Schachter-Shalomi, the paradigm shifts reflect the evolution of human consciousness. Currently a global consciousness is emerging which sees the planet as being divinized, “a mindmove of such proportions that we could say that it is totally unprecedented”.⁸⁰⁸ The divinized planet is part of a whole which is conceived as an ultimate unity, a field of possibilities where different aspects of the whole communicate with each other in all four worlds of human experience (physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual). The evolution of human consciousness requires that all previous stages need to be integrated rather than rejected. Thus the old is not obsolete; it can be accepted as part of its own paradigm and used to enrich the current paradigm.⁸⁰⁹ *Halakhah* can enrich the current pantheistic paradigm if it is tried out, and adjusted or transformed as necessary to align

⁸⁰⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 9.

⁸⁰⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 292.

⁸⁰⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 288-98. A clear and straightforward summary of this approach was put forward by Rabbi Sara Leya Schley, in a teleclass short course on prayer offered by ALEPH, in winter, 2006. See the responsum document sent out by email for Class 6 of the series, (received 3/24/2006), which was available from Rabbi Schley at saraleya@comcast.net.

more closely with the stage of evolution of contemporary consciousness. It is this process of adjustment and transformation that Schachter-Shalomi calls “the psychohalakhic process”.⁸¹⁰

Traditionally, *halakhah* is the body of Jewish law, which includes broad religious, social and ethical principles as well as specific precepts which actualize those principles. The precepts are the *mitzvot* (commandments). The main source of *halakhah* is the Pentateuch, on which talmudic halakhic commentary is based. However, the Talmud is a collection, not a code, and in the late middle ages various thinkers produced codified versions of *halakhah*. The *Shulchan Arukh*, produced in the sixteenth century, became the widely accepted code, but it was not by itself authoritative. As a system of law, *halakhah* operates by its own principles through which the law is established on the basis of precedent and consensus. In making halakhic rulings to address the issues of the time, the rabbis engaged in a process of debate and discussion, consulting both the *Shulchan* and the Talmud, as well as considering contemporary practice. Many hasidic masters were not afraid to deviate from the *Shulchan* in relatively minor ways, although they respected the values and principles it enshrined.

Today rabbinic authorities continue to use the halakhic machinery to develop the law further, in light of contemporary issues, and the actual practice of Jews continues to be an important influence.⁸¹¹ Yet halakhic opinions and positions continue to vary, depending on the attitude of the particular community being addressed. In a review of contemporary attitudes toward revelation, Neill Gillman points out that there is, by and large, a contemporary acknowledgement that the contents of Torah are shaped by humans, whatever God’s role was in the initial revelation, and thus there is an ongoing re-evaluation by each generation of Jews, particularly with regard to the behavioural

⁸¹⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 260-261.

⁸¹¹ Louis Jacobs (ed.), *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 210-12 and 466-67.

obligations, that is, *halakhah* and the *mitzvot*.⁸¹² In consequence, “there are no intrinsic parameters for delimiting reformulations of the Torah ... each community must set its own parameters consensually and accept the authority for its own reading of the tradition.”⁸¹³

6.1.1 The Psychohalakhic Process

Schachter-Shalomi associates the psychohalakhic process not merely with adaptation, but more fundamentally with transformation, of both the halakhic system and the individual soul.⁸¹⁴ Adaptations occur within the existing theistic paradigm. The assumption of the pantheistic paradigm with a Gaian perspective suggests that new models are needed to understand the interaction among humans and between humans and the world, to accommodate new priorities, and thus new halakhic questions. These new models require an in-depth understanding of the theistic halakhic template and the values it expresses, as well as an understanding of the values held within the pantheistic paradigm. In other words, a community perspective, a “consensus of the pious” is important.⁸¹⁵ *Psychohalakhah* cannot be based merely on what feels right for the individual. At the same time, an individual who is coming to Jewish Renewal from a basis of ignorance of halakhic practice (rather than an orthodox background from which he/she has the behavioural template) will develop a practice of observance in steps, starting from outside halakhic observance by trying to work into it. This too is *psychohalakhah*.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹² Neill Gillman, “Contemporary Jewish Theology”, pp.441-460 in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 447.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Psychohalakhah*, www.Ohalah.org, May 10, 2006.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Whereas the traditional halakhic process was one of adaptation of existing law to address contemporary issues, Jewish Renewal's Rabbi Susan (SaraLaya) Shley suggests that since the 1800s a text-based rigidity has crept into the halakhic process, associated with Orthodox Judaism, and attributable to a concern for Jewish survival and the ability of a traditionally structured life to provide meaning in an era of existential uncertainty.⁸¹⁷ Haym Soloveitchik has a more nuanced perspective; he argues that traditional Halakhah is a comprehensive regulation of daily life and was transmitted mimetically, absorbed from home, family and community, producing a traditional society rather than what we today refer to as orthodox.⁸¹⁸ With the waves of Jewish migration to America in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, traditional culture was disrupted, and Jews were more likely to live in enclaves. With that shift, the authority of the home and community to shape behaviour and values among the observant declined, and the influence of Jewish education, textual study and institutional authorities increased. Soloveitchik suggests that this not only transformed a traditional perspective into the contemporary orthodox viewpoint, it also undermined the previously intimate relationship traditional Jews had with the Divine. For him, contemporary religious Jews "seek to ground their emerging spirituality" less on an intimacy with God than on a detailed understanding of God's will through halakhah: "having lost the touch of His presence, they now seek solace in the pressure of His yoke".⁸¹⁹

Jewish Renewal looks to texts for authority, but is oriented to flexibility. Thus, creating a meaningful life through observance requires the application of Torah to contemporary postmodern life, taking into account multiple subjectivities and perspectives, multiple levels of awareness and consciousness development, and the realization that individual actions affect the entire Gaian organism.

⁸¹⁷ Schley, Class 6, ALEPH teleclass course on prayer, 2006.

⁸¹⁸ Haym Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy", *Tradition* 28:4, 1994, 64-130.

⁸¹⁹ Soloveitchik, *Rupture and Reconstruction*, 103.

Reaching back into the premodern halakhic approach, the Jewish Renewal psychohalakhic process is intended to reinstate its fluid, flexible and *minhag* (custom, practice) oriented attitude, to ensure that observance goes beyond commandment but is focussed on transformation of the soul.⁸²⁰ In this it is aligned with the prophetic approach discussed earlier. It also echoes the medieval Jewish mystical conception that human deeds on earth influence the heavenly realms, and that “the performance of *mitzvot* has a cosmic effect, awakening the divine grace and enabling it to flow through all creation”.⁸²¹ As alluded to earlier, *halakhah* is operationalized or made concrete through performance of *mitzvot*. Although *mitzvah* literally means “commandment”, Arnold Eisen points out that over the centuries the *mitzvot* have been carried out not because they were initially commanded at Sinai (as fundamentalists believe), but because they lent richness and meaning to lives that were often otherwise horrible.⁸²²

In Yiddish, which was long the daily language of eastern European Jewish life, the word is *mitzveh*. It denotes not merely a religious commandment, but also a good deed, performed either for someone else or for oneself. Thus it connotes both a sense of community solidarity and also the idea of psychic well being, as well as a sense of being commanded by God.⁸²³ In this it reflects the two poles around which *halakhah* revolves, according to the orthodox theologian David Hartman.⁸²⁴ The legal pole specifies detailed rules of behaviour. The relational pole gives expression to the covenantal relationship between God and *Israel*. Hartman points out that there is also a polarity within halakhic practice between the individual and the community, a polarity which I suggest is captured by the Yiddish word *mitzveh*.

⁸²⁰ Schley, Class 6.

⁸²¹ Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 212.

⁸²² Arnold Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Introduction.

⁸²³ Moshe Waldoks, “Mitzveh”, pp. 627-628 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*.

⁸²⁴ David Hartman, “Halakhah”, pp.309-316 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*.

Jacobs gets at this idea somewhat differently; he describes three categories of *mitzvot*.⁸²⁵ Those which are significant include observances of the dietary laws, the sabbath, prayer, and those associated with Yom Kippur and other festivals (usually with regard to fasting). These *mitzvot* are significant because they relate to institutions which have become powerful experiences for promoting holiness in daily living, through the historical experiences of the community of the Jewish people. These include both legal and relational precepts. Another category of *mitzvot* is those that have become meaningless, at least from a non-fundamentalist perspective. These include, for example, *mitzvot* with regard to shaving, or to *shaatnez* (mixing of wool and linen, forbidden in the book of Deuteronomy), and are largely legal. The third category includes those few *mitzvot* which are largely relational but today are harmful because they promote injustice, such as the situation of the *agunah*, a woman who remains bound to a husband who refuses to give her a *get* (a halakhic bill of divorce) and so cannot remarry. Jacobs suggests that contemporary halakhic development must take into account the spiritual goods or values that a *mitzvah* was intended to enshrine, and determine if, and how, contemporary enactment of the *mitzvah* can ensure loyalty to the good as taught by Judaism.

In applying the psychohalakhic point of view to the development of its observances and practices, Jewish Renewal respects and follows the traditional underlying principles of the halakhic process, but adapts the application of those principles to reflect contemporary reality. In a discussion of *psychohalakhah*, Schachter-Shalomi points to three criteria. The first is the recognition that halakhic development requires a communitarian approach, so that individuals are not blinded by their own assumptions and ego needs: “Nobody can claim they are doing psycho-halakhah (*sic*) if they are doing it outside the consensus of the pious. It depends in which community what consensus of the pious exists”.⁸²⁶ This means that the stakeholders in the decision have to be identified, as do the foreseeable consequences. As an example, Schachter-Shalomi

⁸²⁵ Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 226-230.

⁸²⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Psychohalakhah*.

points to the traditional requirement to refraining from turning lights on and off on *shabbat*. When this ruling was originally put in place, electric lights were just coming into existence. The fibre filament placed into lightbulbs became carbonized easily, which for the *posquim* (halakhic decisors) meant it was making a fire and so forbidden on *shabbat*. Today we understand that electricity is not fire, that it is more like water, and so can be turned on and off on *shabbat*.

The second criterion stresses the importance of being grounded in the past, understanding the initial intention and having “a sense of how the Shekhinah would like to deal with the next generation”.⁸²⁷ This requires having the knowledge and understanding to comprehend the roots and intent of a specific practice. The example here is the traditional requirement to walk to *shul* (synagogue in Yiddish) on *shabbat*. Schachter-Shalomi points out that today, with social mobility, few people live within walking distance of a synagogue. He suggests that before *shabbat* one should buy gas and complete other necessities required for the *shabbat* period, that is, before Friday evening. The car can then be used “to go to shul and to friends”⁸²⁸ but not to go outside of the city limit cause it’s *t’hum Shabbos*, and by that I mean that it would not be cool to go from the Bronx to White Plains despite the fact that it looks like one city”.⁸²⁹ *Tehum shabbat* is a halakhic ruling that one must not venture more than a certain distance (200 *amot*) outside a populated area on *shabbat*.⁸³⁰ The third criterion for *psychohalakhah* is whether the activity is conducive to *avodat haShem* (sacred service, service to God): “will it strengthen the Shekhinnah or will it weaken the Shekhinnah?”⁸³¹ Deriving the answer to this question requires intimate knowledge of what traditional Judaism has thought, which in turn means that individuals cannot necessarily rely on themselves to make the decision if their knowledge is inadequate. Schachter-Shalomi points out that, “there are a lot of

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁸ Visiting friends is traditionally encouraged on *shabbat*.

⁸²⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Psychohalakhah*.

⁸³⁰ I thank Professor Shaul Magid for pointing this out.

⁸³¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Psychohalakhah*.

people who have come to Jewish Renewal, for whom I did the translation of the *siddur* (prayerbook) and *tehillim* (prayers), who are coming so far from the outside, how shall I put it, they are more this kind of vague protestant than they are Jews”.⁸³² His concern is that not only will they be inclined to go with their individual feelings, they also will be unable to instill the sense of very strong commitment to a consciously and Jewishly observant life and pass that sense on to the next generation: “the likelihood is they will not have *milah* (*sic*) (circumcision) and not have a second generation. So there is something, that’s why I keep saying that has to be between the past and the future”.⁸³³

For Schachter-Shalomi, *halakhah*, and particularly the observance of *shabbat*, is “wonderful shamanistic wisdom”, but it has to be used in a new way.⁸³⁴ Referring to Heschel’s description, he reiterates that “shabbos is the punctuation of time, the signification of time”.⁸³⁵ He points out that regular *shabbat* observance allows a person to move out of the realm of the everyday and recover perspective and solutions to problems by moving into a more mystical realm, in effect taking a regular ‘time out’. In this the rituals of *shabbat* resemble shamanism, which is intended to aid individuals to heal themselves by moving into an alternate psychic space through ritual. Shamanism is generally associated in pre-industrial cultures with healing and therapy, whether physical, mental or emotional.⁸³⁶ Shamanistic wisdom requires considerable expertise, developed through self-discipline and learning, often through the vehicle of ritual. Thus *shabbat* is an example, for Schachter-Shalomi, of the healing wisdom to be found in the discipline of halakhic observance, provided it is updated to reflect contemporary conditions.

⁸³² *Ibid.*

⁸³³ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 260.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁶ This understanding of shamanism can be found in the anthropological literature. For a good discussion, see Anthony F. C Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966), 125-126, and 145-157.

6.1.2 Eco-kashrut

It is clear then, that with respect to the legal, behavioural pole of *psychohalakhah*, Jewish Renewal takes its cue from traditional Jewish thought. Schachter-Shalomi espouses a psychohalakhic development process that reflects the traditional halakhic procedure of debate and consensus within the specific community. He encourages interpretations of *mitzvot* that take into account the underlying values expressed by the *mitzvah*. He stresses the importance of the purpose of the *mitzvah* as contributing to the service of God.

The relational, covenantal pole of *psychohalakhah* is expressed more evidently in Jewish Renewal's expansion of the traditional laws of *kashrut*, which deal with dietary matters, into laws of *eco-kashrut*, a new way of being kosher which addresses consumption more broadly.⁸³⁷ As discussed in Chapter 3, Jewish Renewal interprets *kashrut* as *eco-kashrut*, a set of evolving practices concerned not only with the end results of food production but with the methods used to obtain those results, and with the environmental and human toll associated with human action to produce things including food.

This environmentalist perspective on *kashrut* goes considerably beyond the traditional approach. As Jacobs points out, "unlike the ethical and moral precepts of Judaism, the dietary laws seem to defy human reasoning".⁸³⁸ Medieval theologians sought to find reasons, and the dietary laws were understood as intended either to maintain health (Maimonides) or benefit the soul (Nahmanides). The kabbalists considered forbidden foods as being in the realm of the demonic so that eating them equated to imbibing a spirit of impurity, making the mind and soul impure. Modern Jewish thinkers do not focus on the reasons for the *mitzvot*, but emphasize their role in developing self discipline and preserving the integrity of *Israel* as a people apart.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 149-180.

⁸³⁸ Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion*, 126.

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*

Schachter-Shalomi asserts that “there is reason to think that much of *halakhah* as it concerns *kashrut* is related to an understanding of the cosmos”.⁸⁴⁰ He suggests this halakhic thinking is rooted in a pre-Copernican worldview, and must now be reworked to align with the emerging Gaian reality map. In aid of this, he returns to the Torah, in which he discerns a highly sophisticated ecological worldview; and he finds places in it where the two imperatives of serving God and serving the planet converge. In his view, “strengthening this whole-Earth cooperation is ... the most urgent and important way we have of serving God, the holiest and most pressing invitation of our time”.⁸⁴¹ For him, one way of rendering this service is to practice *eco-kashrut*, which differs from *kashrut* in three important ways. First, as mentioned earlier, in contrast to traditional *kashrut*, it is concerned both with the origin and the method of production of things consumed. Second, it cannot rely on clear, cut and dried pronouncements from rabbinic authorities, as all consumption has “multiple interlocking costs and repercussions; the challenge is to maximize the *kashrut* of a given product or action, which speaks to a matter of degree of ‘kosherness’”.⁸⁴² An eco-kosher perspective suggests questions such as: are fruit and vegetables harvested by underpaid migrant workers kosher?; are latkes made from potatoes from plants doused with pesticides less kosher than those from organically grown plants?; are disposable dishes and Styrofoam containers kosher since they are ecologically disastrous?; is chicken more kosher than beef because it takes less grazing land to produce chicken? Thus the third difference from traditional *kashrut*: *eco-kashrut* is an evolving practice, and an eco-kosher practice is a matter of individual conscience and decision, rather than legislation.

6.2 Covenant, Post-Holocaust

This linkage of *eco-kashrut* to individual conscience and judgement, as well as to an individual’s way of serving God, speaks to the relationship between the person and

⁸⁴⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 269.

⁸⁴¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 152.

⁸⁴² Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling*, 158-159.

God, and is tantamount to a personal covenant. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the concept of covenant is not well developed in Schachter-Shalomi's writing or in Jewish Renewal. In this is reflected the "intractable difficulty" of the idea of covenant in Jewish thought in the modern era, and in particular during the post-Holocaust period.⁸⁴³ Eisen maintains that contemporary Jews are still seized with the idea of covenant, of *brit* (or *bris*), in part due to their own ambivalence about it.⁸⁴⁴

Emerging from the suzerainty treaty model borrowed in the biblical description of the revelation at Sinai, the *brit* idea has evolved through biblical, medieval and modern periods to emerge today "draped in the forms of halakhah, transcendence, heteronomy and fate".⁸⁴⁵ At the same time, the biblical *brit* idea was daring because it included another dimension - the sense of parity. The moral God, seeking a moral world, created a humanity free to disobey; thus God bargains with humans, and thus the "*mysterium tremendum* is thereby rendered accessible and to a degree, comprehensible".⁸⁴⁶ Eisen holds that this parity dimension of the covenant appears in modern Jewish thought associated with ideas of ethical obligation, immanence, autonomy and destiny. He points out that even those theologians who consider the covenant shattered in light of the Holocaust appear to remain faithful to Jewish tradition, identifying with a unique people through which some sort of transcendent meaning can be located even today.

The evolving nature of Jewish Renewal's *eco-kashrut* approach includes recognition of humanity's responsibility for stewardship of the earth, and its idea of

⁸⁴³ Arnold Eisen, "Covenant", pp.108-112 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.) (The Free Press, New York, 1987), 110.

⁸⁴⁴ Note that the words *brit* and *bris* (which is an Ashkenazi pronunciation) reflect common usage. See Louis Glinert, *The Joys of Hebrew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40. The term comes from *berit milah*, "covenant of circumcision". See Leonard V. Snowman, "Circumcision" in *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

⁸⁴⁵ Eisen, "Covenant", 111.

⁸⁴⁶ Eisen, "Covenant", 108.

psychohalakhah provides a voluntarily undertaken structuring of daily existence.⁸⁴⁷ In my view, some form of the idea of *brit* needs to evolve as part of a post-Holocaust Jewish theology, and there is the potential for that evolution in the form of a clearer idea of a renewed or renewable covenant, focused on the earth and in tune with contemporary perspectives.

This approach to covenant may be an important element of Jewish Renewal's contribution to the development of post-Holocaust theology. North American Judaism has not yet worked out a response to the Holocaust that fully satisfies the complete range of Jewish perspectives. In an overview of theological responses to the Holocaust, Katz describes a range of reactions. Some view the Holocaust as another in a line of Jewish tragedies; others see it as proof that God does not exist; still others declare it a revelation to Jews commanding them to survive. Katz maintains that each thinker finds in the Holocaust confirmation of his own prior convictions.⁸⁴⁸ Writing somewhat later, Berenbaum points out that the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel are no longer contemporary experiences for modern Jews, so that they no longer see them as forming a mythic saga of death and rebirth, but rather, in light of Israeli-Palestinian issues, a complex mix of Jewish identity, tension between a history of victimization and assumption of power, and options for Jews in the wake of decreased anti-semitism.⁸⁴⁹

Recently, Rosenak has examined the range of theological positions following the Holocaust, and concluded that they speak to widely disparate goals with regard to relating the Holocaust to the situation of the Jewish people today.⁸⁵⁰ He suggests that diverse theological positions can create empathy, rather than enmity, among Jews if there is a broad acceptance that diverse Jewish communities develop their own understandings of

⁸⁴⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal Is Judaism Now*, 63-72.

⁸⁴⁸ Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

⁸⁴⁹ Michael Berenbaum, *After Tragedy and Triumph* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁸⁵⁰ Michael Rosenak, "Theological Reflections on the Holocaust", pp. 161-174 in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology* (Steven. T. Katz, ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 2005)

the common destiny and that each is trying to work out in its own way how to maintain the spiritual entity that is the Jewish people and carry on its spiritual life. At the same time, a particular Jewish discourse on faith is acceptable if the theological position it puts forward is truthful, that is, found in the religious experience and behaviour of those adhering to it; if it is coherent, that is, the elements of the theology come together in a way that promotes integration of the religious personality; and it is plausible, that is, explainable to an outsider without requiring acceptance or agreement.

I suggest that Schachter-Shalomi is putting forth a truthful, coherent and plausible theological position, but one that is not fully articulated as such. Rather, it is expressed to a large extent in behavioural, action oriented terms. He holds that, to maintain its moral identity and orientation, Judaism needs to develop a clear, new archetype which individual Jews can emulate. This new archetypal Jew takes on a leadership role within humanity's moral domain, and must be presented in terms that are accessible and meaningful for contemporary men and women. This in turn requires letting go of some traditional and less meaningful cultural "scripts" which dictate a negative Jewish attitude toward the non-Jew, as well as developing a set of "action directives" through a revised *halakhah* which fully treats the relationships between Jews and non-Jews and incorporates an application of divine law which is more clearly in the service of the total redemption of humanity.⁸⁵¹

Magid characterizes this Jewish Renewal response to the Holocaust as one which sees the covenant not as broken, but as partially destroyed, resulting in a radical altering of the world's spiritual terrain. For the covenant to survive, the Torah, as a statement of *Israel's* universal purpose, must be revised to be renewed. This implies that the old Torah, as practiced pre-Holocaust, was inadequate as a revelation and guide for contemporary Jews, because it did not include the non-Jew nor did it adequately address Judaism's universal role in humanity's future.⁸⁵² Schachter-Shalomi refers to this as, in effect, a redemption of the covenant. In contrast to the pre-Holocaust hasidic way of

⁸⁵¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 68, 65.

⁸⁵² Shaul Magid, "Jewish Renewal and the Holocaust", *Tikkun*, March/April, 2006: 59-68.

redeeming the covenant through fasting and penitence, he suggests the activity today must be a process of rebuilding trust, not only among individuals but between Jews and non-Jews.⁸⁵³

I maintain that this rebuilding of trust requires understanding the Holocaust not just as an historic event, the ultimate, terrifying expression of modernity's potential for evil, but also as the shatterer of the previous paradigm and the harbinger of the shift to a new paradigm. At a more fundamental theological and philosophical level, it requires interpreting the Holocaust from a different metaphysic, as Edith Wyschogrod has pointed out.⁸⁵⁴ This new metaphysical interpretation can be found embedded within Schachter-Shalomi's writing, expressed not directly but rather, illustrated through the tool of hasidism. I turn now to this discussion.

6.3 Creation and Redemption: Post-Holocaust Metaphysics

In Chapter 5 I discussed the *Aleinu*, the prayer that closes services. This ancient prayer clearly separates *Israel* from other peoples. In its original formulation, it referred to other peoples as worshipping idols as well as vanity and emptiness. This was followed by a phrase which indicated that Jews bent their knees and bowed to acknowledge the King of kings. During the 14th to 18th centuries, the reference to other nations worshipping idols, vanity and emptiness was considered offensive to Christians and was banned by them. Today, most prayer books still eliminate this reference to the idolatry of other nations.⁸⁵⁵ The *Chabad siddur, Tehillat HaShem*, however, retains the phrase, which it translates as "for they bow to vanity and nothingness".⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Renewal Is Judaism Now*, 98-101.

⁸⁵⁴ Edith Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes: Hegel, Heidegger, and Man-Made Mass Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁸⁵⁵ Harlow, *Pray Tell*, 195-156. As well, all the Jewish Renewal *siddurim* that I examined eliminate the phrase. It still appears in the *Artscroll Siddur for Sabbath and Festivals, With an Interlinear Translation*, (Menachem Davis, ed.)(Brooklyn: Mesorah Publishing, 2002), 430.

⁸⁵⁶ *Siddur Tehillat HaShem*, 245.

6.3.1 The Void and *Tzimtzum*

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the Jewish Renewal *siddurim* adjust the Hebrew and English of this section of the *Aleinu* to emphasize the unity of humanity. However, recently ALEPH has published a weekday *siddur* for praying in the vernacular, authored by Schachter-Shalomi that offers English translations of the liturgy which reflect not the literal meaning of the words in Hebrew, but a “devotional interpretation that can make it a prayer of the heart”.⁸⁵⁷ In this *siddur*’s rendering of the *Aleinu*, Schachter-Shalomi reaches back to the *Chabad* approach, by including in brackets the passage, “Some of us like to worship You, as emptiness and void; Some of us want to worship You, as King of Kings. We all consider You as sacred and blessed.”⁸⁵⁸ Thus, he recognizes as equally valid the traditional Jewish approach which images God as the ultimate sovereign, and the approach of other spiritual traditions which image God as emptiness and void. This recognition appears to stem from an experience he had some decades ago with some Zen practitioners, all of Jewish birth. In reciting the traditional *Alienu* with them, he came to the realization that “emptiness and void (*hevel varik*)” could be interpreted as the highest attribute of God, the “anikonic and infinite”, that is “no-thing”; thus, he understood that the aim of all religions was the same, to worship God, but the God concept was expressed differently.⁸⁵⁹ This “devotional interpretation” offered by Schachter-Shalomi is an example of what Magid calls “translation as an act of subversion”.⁸⁶⁰ It alters the original meaning of the Hebrew in such a way as to import into Jewish Renewal liturgy the god-

⁸⁵⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, “Introduction” in *A Weekday Siddur, As I Can Say It* (Philadelphia: ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, 2006)

⁸⁵⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, “Introduction”, 31.

⁸⁵⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 41. Note that Schachter-Shalomi does not hold that all other religions are equally valid paths to God - some, like Hare Krishna, forget the true purpose of lighting incense, chanting, etc., but demand the total abnegation of other religions, thus they are idolatrous, in his view; see pages 41-42.

⁸⁶⁰ Shaul Magid, *The Necessary Heresy of Translation: Reflections on the Hebrew Writings of Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi*, <http://www.rzlp.org/index.cfm?objectid=586BE7C0-D614-E19E>, 6.

concept of another religion. The traditional intention of the use of *l'hevel varik* (to vanity and emptiness) in the *Aleinu* prayer was to differentiate Jews from other peoples precisely by the differing types of god-concept. In addition, the concept of nothingness, *ayin*, exists in Jewish mysticism. As Daniel Matt points out, however, mystical portrayals of nothingness do not express identical meaning across cultures, as “each mystic names the nameless from within a discursive realm shaped by his own training, outlook and language.”⁸⁶¹ For the Jewish mystic, divine nothingness does not mean nonbeing, it means that God is not a thing but is greater than any thing the human imagination can conceive of. This, *ayin* conveys more than a simple negation; it “implies the God beyond God...the fullness of being that transcends being itself.”⁸⁶²

Schachter-Shalomi, looks to Hasidic teachings to underpin his interpretation of void. He points in particular to the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav (1772-1810) and his followers.⁸⁶³ In the writings of Reb Nachman (*Likkutey MaHaRan*) and his disciple Reb Natan of Nemirov (*Likkutey T'fillot*) he finds both poetic and discursive descriptions of the void as that which separates “the Divine which fills and the Divine which surrounds the world”, an “empty space” which was created when God condensed His divinity and contracted His light, in which space God “created all of creation”.⁸⁶⁴ He considers Reb Nachman to be one of the few examples in Judaism (or Christianity) of an apophatic theologian, one who finds God more in the darkness than the light, that is, one whose conception of the divine is expressed in negative terms (void) rather than exclusively positive terms (as in the image of light): “most people want to talk about the great light and the great bliss. Very few are willing to talk about the fatal abyss that is God, to speak that language”.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶¹ Daniel Matt, “Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism”, pp.67-108 in *Essential Papers On Kabbalah* (Lawrence Fine, ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 67.

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁶³ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 204-245.

⁸⁶⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 226-227.

⁸⁶⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 229.

The condensation of divinity and the contraction of divine light which created the void is referred to kabbalistically as *tzimtzum* (withdrawal, contraction), and, as explained in Chapter 3, it was introduced by Isaac Luria in his cosmogonic myth of creation. Arthur Green points out that, paradoxically, the void cannot be a total void, as nothing, even void, can exist outside the all pervasive *Ein-Sof*.⁸⁶⁶ Following this contraction of divine light there was a shattering of vessels which were not strong enough to contain the light as it flowed down from the uppermost *sefirot* to the lower. The shards of the vessels, mingled with sparks of divinity were scattered throughout the universe and became the *qelipot*, the demonic forces that hid the bits of divinity embedded within them. According to Green, the real meaning of the myth of *tzimtzum*, already recognized in Luria's time, is that *Ein-Sof* contained within it the roots of evil, and God's withdrawal from the primal space simultaneously purged *Ein-Sof* of those roots of evil, thus allowing for the existence of divine good untainted by evil. Green points out that Nachman interpreted the Lurianic myth as meaning that evil consists of the denial of God, and evil, or the absence of God, seemed to be all too present in the world in which Nachman lived. He looked to the concept of void to resolve this theological problem. In Nachman's view, the void is necessary for creation, so that there remains "some space" between God's immanence and His transcendence, and "thus the void from which God has withdrawn, and inside which he created the universe, surrounds the entire world, and God is also without, surrounding the void itself..."⁸⁶⁷ Nachman expanded this idea to assert the truly paradoxical nature of faith, that it can assert its true power (of transcendence) only when God seems hidden, when His presence is not apparent. Man must seek out "those places from which God is apparently absent", in order to "gain the strength in faith ... needed to assert His presence".⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁶ Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nachman of Bratsla*, (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 309-316.

⁸⁶⁷ Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, quoted in Green, *Tormented Master*, 314.

⁸⁶⁸ Green, *Tormented Master*, 315.

Schachter-Shalomi builds on Nachman's interpretation of the void's necessary existence to update the notions of *tzimtzum* and to focus on God's immanence rather than transcendence, as a way of dealing with the evil of the Holocaust. In his own reading of the Lurianic myth, he states that that Luria conceptualized the *tzimtzum* not as the infinite light of God contracting inward from outer edges, but as contracting away from a given point, creating a "a space that is womb-like" in which Creation could emerge.⁸⁶⁹ He suggests that the concept is interpreted differently in different ages. Applying the concept of *tzimtzum* retroactively to biblical thinking, Schachter-Shalomi maintains that in the deistic reality map, *tzimtzum* meant that God contracted himself into an incredibly dense point between the wings of the *k'ruvim* (cherubim) guarding the ark, and was seen as totally other, occupying one place in space and time but absent from others. Separation from God was necessary to prevent humans from being overwhelmed by the intensity of God's presence. In the theistic paradigm *tzimtzum* meant that good became associated with the presence of God and evil with the absence. But the Holocaust, the culmination of the theistic paradigm, showed that this tension between good and evil could no longer support such an interpretation of *tzimtzum*. According to Schachter-Shalomi, God was immanent in each individual who died. Thus, this intense immanence, this emergence of a new reality map after the horror of the Holocaust, forced the realization that *tzimtzum* is not "associated with evil and the absence of God, but with ignorance and the concealing of God".⁸⁷⁰ God hid in order that creation could occur.

This sense of 'hiding' is associated with the human realization of human incapacity to achieve a full understanding of God. In the present pantheistic reality map, *tzimtzum* thus becomes the idea that the full import of certain knowledge and understanding is beyond the capacity of the recipient to absorb; *tzimtzum* now connotes compassion, a scaling down, but also an expansion, a potential that may be realized when the capacity for understanding is available. The current evolutionary expansion of

⁸⁶⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, with Netanel Miles-Yepey, *God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown-Variations on a Kabbalistic Theme*, www.rzlp.org/index.cfm?objectid=FCF77877-D612-00A4AD.

⁸⁷⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, with Netanel Miles-Yepey, *God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown*, 2

consciousness represents a return to the light, an increasing capacity to absorb more understanding of the Divine. From this perspective, “*tzimtzum* is the tight-ended, focused, flow of God-energy that keeps us alive but stays out of our awareness.”⁸⁷¹ It thus becomes a function, a tool which can endow new meaning to the essence of tradition, and a tool that is available to Jewish Renewal to carry forward and teach traditional ideas to future generations: “So when I ask myself what would be the best way to make Jewish Renewal more effective, I realize it would be to make *tzimtzum* an effective tool in our hands. We have to become more and more effective in making such transmissions”.⁸⁷²

Schachter-Shalomi also finds precedence for this interpretation of *tzimtzum* and the radical immanence of God in the work of the founder of Chabad hasidism. He interprets the latter’s discussion of *tzimtzum* as withdrawal or contraction applying only to the concept of God (*Ein-sof*, infinite nothing) as represented by the symbol of its light, (*or Ein-sof*). The *Ein-sof* and the *or Ein-sof* were not removed or withdrawn during the process of *tzimtzum*, but merely concealed from the human perspective: “God’s light was never removed from the void, and there never was a void; it was merely concealed from our point of view. We are radically ignorant of God’s immanence right here and now in this wonderful fiction we call ‘life’ ... It is the hiding of God that allows us to perceive ourselves as separate.”⁸⁷³

6.4 A Post-Holocaust Metaphysics of Negation

It is evident, then, that Schachter-Shalomi finds in both Bratslav and Chabad hasidism an understanding of God that is simultaneously negative and positive. This is an interesting bridging of two separate strains of hasidism. Joseph Weiss, writing in 1950, described fundamental differences in hasidism, with the “two broad camps” being

⁸⁷¹ Schachter-Shalomi, with Netanel Miles-Yepetz, *God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown*, 3

⁸⁷² Schachter-Shalomi, with Netanel Miles-Yepetz, *God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown*, 5.

⁸⁷³ Schachter-Shalomi, *From the Infinite to the Finite: The Ari’s Answer*, www.rzlp.org/index.cfm?objectid=F5F4EAA@-D612-00A6, 3.

mystical hasidism, as represented by Chabad, and the hasidism of faith, represented by Bratslav hasidism.⁸⁷⁴ For him, the mystical, contemplative orientation “weaves idealistic inclinations into a unified, coherent pattern of thought”, whereas the hasidism of faith with its strong eschatological drive and relational emphasis, contains “powerful existential elements ... giving it a unique character”.⁸⁷⁵

Schachter-Shalomi suggests that some two hundred years ago, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav understood that the dilemma which confronts the spiritual seeker in the modern and even postmodern age is how to find an appropriate spiritual path in a secular world, and also that “the old paths just don’t work anymore”; since earlier times, “roads have changed and the old maps no longer work as they used to”.⁸⁷⁶ He implies that newer, more appropriate maps must take into account the negative approach to understanding God as present in the void, hidden from human understanding and experience by the compassion of *tzimtzum*, and develop new interpretations of tradition in order to facilitate movement toward “a greater constancy in the life with God”.⁸⁷⁷

Schachter-Shalomi does not translate his perception of the hasidic understanding of the concept of void and deep negation into a well articulated post-Holocaust theology. He does, however, hint opaquely at such a possibility in his discussion of the nature of good and evil. He holds that the hasidic approach sees some types of evil as transformable by man and others as transformable only with God’s help. Both types of evil, however, form a polarity with the good; they are not totally separate.⁸⁷⁸ There is also a suggestion that monotheism tends to separate good and evil into different realms, associating them with spirit and matter respectively, but that Eastern philosophies, some

⁸⁷⁴ Joseph Weiss, “Mystical Hasidism and the Hasidism of Faith: A Typological Analysis”, pp. 77-285 in *God’s Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism* (Shaul Magid, ed.) (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 277.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁸⁷⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 209.

⁸⁷⁷ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 212.

⁸⁷⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 81-116.

of which are monistic, see two polarities of one thing rather than separate things. In his view, this monistic approach is more in tune with the contemporary mind, which is why Eastern philosophies are so readily accepted by Western spiritual seekers.⁸⁷⁹

This less categorical approach to the separation of good and evil is reflected in his call for a “theology of the *goy*”.⁸⁸⁰ Although Jews were originally also called *goy* (nation), centuries of persecution gave the word a pejorative meaning, so that when European Jews referred to Nazis by the term it had become synonymous with inhuman villain. He states that today, Jews are in dialogue with *goyim*, so that the pressing contemporary question *mi hu yehudi* (who is a Jew?) also includes the other polarity, *mi hu goy* (who is a *goy*, that is, non-Jew?). *Halakhah* contains concepts of gradations of Jewishness, a gray area rather than a binary black and white approach; he suggests that a contemporary Jewish discussion expanding these gradations would help Jews and non-Jews not only tolerate but also learn from one another.⁸⁸¹

I suggest that in this idea of the theology of the *goy*, linked to the idea that good and evil are joined in polarity, can be found the seed of a post-Holocaust theology which includes a void or deep negation as an aspect of the divine.

This approach to interpretation of the Holocaust finds support in the work of the contemporary thinker Edith Wyschogrod, who suggests that hasidism “brings to the fore resources that can be exploited to develop a postmodern theology of the Holocaust, one that is best characterized as a theology of deep negation.”⁸⁸² In her view, the understanding of hasidism demonstrated by Buber, Scholem and Idel are all important to a postmodern perspective. She holds that Buber’s reading of hasidism as exemplifying the human ability to sanctify through joy reflects the Enlightenment’s reliance on the importance of human will. It does not, however, reflect an understanding of absence in

⁸⁷⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 293-294.

⁸⁸⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 26-28.

⁸⁸¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 28.

⁸⁸² Edith Wyschogrod, “Hasidism, Hellenism and Holocaust”, pp. 301-321 in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* (Stephen Kepnes, ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 302.

the human-divine relationship, expressed in the Holocaust as human helplessness and divine silence, a divine absence from human affairs. She cites Scholem as having a fuller understanding of the negation within hasidism due to hasidism's awareness that the concentration necessary for prayer can be both a source of cosmic harmony and also a cause of the destruction of things, a depletion of the vital energy needed to support existence. She also points to Moshe Idel's work on kabbalism and hasidism, and his insistence that, contrary to normative Jewish doctrine, *devekut* can take the form of full union of the human soul with the divine fullness, both in early kabbalistic sources and later hasidism. The human soul, then, can plunge into the divine abyss and thus lose its way, in which case, the abyss cannot become the ground of "an ontological foundation", that is, the basis from which to build meaning into daily existence.⁸⁸³

Wyschogrod links this deep negation at the core of hasidic theology to its prekabbalistic foundation in neoplatonic thought. Pushing to the limit the Plotinian concept of the One as generative of the multiplicity of being yet also cordoned off from it, and thus beyond it, she holds that "this leads to the startling postmodern conclusion that the One and the nihil are nondifferent. Thus there is already deep, deep negation within the core of divine plenitude".⁸⁸⁴ In *kabbalah*, the *Ein-Sof* takes the place of the Plotinian One; the *sefirot* express the generative principle, and Plotinian idea of contemplation of the One is supplemented by the kabbalistic idea of repair of the divine order, *tikkun*, the task of human existence. Thus in *kabbalah*, the restorative process is contemplative but also ritual and ethical, bound up with Torah observance and mystical understanding of the individual letters. And in traditional kabbalistic myth, the deep negation is also cordoned off, either as a penultimate stage of understanding the divine or as a "realm of trial that the worshipper must surmount".⁸⁸⁵

Having established a deep negation at the core of hasidic/kabbalistic theology, Wyschogrod turns to the Holocaust experience and the theological interpretations

⁸⁸³ Wyschogrod, *Hasidism, Hellenism and Holocaust*, 312.

⁸⁸⁴ Wyschogrod, *Hasidism, Hellenism and Holocaust*, 313

⁸⁸⁵ Wyschogrod, *Hasidism, Hellenism and Holocaust*, 315.

associated with it. She suggests that the experience can be interpreted within the framework of a metaphysics of negation. The Holocaust was the intersection of an intradivine disaster --the utter absence of God -- with an historical event, which led to the dissolution of all meaning and the inability of words and language to give it meaning. Complete collapse of meaning is a marker of postmodern thought. Contemporary, that is, postmodern stories, exhibit a deep negation through their descriptions of “fissures in the ‘normal’ facades of existence”.⁸⁸⁶ Eighteenth century hasidic tales can be strikingly postmodern in that they do not unfold as a series of successive occurrences but can seem to take place outside of time. Thus, it may be possible to read these tales in a postmodern, post-Holocaust fashion, as texts of deep negation, stories of “cosmic disarray in which the categories of experience themselves are altered”.⁸⁸⁷ Wyschogrod is putting forward the very interesting suggestion that kabbalistic mythology and hasidic tales can, when considered from a postmodern perspective, resonate with the deep negation of postmodernity and thus point the way to finding meaning through the redevelopment of a post-Holocaust theology of Judaism. In this she echoes the implied view of Schachter-Shalomi, who, I maintain, uses hasidic tales to advance the development of a post-Holocaust theology that resonates with the contemporary inclusion of a deep negation at the core of existence. That theology points to an ethical posture of positive, relationship-based work with followers of other traditions, in order to heal and care for the earth and its peoples.

This idea of deep negation at the core of post-Holocaust theology, leading to a human-centered ethical approach, can be found in the work of another Holocaust thinker for whom the Holocaust was also a personal experience-Elie Wiesel. Born in Romania, Wiesel was educated in Torah and sacred texts and has been deeply influenced by both hasidism and existentialism.⁸⁸⁸ A survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, he subsequently lived and worked in France, Israel and the United States. Thus he has

⁸⁸⁶ Wyschogrod, *Hasidism, Hellenism and Holocaust*, 317

⁸⁸⁷ Wyschogrod, *Hasidism, Hellenism and Holocaust*, 318.

⁸⁸⁸ Ted L. Estes, *Elie Wiesel* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1980), 1-15.

personally experienced all the major events which have shaped contemporary Jewish consciousness in the late twentieth century. He enjoys unique status in the Jewish community, as a visionary and charismatic leader and witness to the Holocaust.⁸⁸⁹ His literary output uses biblical, midrashic and hasidic works to explore pre-Holocaust hasidism as a basis for the articulation a meaningful post-Holocaust theology.⁸⁹⁰

Wiesel develops his theology through stories, in the tradition of Rabbinic Midrash and hasidic tales, and builds it on the three pillars of Jewish thought: God, Torah and *Israel*. Wiesel's work struggles to affirm life "in the face of the overwhelming reality of death and despair."⁸⁹¹ As Berenbaum points out, the Holocaust represents for Wiesel a rupture with the Jewish past, and his "theological vision is of the void. Where previous Jewish theologians found some security in God and his revelations, in man and his creaturely status, and in Israel and its divine mission, Wiesel now finds an abyss of chaos, madness and radical insecurity", where there is a personal separation from God, a meaninglessness in life, and an absence of God in history.⁸⁹² Berenbaum states that, in the development of the corpus of his work, he shifts the theological center from God to the human spirit, "the communal Jewish spirit that lies with the memories of God's presence and His radical absence".⁸⁹³

Wiesel maintains the centrality of *Israel* and its mission without relying on an absent God. He accomplishes this through the forging of an additional covenant at Auschwitz. This covenant is not between God and *Israel*, but between *Israel* and its memories- of pain, death, God and meaning.⁸⁹⁴ The elements of this covenant are self-affirmation as Jews, solidarity, witness and sanctification of life. Wiesel, who is

⁸⁸⁹ Michael Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void: Theological Reflections on the Works of Elie Wiesel*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 3-8.

⁸⁹⁰ Estes, *Elie Wiesel*, 14-16.

⁸⁹¹ Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void*, 123.

⁸⁹² Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void*, 6.

⁸⁹³ Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void*, 124.

⁸⁹⁴ Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void*, 127-133.

antagonistic to the Christian myth, bases the solidarity of the Jewish people on their “dissent from Western civilization”.⁸⁹⁵ Jews in the post-Holocaust world have responsibility to bear witness- to the destroyed world of Eastern European Jewry, to the need to rebuild the world, and to the need to question constantly. In the depths of the emptiness of the void, the battle for meaning begins for the contemporary Jew, and that meaning is sparked by the affirmation and sanctification of life, both as survival and as the quality of that survival. Wiesel sees this as a continuation of the Sinaitic endeavour.⁸⁹⁶ Thus Wiesel’s theology stresses the importance of human’s relationships with each other, and the additional covenant speaks to ethics as well as theology.

6.5 A Post-Holocaust Ethical Metaphysics

Wyschogrod has also suggested that the Holocaust can be interpreted from the perspective of an ethical metaphysics.⁸⁹⁷ Pointing to the 20th century institutionalization of mass death through the horrors of nuclear annihilation and concentration camp (epitomized as “Hiroshima” and “Auschwitz”), she suggests that contemporary philosophy has failed to wrestle with the impact of these mass-death events on its main themes.⁸⁹⁸ In her view, the meaning of self, time and language are all affected. Western thought about death has been dominated by the interpretation of self as a “cognition monad”, a meaning of self which determines and is determined by the understanding of mortality and the process of dying as “requiring behaviour appropriate to a rational subject”.⁸⁹⁹ That is, “death is the coming to an end of a self conceived as a cognition monad”.⁹⁰⁰ The character of death is intrinsic to the formation of a fully self-conscious

⁸⁹⁵ Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void*, 135.

⁸⁹⁶ Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void*, 146-151.

⁸⁹⁷ Wyschogrod, *Hasidism, Hellenism and Holocaust*, 317.

⁸⁹⁸ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, ix-xiv.

⁸⁹⁹ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, xi.

⁹⁰⁰ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, xii.

existence. The social, political and cultural complexes that constitute mass-death events come into being when the unity of being is denied by those exercising power.

Auschwitz and Hiroshima ushered in a world of radically new, efficient forms of extinction, powered by new social and political means. This in turn opened up the structures of existence. It overturns previous conceptions of finitude, which were grounded on the premise that “individual selves are logically and ontologically prior to their social transactions”, a view which she suggests is no longer tenable.⁹⁰¹

Wyschogrod argues that, rather than conceive of the self as cognition monad, philosophy must postulate a transactional self, a self constituted *a priori* by social existence.⁹⁰² This means that the self can assume the standpoint of another, including acting as other to itself, by which it becomes a polarity of subjective I and objective me. It also means that death is an act which both bolsters the constitution of self and deepens the relation of self to other. Furthermore, once social existence is stabilized, self-restraint marks its stability and language expresses this self-restraint by its silent renunciation of violence (a phenomenological view of language rather than a functional one in which language is primarily referential or communicative). Thus, “an utterance includes not only its signification but the act of reaching across toward others”.⁹⁰³ Language and naming is a calling forth into social relationship, and words and names support the constitution of a social self which is linguistic, corporeal and transactional. The Nazis sought to destroy the self of their victims, first by elimination of names (identifying tattoos were numbers) and cynical use of words (“Arbeit macht frei” over the gates of Auschwitz implied productive work rather than slave labour), and then finally by death. Such depersonalization and lack of value associated with human existence is a phenomenon of our apocalyptic age, an age of mass death, and suggests that “selfhood ... is in transition from a psychological to an axiological or moral conception of the I

⁹⁰¹ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, 205.

⁹⁰² Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, 205-206.

⁹⁰³ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, 207.

pole”.⁹⁰⁴ Thus the man-made mass death of contemporary existence forces a rethinking of selfhood. In contrast to the self as cognition monad, which was valued by the way in which it faced its own death, Wyschogrod’s conception of a transactional self “exists as a bipolar unity: an I which is a discursive spontaneity and a me which is integrated through time into a relational field”.⁹⁰⁵ Yet, the impact of man-made mass death destroys the possibility of holding the poles in balance, because it emphasizes an objectified me pole. The social I then “demands that the whole human community, whose possible extinction is part of the formation of the I, persevere in existence. Postmodern selfhood must now be understood as living within the ambit of the tensions created by this demand”.⁹⁰⁶

This post-Holocaust reconception of selfhood as primordially social and linguistic rather than cognitive and monadic is built on the conception that an ethical metaphysics can provide a basis for meaning in the postmodern era. Although Wyschogrod does not cite the work of Emmanuel Lévinas in her discussion of the concept of self in an age of mass death, she points out that his perspectives permeate and influence her work.⁹⁰⁷

Born in 1905, Emmanuel Lévinas’ work spanned much of the 20th century, and he thus experienced the advent of man-made mass death. Building on a deep philosophical background as well as an extensive understanding of classical talmudic thinking, his project was to reverse traditional western metaphysical thinking about ethics. In his view, traditional western philosophy constructed ethics upon pre-established metaphysical foundations, whereas metaphysics should logically and properly be constructed upon ethical foundations. For Lévinas, western philosophy presupposed the existence of a consciousness that discriminates between the self and the other. Thus the one and the other are apprehended as distinct only to an observer who provides a reference point of view. But the possibility of incorporating the one and the other into a single point of view eliminates the radical alterity, or exteriority, of the other. Radical otherness derives from

⁹⁰⁴ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, 214.

⁹⁰⁵ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, 215.

⁹⁰⁶ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, 216.

⁹⁰⁷ Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*, xv.

a more primordial source, which lies beyond ontology and thus can never be adequately understood. This radical otherness is reflected in the world through the presence of other persons. Yet we can never know the Other, because all knowledge is self-knowledge. The intricate structures of our contemporary, overwhelmingly technological existence are integrated into a totality that imposes its own purpose upon individual life and is thus a vast extension of self. Thus, the problem of how to understand the Other must be rethought.⁹⁰⁸

For Lévinas, metaphysics reverses the self-aggrandizing structure of the totality, the ontological realm. The idea of the Infinite is placed in humans; it does not arise from any structure of the self. Thus it is a genuine relation with what is other than the self. This exteriority of the Infinite is experienced in social relation- when the face of the Other appears before us, it conveys the idea of the Infinite, and we experience an opposition to our own powers. For Lévinas, the face carries spiritual weight; it is the bearer of values and human personality. Discovery of the true exteriority or alterity of the Other lies in apprehending the appeal of the Other's defencelessness, when we abandon the will to power over the Other. Thus power, the destroyer of the Other, becomes justice, the impossibility of murder. The face of the Other has the form of law, for it commands us not to destroy. The epiphany of the Other commands an ethical relation, which is a command to action without intervening structures- action does not rest upon illuminating knowledge or preliminary reflection. The modality of the Other for Lévinas is always posited as the poor and the stranger, who appeals because there is no recourse, and with whom the relationship is direct and near. Thus the human encounter with God is of social origin; there can be no relationship with God apart from the relationship with other humans. But God is more than the goodness that is present when others are present to us. God is the mediator between humans, the fixed point outside of society from which

⁹⁰⁸ Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas(sic): The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), xxx-1

justice comes, the “necessary condition for justice, the interlocutor of the totality and all the relations that subsist within it”.⁹⁰⁹

Wyschogrod points out that Lévinas refrains from using religious language in his philosophical work, but it is clear that his themes arise from a religious perspective. He derives his emphasis on the unique relationship with the Other from talmudic sources.⁹¹⁰ In Lévinas’ view, authentic Judaism is not concerned primarily with the supernatural, but with moral interiority, its emphasis on the inner life, that is, bringing to light the relationship with the Divine as an ethical one. Thus, rabbinic wisdom runs as a countercurrent to contemporary life, which sees the world as everywhere transformed by human agency, no longer primordial, and which does not initiate a dialogue with God as did the ancients.

Lévinas was not a supporter of mysticism or the contemporary romantic perspective on hasidism; for him, “the uncontrollable seizure that constitutes the human experience of the numinous annuls the relation between persons that is the foundation for all ethical relations.”⁹¹¹ Rather, Judaism represents access to truth without ecstatic experience. It presupposes the value of consciousness, which resists the absorption by a reality outside the self that obliterates the distinction between the self and world. “The moral relation therefore reunites both self-consciousness and consciousness of God. Ethics is not the corollary of the vision of God, it is that very vision.”⁹¹² For Lévinas, authentic Judaism does not conceive of the relation between God and humanity as a communion of feeling in love, but a relation between minds, through the teaching of Torah.

⁹⁰⁹ Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 93-112.

⁹¹⁰ Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 176-219.

⁹¹¹ Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, 180.

⁹¹² Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, quoting Lévinas, 181.

Interest in and awareness of the work of Lévinas has grown exponentially over the last four decades.⁹¹³ Notwithstanding the antipathy of Lévinas's thought for hasidism and mysticism, as well as Schachter-Shalomi's absence of reference to the work of Lévinas, I suggest that Schachter-Shalomi's reading of some aspects of hasidic ethics does seem to be resonant with Lévinas' post-Holocaust ethical philosophy. In a discussion of the work of Reb Israel, the Maggid of Koznitz (1733-1815), Schachter-Shalomi examines the nature of the *yetzer ha-ra*, the evil impulse, and links it to renewal and relationship.⁹¹⁴ Interpreting a passage from Reb Israel's writing, *Avodat Yisrael* (*Tetsaveh*, 33b), he explains that the impulse to evil is Amalek, Israel's ancient nemesis. In the biblical story of Exodus, Amalek was the tribe that attacked the Jewish people from the rear, raiding and massacring Israel at its weakest point, before it reached Sinai. Using *gematria*, Schachter-Shalomi points out that in Hebrew, the word Amalek has the same numerical value as *safek*, "question or doubt", but question in the sense not of seeking understanding but in the sense of raising opposition and defiance. Following a common Hasidic theme, Schachter-Shalomi says that Amalek exists within people, generating insecurity of existence, weakening of faith and doubt of the relationship with God. While it is a destructive force, it is redeemable, by exchanging the rhetorical question for a true question, one which seeks understanding. Just as ancient *Israel* was enjoined to remember what Amalek did yet blot it out, the *yetzer ha-ra* can be considered a gift from God, a tool to be turned to the search for true understanding of the Divine-human relationship.

Reb Israel was also fond of illustrating his teachings with a quote from Isaiah 40:31, rendered somewhat literally as "But they who hope in YHWH shall change their strength. They will raise their organs as eagles..."⁹¹⁵ Schachter-Shalomi interprets this

⁹¹³ Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas*, ix.

⁹¹⁴ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 81-87. Note that my transliteration here follows that of Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion*, 608.

⁹¹⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 83. Note that Schachter-Shalomi also provides the more poetic and familiar King James translation: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;

passage as a reference to the common ancient belief that when eagles moult (raise their organs) they are renewed or reborn to youth, meaning they change their strength. Changing strength is what humans do when they serve God by using the energy freed up from turning the *yetzer ha-ra* to gain true understanding. He points out, however, that the passage refers to “they” who are renewed, not “he”. This reference to the plural “means that we are not renewed as one, self-contained being. We are not renewed in separateness but in relation.....Renewal is always a process of ‘togethering’, of partnering with something else”.⁹¹⁶ That “something else” is the energy of God’s creation, and it is also community. Being in relationship with community means that the various units within community, like the cells within an organ, link to each other in a common bond and destiny, helping each other to change and renew: “We are not alone, nor should we see ourselves as separate”.⁹¹⁷ Using another of Reb Israel’s tales, Schachter-Shalomi stresses the importance of learning to turn the *yetzer ha-ra* and renew oneself in relation and community by starting with the local unit, the small scale of daily activity, that is, “taking care of the local unit in order to benefit the larger organism”.⁹¹⁸

I suggest that this reading of hasidic ethics through the work of Reb Israel of Koznitz locates in hasidism an incipient ethical metaphysics which links the relationship with the Other to the relationship with the Divine. This could reflect Schachter-Shalomi’s emphasis on broadening the post-Holocaust necessity to enhance the relationship with non-Jews as well as broadening Judaism’s particularistic perspective to a more universal one.⁹¹⁹ Using the metaphor of humanity as a body, Schachter-Shalomi implies the need for this enhancement and broadening: “we Jews are the white corpuscles of this world ...

they shall mount up with winds as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”

⁹¹⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 85.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹¹⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Wrapped in a Holy Flame*, 86.

⁹¹⁹ Shaul Magid, “Jewish Renewal and the Holocaust: A Theological Response”, pp. 59-68 in *Tikkun*, March-April, 2006, www.tikkun.org.

go where there is infection ... when the Nazis became powerful, they attacked us and so we became the ones who contained them".⁹²⁰ However, it could also reflect a potential limitation of hasidism for the development of a post-Holocaust theology. It may be that hasidism can provide tales for illumination through interpretation and discovery of embedded ethical concepts, but can it provide the philosophical ballast needed to develop the postmodern ethical theology that appears to be emerging in Jewish Renewal? Yet, as Byron Sherwin points out, Jewish ethics has always been a form of theological ethics, and presupposes that ethical guidance "ultimately derives from a divine source that is communicated to us in acts of revelation", in contrast to secular ethics which rejects the notion that "any guidance from beyond the human or natural realm is possible or even necessary".⁹²¹ Nor does Jewish ethics discount the contribution of rationality, intuition or emotion to shaping ethical and moral teachings: "For many Jewish ethicists and legalists, God has the initial word, but human beings have the last word".⁹²² Sherwin points out that the sixteenth and seventeenth century Jewish mystics saw God as a part of each person, so that how we relate to other humans does not merely reflect how we relate to God; rather, our relation to other humans *is* how we relate to God. The mystical underpinning of hasidism, then, is essential to the emerging ethics of Jewish Renewal. It may be that that mystical underpinning is more congenial to some postmodern minds than the philosophical approach.

In summary, then, bridging the past and future of Judaism in the post-Holocaust era requires a post-Holocaust theology, of which a key component is repair of the covenant. At the level of concrete, day-to-day behaviour and activity, the repair can be accomplished through the redevelopment of traditional Jewish law and observance, into the more contemporarily oriented and holistic institutions of *psychohalakhah* and *eco-kashrut*. At a deeper theological level, a more universal understanding of covenant is necessary to balance the traditional Jewish particularity. Hasidic wisdom can be invoked

⁹²⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Credo of a Modern Kabbalist*, 239.

⁹²¹ Sherwin, *Toward a Jewish Theology*, 115-128.

⁹²² Sherwin, *Toward a Jewish Theology*, 121.

to reorient the understanding of the Divine to include the apophatic approach of negation, which opens up the theology to recognition of and discourse with other spiritual paths, provides a valuable role for Judaism in the continuing evolution of the human community, and orients it to postmodern sensibilities. This deeper, more universal understanding of covenant depends on its derivation from hasidic ethics and mysticism, but may also be given some ballast by looking to a potential grounding in contemporary Lévinasian philosophy, although that is not pursued in the work of Schachter-Shalomi.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: A Postmodern Judaism

Jewish Renewal reconstructs Jewish theology within the larger postmodern theological context. Kevin Vanhoozer suggests that: postmodernity is perhaps best construed as an “exodus” from the constraints of modernity, as a plea to release the other, as a demand to let particulars be themselves rather than having to conform to the strictures and structures of the prevailing ideological or political system.⁹²³

For Vanhoozer, postmodernity has a mission, which is to bring about both new conditions of experience and a new “shape of living”, that is, a change in the habitual patterns of speech and action which define the spirit of a culture.⁹²⁴ Graham Ward argues that modernism is linked to specific conceptions of time, space and substance, and the postmodernism “explodes the ideologies constructing these conceptions”.⁹²⁵ This in turn opens up possibilities for a postmodern theology, which both informs, shapes and moulds postmodernism and is in turn influenced by it. In his view, at the end of modernity, western culture and society has come to a divergence of paths. The “primrose path is the aesthetics of nihilism” as expressed in various contemporary forms such as flagrant sexuality, increased and increasingly sophisticated drug use, and a culture of virtual realities.⁹²⁶ The more difficult path is that of faith.⁹²⁷

⁹²³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Preface” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See also his “Theology and the condition of postmodernity”, pp.3-25, for a good overview of the elements of postmodernity. This book also provides an interesting discussion of types of postmodern theology, but it is limited to a largely Christian perspective.

⁹²⁴ Vanhoozer, “Theology and the condition of modernity”, 23.

⁹²⁵ Graham Ward, Introduction, xvii.

⁹²⁶ Ward, Introduction, xliii.

7.1 Postmodern Jewish Theology

Sherwin Byron Sherwin has identified a postmodern trend in American Jewish theology that emerged in the 1990s.⁹²⁸ This postmodern perspective exists in tension with the remnants of four other trends in American Jewish theology. Since the middle of the nineteenth century an inter- and intra-denomination theology has developed. The early ideological and theological differences between Reform and Conservative Judaism have now been reconciled to a significant extent, with both embracing the idea of continuous revelation and changing *halakhah*. Orthodox Judaism strongly discourages halakhic alteration, based on its belief that revelation comes from God directly to the people *Israel* in the form of Torah.⁹²⁹

Since the middle of the 1950s, an existential theology has existed. This approach questions the meaning of human life and Jewish existence, recognizing that the horrors of the twentieth century invalidated rationalism and humanism as valid foundations for Jewish life and thought. There is a focus on the implications of a personal commitment to Judaism, and on the divine-human relationship as a means to overcome the loneliness, absurdity and alienation of twentieth century post-World War II life. It seeks to articulate an authentic contemporary Judaism, rooted in classical Jewish religious sources and ideas.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁷ For interesting discussions on the implications of postmodernity on the study of religion and theology, see Gavin Hyman, "The Study of Religion and the Return of Theology", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 72, 2004:195-219, and also "Theology in Modernity's Wake", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 74, 2006:7-15. And for a somewhat contrary view, particularly of postmodernism, see Robert A. Segal, "All Generalizations Are Bad: Postmodernism on Theories", in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 74, 2006: 157-171.

⁹²⁸ Byron Sherwin, "Thinking Judaism Through: Jewish Theology in America", pp.117-132 in *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism* (Dana Evan Kaplan, ed.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹²⁹ Sherwin, "Thinking Judaism Through", 120-124.

⁹³⁰ Sherwin, "Thinking Judaism Through", 124-126.

A third trend is Kaplanian thought, which emerged toward the middle of the twentieth century. It sought to blend American philosophical pragmatism with a view of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization. It severed the Jewish concepts of God, Torah and *Israel* from their traditional meanings, giving them more functional definitions. In this view, God functions as a process that operated in the universe; Torah and Judaism are expressions of the creative religious genius of the Jewish people; and the covenant is a vocation rather than the expression of *Israel* as a chosen people.⁹³¹

By the early 1970s, a deeper awareness of the Holocaust and a stronger commitment to the state of Israel could be detected in American Jewish thinking. Some Jewish theologians incorporated the civil religion of American Jewry into their teachings. Others responded to the enormity of the Holocaust with either a reaffirmation of an abandonment of a supernatural God. Still others focussed on the relationship between evil and the abuse of human freedom.⁹³²

Sherwin holds that at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first, a group of American born and trained Jewish theologians now perceive that none of enlightenment rationalism, science, secularism, or post-Holocaust Jewish survival is “considered to be a sine qua non for either human or Jewish meaning”.⁹³³ Rather, there is an attempt to recreate an understanding of Judaism for the twenty-first century using the understanding of classical Jewish sources as well as the insights of the Jewish mystical tradition. The task of Jewish theology is seen as providing an alternative to the secularization of American Jewish life, and the way in which a Jew can live the commitment to the covenant with God is particularly of concern. In consequence, there are contemporary formulations of views on revelation, ethical behaviour, and the philosophy, interpretation and application of Jewish law.

The overall goal of postmodern Jewish theologians is to produce a recreated yet authentic and traditional, though non-orthodox, contemporary American Jewish theology.

⁹³¹ Sherwin, “Thinking Judaism Through”, 126-127

⁹³² Sherwin, “Thinking Judaism Through”, 127-128

⁹³³ Sherwin, “Thinking Judaism Through”, 128.

Such a theology aims to reinterpret the theological, mystical, spiritual, ethical and halakhic elements of Judaism, and apply them to the existential, social and communal problems encountered by American Jews.⁹³⁴ Some of these thinkers have pointed out that, while Judaism traditionally focuses more on praxis than doxis, there are periods when doxis is very important.⁹³⁵ In fact, Norbert Samuelson holds that an emphasis on practice is a more contemporary phenomenon, and that the major conceptual orientation found in classical rabbinic thinking stresses the importance of dogma in Judaism. He points out that Jewish dogma recognizes that belief cannot be commanded but is voluntary; thus it sets the parameters for speculation, specifying what Jews ought to doubt rather than what they ought to believe.⁹³⁶

7.2 Jewish Renewal's Resonance

Jewish Renewal reconstructs Jewish theology using strategies that resonate with the postmodern ethos, yet are profoundly Judaic. By offering a post-Holocaust reinterpretation of the classical theological building blocks of Judaism, God/Torah/*Israel*, and the associated concepts of creation/revelation/redemption and covenant, it echoes the strategy used by the ancient sages who rebuilt Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, and follows a centuries-old Jewish practice of reinterpretation of scripture and texts. The reinterpretation is accomplished within the postmodern framework of paradigm shift and the multiple perspectives afforded by other religions, contemporary science, and an ecological awareness. In his works, Schachter-Shalomi moves among various frames of reference to explain his ideas, such as the kabbalistic, sufi, scientific and psychological frames. Seen by some as syncretic, these conversations with other

⁹³⁴ Sherwin, "Thinking Judaism Through", 128-9.

⁹³⁵ See, for example, Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990); Arthur Green, *Seek My Face, Speak My Name* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1992); and Byron Sherwin, *Toward a Jewish Theology*.

⁹³⁶ Norbet Samuelson, *Judaism and the Doctrine of Creation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 15-19.

traditions are, I maintain, more in the nature of dialogues and dialectics. For example, the dialogue between Jewish Renewal and New Age, which was active in the 1980s, was helpful because New Age thinking spoke to the postmodern sensibilities of the time.

Jewish Renewal derives authority for its reinterpretation by using talmudic midrashic technique to locate seminal ideas in antecedent Jewish sources, particularly early hasidism. Like medieval and modern Jewish thinkers, Renewalists look to and interact with contemporary intellectual ideas, particularly those labelled New Age, to stretch the boundaries of those sources. Yet like postmodernists, Renewalists favour the mystical approach, in this case that of the early hasidic strain of Judaism, as the source of still vital and viable ideas which can be used to bridge modern to postmodern Jewish thinking and reconstruct Jewish theology. At the same time, its initiatives with regard to psychohalakhah are eminently Jewish reinterpretation, and also bridge the modern and postmodern as well as reflecting the latter's emphasis on the concrete rather than the abstract.

In emphasizing the imaginal and encouraging Jewish expression in the arts and literature, Renewal reflects the appreciation of early hasidism for the world of "sacred fantasy" and its importance for redemption through the repair of the concrete world.⁹³⁷ Renewal looks to hasidism for a toolkit with which to develop this imaginative faculty. This toolkit provides techniques for worship which include chanting and embodied participation through body movement, as well as quotidian practices of prayer and observance which deepen the sense of immanent Divine. At the same time, this recognition that it is important to develop and strengthen the imaginative faculty, the world of *medammeh*, because it is essential to supplement the growth of the intellect, *sekhel*, is in keeping with the appreciation of some postmodernists for the role of imagination as the foundation of ethics and meaning in the contemporary situation.

Finally, Renewal's strategy of expressing its reconstructed theology in its liturgy follows a long rabbinic and mystical Jewish tradition of liturgical evolution which

⁹³⁷ Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratsla*, (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 343.

reflects and expresses contemporary Jewish theology. Jewish liturgy encompasses both individual and community expression, with daily, weekly and annual practice. Jewish Renewal strongly reflects the importance of such frequent and regular expression, because it recognizes the importance of the experiential. This again resonates with the postmodern valuing of the concrete over the abstract.

Jewish Renewal describes creation as a continuously unfolding process of universal interconnectedness, encompassing good and evil as well as progressively more developed universal individual and progressive levels of consciousness. God is the intuitive human understanding of this process, reinforced experientially by worship through communal prayer, which also reinforces inter-human bonds and a sense of unity. Blending openness to contemporary scientific theory with a Jewish mystical perspective, Renewal reflects the postmodern emphasis on nature and humanity's relationship to it. This is expressed particularly through Renewal's emerging psychohalakhic code.

Both in its pantheistic interpretation of God and its application of the Gaian approach, Jewish Renewal reflects but goes beyond the ancient Jewish conception of unity. While stating that God is both immanent and transcendent, Renewal's view of God is closer to the Eastern conception of unity as union or identification of apparently distinct essences. As Charles Vernoff holds, the principle of unity "grounds the entire structure of the Judaic worldview".⁹³⁸ Yet that worldview conceives of the Divine unity as transcendent. Nevertheless, the notion of unity as the identification of apparently distinct essences "does play an auxiliary role in Judaism", via *kabbalah* and hasidism.⁹³⁹ Renewal's understanding of the unity of God is openly pantheistic, thus elevating the auxiliary to the predominant, and going beyond even the main body of hasidic teaching but following the radical pantheism of Chabad.

Renewal understands revelation to be a continuous transformative process, accessed through Torah, which is a channel to the divine source of all knowledge and a

⁹³⁸ Charles Elliott Vernoff, "Unity", pp.1025-1032 in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, (Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, eds.) (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 1025.

⁹³⁹ Vernoff, "Unity", 1031.

tool for developing higher levels of consciousness and awareness of the Divine. Ancient rabbinic and mystical tradition provides an interpretive base from which to encompass a postmodernist Gaian perspective of the universe and work out meaning and a potential postmodern world view. The stress on interpretation of Torah to understand reality as well as the expression of that reality through the action of *mitzvot* and an updated (psycho)halakhah, echo the postmodernist's understanding of reality and knowledge as fluid, plastic and humanly constructed.

In the Renewal view, redemption, expressed through the ideas of *mashiach* and *tikkun*, is the hope for a better future and the urge to create it. This innate and continuous human urge, aided by development of the imaginative faculty, leads to progressively higher levels of collective and individual consciousness within which spiritual adepts can engage in repair of the world. Such an appreciation of the power and complexity of consciousness and of the important mediating role of imagination in the creation of reality not only resonates with the postmodern ethos, it also provides a platform for the developing Renewal understanding of the ancient Jewish idea of the divine-human covenant. That post-holocaust covenant expresses the people *Israel's* particular role in encouraging humanity to adopt and develop a more universal ethics-based theology in which the relationship between self and other is paramount. Thus, it reflects the Levinasian search for a meaningful and more universal Judaism after the holocaust, while speaking to the postmodern need to avoid descending into "apocalyptic emptiness"; that avoidance is supported by encouraging the emergence of an ethical imagination.

In reflecting both a postmodern and a profoundly Jewish approach to its reconstruction, Jewish Renewal theology appears to conform to the four criteria proposed by Sherwin to evaluate expressions of past, present and future Jewish theologies.⁹⁴⁰ It is authentic in that it looks to traditional Jewish texts as a basis to recreate the tradition. These texts are examined and restated by thinkers such as Schachter-Shalomi and Waskow, who are rabbis fully conversant with the full range of Jewish tradition and

⁹⁴⁰ Sherwin, *Thinking Judaism Through*, 129. The four criteria are authenticity, coherence, contemporaneity and acceptance by the faith community.

learning. At the same time, the traditional texts to which they look are largely, although not exclusively, hasidic, thus reflecting the mystical tradition. These are reinterpreted to set out a coherent theological perspective that embraces the key areas of traditional Jewish theological speculation and expression: God, Torah, the people *Israel*, creation, revelation, redemption, covenant, theodicy, worship, ethics, *halakhah* and *mitzvot*. Jewish Renewal finds in traditional mystical thinking the seeds of ideas that, when viewed through a more universalist lens, resonate with contemporary sensibilities and can give shape and meaning to daily Jewish life. In developing this posture, Jewish Renewal's reconstructed theology speaks to a renewed vocation for *Israel*, and finds communal acceptance through the adherence of its followers to the institutions associated with the movement. Nevertheless, there are tensions both within Jewish Renewal's theology, and between that reconstructed theology and contemporary Jewish theological trends. Within Jewish Renewal, the emphasis on the ability to read texts in the original Hebrew, the value placed on individual creative and artistic expression, and the encouragement of meditative techniques to develop spiritual adeptness at various levels of consciousness all point to abilities that may be beyond the reach of many individuals. This suggests the potential for a theological elitism which would seem to be contrary to the more populist thrust of the hasidic antecedents on which the theology builds. Indeed, there is tension between two key versions of hasidism that Jewish Renewal looks to as the source of ideas. The monistic Chabad hasidism is strongly mystical, emphasizing a radically pantheistic (or panentheistic) and thus impersonal understanding of God, with the mystical contemplative experience being of a divine life force that pervades all existence. Bratslav hasidism is on the other end of the continuum, adhering to a more "personalistic, even volantarist theology", in which faith is valued more than contemplation and mystical union.⁹⁴¹ In this version of hasidism, the universe is dualistic, with the border between God and the world clearly demarcated.

⁹⁴¹ Joseph Weiss, "Mystical Hasidism and the Hasidism of Faith", pp.277-285 in *God's Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism* (Shaul Magid, ed.) (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 279. For another interesting examination of tensions within hasidism, which looks at other types of hasidism, see Magid's *Hasidism on the Margin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

This tendency to mine for insights among versions of hasidism that are theologically in tension may reflect a certain limitation of the emergent Renewal theology, as it also appears to look solely to hasidism and mysticism to support its emergent postmodern ethical approach, rather than incorporate the theological ballast that could be provided by postmodern philosophy, such as that of Levinas. Yet, this tension may also reflect the incorporation of complementary polar opposites that is characteristic of Jewish theological discourse.

There is also a tension between Renewal's thrust towards a universalist global ethics and its particularist Jewish perspective, which is a contemporary reflection of the tension between universalism and particularism in Judaism that has existed throughout the modern era. By offering its reinterpretation of Jewish theology within a global framework which emphasizes an ethics of global healing, ecological spirituality and interreligious cooperation, Jewish Renewal appears to support the idea that a common global ethics is both possible and desirable and that spiritual cooperation among practitioners of different religions is the vehicle for bringing about such an ethics. As Gavin D'Costa has discussed, this idea owes much to the work and influence of Hans

Kung, but emerges from the totalizing modernist perspective.⁹⁴² If the idea is examined with a postmodernist lens, it becomes clear that it is more effective to engage in constructive discussion and negotiation on specific questions, rather than aiming for a global ethics. In addition, each of the participants in the discussion must be able to critique the other's traditions and moral perspectives respectfully yet deeply, which requires a level of mutual understanding that is not easily achieved. It also implies limits on the degree of interreligious cooperation as some traditions may be seen by others as so structured as to seem the cause of problems rather than the solutions. Finally, profound and respectful interreligious discussion of moral issues may induce changes, both minor

⁹⁴² Gavin D'Costa, "Postmodernity and Religious Plurality", pp.132-143 in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Graham Ward, ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001). D'Costa outlines and analyzes Kung's position on a global ethic, while also critiquing it.

and major, in the traditions of either perspective. Thus, interreligious ethical cooperation to develop a global ethics needs to be approached carefully.

I do not wish to imply that Jewish Renewal's approach is cavalier or even naïve. Rather, I suggest that in the works of Schachter-Shalomi there is evidence of an awareness of the potential issues and limitations. The emerging ethical perspective of Jewish Renewal appears to crystallize around a universalist, ecologically oriented ethics of healing as well as a universalist, relational ethics of the Other. In the latter, it echoes a long line of modern Jewish thinking from Moses Mendelsohn to Martin Buber. It certainly deserves further study.

In stressing its non-denominational approach and aligning itself so strongly with the mystical strain of Judaism, Renewal theology stands in tension with other contemporary Jewish theological trends- denominational, existential, Kaplanian, as well as some contemporary post-Holocaust thought. Yet it emerges out of a need to develop a post-Holocaust Jewish theology. As Magid points out, Renewal's approach does not dwell on the anti-semitism that led to the Holocaust; rather, the Holocaust becomes an opportunity to salvage something useful which can change "Jews, the Torah, the world and the Jewish mission".⁹⁴³ Jewish Renewal offers its universalist, ethical approach as a renewal of the particularist covenant, but a different kind of covenant, and a solution to Judaism's post-Holocaust dilemma.

7.3 A "Post-monotheistic" Judaism?

Jewish Renewal seems to be pointing the way for the evolution of North American Judaism in the twenty-first century.⁹⁴⁴ In the face of intermarriage and assimilation, the number of adherents to Judaism is predicted to decrease, and the trend

⁹⁴³ Shaul Magid, "Jewish Renewal and the Holocaust", <http://www.tikkun.org/magazine/tik0603/magid>

⁹⁴⁴ Shaul Magid, "Jewish Renewal and American Spirituality", *Tikkun*, May-June, 2006:58-66, 66.

toward secular and nondenominational identification with Judaism will increase.⁹⁴⁵ Yet those liberal and heterodox, postmodern Jews who remain committed to Judaism are searching for satisfying ways to belong to community and to function Jewishly in their daily lives. In this they reflect a postethnic American approach, in which a cosmopolitan orientation is melded with an appreciation for the ethnos.⁹⁴⁶ Some are turning to theology, as its function is to make such living possible, and in choosing among the available theological options, they will gravitate to theological positions that best meet their psychological needs.⁹⁴⁷ The Jewish Renewal movement's emergent, reconstructed Jewish theology speaks to this postmodern need of individuals to see themselves as autonomous spiritual seekers who understand and adapt ideas from various religions, reflecting their cultural upbringing as members of the "global village".⁹⁴⁸

Magid suggests that Jewish Renewal theology could be considered "post-monotheistic" rather than pantheistic or monistic, because it is an attempt to retain monotheism's "basic superstructure" yet jettison its negative consequences (such as exclusionist tendencies) and replace them with a more universalist and tolerant spirituality.⁹⁴⁹ As I have demonstrated, that spirituality is rooted in mysticism. Thus Jewish Renewal's reconstructed theology may be the harbinger of the "mystical society" that is emerging from postmodern culture, according to Phillip Wexler.⁹⁵⁰ Such a society is marked by a sense of unity and relationship, and resacralizes daily experience.

⁹⁴⁵ Bruce Phillips, "American Judaism in the Twenty First Century", pp.397-415 in *American Judaism*, (Dana Evan Kaplan, ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹⁴⁶ David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

⁹⁴⁷ Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 30-33.

⁹⁴⁸ Arthur Green, *Judaism for the Post-Modern Era* (The Samuel H. Goldenson Lecture; Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, December 12, 1994), 7.

⁹⁴⁹ Magid, *Jewish Renewal and American Spirituality*, 66.

⁹⁵⁰ Phillip Wexler, *The Mystical Society*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 1-3.

David Novak claims that “today’s Jews are just too worldly for Kabbalah to become the locus of our theology”.⁹⁵¹ Yet from the seedbed of kabbalistic and hasidic monism, Jewish Renewal theology provides the postmodern Jewish spiritual seeker with a language and a theology of creation, revelation and redemption which reintegrates the divine and natural realms, embraces the Divine as an “inner Oneness”, simultaneously immanent and transcendent, and recognizes the “spiritual legitimacy of other faiths”.⁹⁵²

I suggest that Jewish Renewal thinking may well permeate mainstream Jewish thought in the decades to come, and thus it would become an important contributor to the redemption of *Israel* after the *Shoa*, to use Peter Ochs’ expressive and poetic description of post-Holocaust renewal of Judaism. Ochs suggests that the broader “contemporary disillusionment with Enlightenment rationalism” is mirrored within Judaism by its own spiritual dissipation after the Holocaust.⁹⁵³ In what he admits is an over-generalization, Ochs portrays the Jewish people today as “predominantly in a condition of limping-along: limping in particular on the two worn-out legs of a Jewish liberal universalism and a Jewish anti-liberal orthodoxy”.⁹⁵⁴ He maintains that both these thought patterns adhere to the reasoning patterns of modernity, and, for Jews, both have died with the Holocaust and the passing of modernity. These approaches must be mourned, and a new perspective developed for Judaism to renew itself theologically. He calls for the use of a postmodern logic to aid in renewing Judaism today, just as “previous stages of Jewish renewal have been aided by the Jewish use of Platonic, certain Muslim, Aristotelian and most recently Kantian models of logic”.⁹⁵⁵

Ochs points out that in accessing postmodern, particularly European, thought, Jews can strengthen the power of Judaism to redeem itself (that is, to renew itself).

⁹⁵¹ David Novak, *The Election of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 18.

⁹⁵² Green, *Judaism for the Post-Modern Era*, 6, 21.

⁹⁵³ Peter Ochs, “The Renewal of Jewish Theology Today: Under the Sign of Three”, pp. 325-348 in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Graham Ward, ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

⁹⁵⁴ Ochs, “The Renewal of Jewish Theology Today”, 325.

⁹⁵⁵ Ochs, “The Renewal of Jewish Theology Today”, 335.

Continental postmodern thought, such as that of Levinas, has brought to the attention of western philosophers the “eruption of negation and not-being into the complacency of their secular, ego-logical project”.⁹⁵⁶ This negation was recognized centuries ago by Jewish sages and rabbis, but has been forgotten by Jews in modernity. Thus, “peering into the abyss, not looking into it or rationalizing it, Jews are able to encounter the God to whom they cried in Egypt”.⁹⁵⁷ Ochs holds that rabbinic Judaism recognized the importance of destruction to renewal, expressing it in terms of “*tichayat hametim*, the resurrection of the dead”.

Postmodern and post-Holocaust Judaism, then, can find renewal if it: recognizes that Judaism’s modern dialectic is dead; recognizes that the resources of contemporary critical scholarship can help to understand this death and point the way to rebirth; looks to traditional Jewish texts and historical scholarship to discover in contemporary terms the living dimensions of Judaism; and expresses the learning from these texts in a pragmatic reading which can frame an authentic and contemporary Jewish life. This pragmatic, textual based reasoning needs to be complemented by the partnership of another pole of Jewish thought, that a renewed life requires acceptance of the work of the “*ruach hakodesh*, the Holy Spirit”.⁹⁵⁸ As Ochs says, in every generation, Judaism’s redeemer lives. As it was after the exodus from Egypt, the establishment of the canon of Torah after the destruction of the First Temple, the development of the Mishnah and Talmud after the destruction of the Second Temple, and the establishment of the teachings of *kabbalah* after the various losses of the diaspora, the renewal takes the form

⁹⁵⁶ Ochs, “The Renewal of Jewish Theology Today”, 336.

⁹⁵⁷ Ochs, “The Renewal of Jewish Theology Today”, 337.

⁹⁵⁸ Ochs, “The Renewal of Jewish Theology Today”, 340. Note that Ochs offers his essay on the renewal of Jewish theology as a way of characterizing the work of two contemporary communities of thinkers: philosophers and text scholars, and Jewish, Christian and Sunni Moslem theologians. One, formally grouped as the Society for Textual Reasoning, seeks “to articulate a new form of Jewish discourse beyond the medieval philosophic and modern historicist models”. The other, the Society for Scriptural Reasoning, seeks to “examine together the parallel forms of reasoning that emerge out of philosophically disciplined readings of holy scripture by members of each religious sub-community”. See pages 340-341.

of the classic Jewish themes, God, Torah and *Israel*. The renewal is always “a name of God”, delivered as the word of God in the “renewal and regiving of Torah” which provides the Jewish people, *Israel*, with a new “theopolitical reality and a new rule (*torah*) of practical reasoning (a complex of *chokhmah*, *binah*, *daat*; or of *halakhah* and *s'vora*).⁹⁵⁹

For Ochs, through the work of a continuum of Jewish thinkers including rabbis, scholars and thinkers from various Jewish movements, denominational as well as non-denominational, Judaism is starting to be reborn in the postmodern period. This new Judaism is emerging out of “two destructions: one is the literal Destruction of European Jewry in the Shoa; the other is Jewish assimilation to a modern secularism that has now lost its hegemony in the West”. Jewish Renewal, through Schachter-Shalomi’s paradigm shift, its emphasis on scriptural interpretation, and its building on the mystical tradition to develop a postmodern practical reasoning focussed on healing and transformation, belongs on that continuum.

⁹⁵⁹ Ochs, “The Renewal of Jewish Theology Today”, 325-6.

Appendix: ALEPH Statement of Principles

(Taken from the Aleph Website, Feb 7, 2006)

► **Who is ALEPH? What is ALEPH?**

FOUR WORLDS, EIGHTEEN AFFIRMATIONS, ONE COVENANT: ALEPH STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

We of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal strive to open ourselves to awareness of the sacred in all of existence. We strive to create Jewish paths of prayer and meditation, study, communal life--practice, and public action that embody this outlook.

We see ourselves in a crucial position at these times of paradigm shift and are committed to help develop a spirituality through which Judaism can transform itself to continued viability in the service of tikkun olam -- the healing and balancing of this planet. Together we affirm principles and values that flow together from the Four Worlds of Being, Knowing, Relating, and Doing:

In the world of Atzilut, Being:

1. We are committed to the search for a deeper and higher understanding of the spiritual realities in our lives and of our cosmic purposes.
2. What/Whom the traditions experienced as transcendent God we meditate on and worship in ways that honor both the tradition and our intuition as to how we are addressed by that God in the present.
3. We see the human spirit and the Divine as one evolving process that calls upon

us all for the interaction we call Godwrestling ("Yisrael") and "Gathering the Sparks."

4. We intend to open ourselves to the transformation of consciousness and action that is resulting from our living in a time when the Feminine is emerging.

In the world of Briya, Knowing:

5. In the sacred texts of the Jewish people and the writings of Jewish spiritual teachers of previous generations we find enormous wisdom and insight that draw on Eternal truth and continue to have great potential to aid human beings in their quest for personal growth, empowerment, and healing -- as well as those elements that are historically limited and need to be transcended. We will study, teach, and make accessible these texts and writings with all those who wish to encounter them, wrestle with their content and meaning, and decide what to draw on and what to leave behind.

6. Among our guides to interpretation of Torah are the Prophetic, Kabbalistic, and Hassidic traditions as they are now being transformed in the light of contemporary feminist spirituality, process theology, and our own direct experience of the Divine.

7. We are committed to consult with other spiritual traditions, sharing with them what we have found in our concerned research and trying out what we have learned from them, to see whether it enhances the special truths of the Jewish path.

In the world of Yetzira, Relating --

8. We are committed to foster a safe environment for spiritual growth in which what we are learning about the human psyche and spirit is honored, and through

which we enable the self to embody the Presence.

9. Our communities strive to be collective and egalitarian in leadership and decision-making.

10. Women and men are full and equal partners in every aspect of our communal Jewish life.

11. ALEPH welcomes, includes and recognizes the sanctity of every individual regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We recognize respectful and mutual expressions of adult human sexuality as potentially sacred expressions of love, and therefore we strive to create communities that include and welcome a variety of constellations of intimate relationships and family forms -- among them gay, lesbian, and heterosexual relationships as well as single life-paths.

12. We will reach out toward including all who seek but have not yet found a spiritual home in the Jewish community or a satisfying connection to the Jewish people and its traditions and teachings.

In the world of Asiyah, Doing:

13. In order to heal the world, we seek to re-balance the power relationships among human beings and all other species and aspects of the Earth, as well as among races, peoples, faith-communities, classes, genders, age groupings, and other human groups so that each can live in shared peace and dignity. We will ourselves treat with respect and open-mindedness those who belong to other peoples and walk other paths than our own, even if we feel compelled to oppose their actions in the world. These efforts we view as integral to Jewish spirituality and action.

14. We believe that the healthy expression of Jewish people requires a vital self-

governing Jewish community in the Land of Israel (which in our generation has taken the form of the State of Israel); Jewishly vital, varied, and creative communities in many places throughout the world; and a continuous and open-hearted interchange between all these communities. We will try to embody such connections in our individual lives and in building the networks of our communities.

15. We welcome with surprise and excitement the discovery that God's will for our generations of Jews is that we learn to live in what we understand as the Land of Israel face to face with our cousins the children of Abraham and Hagar through Ishmael. We support every effort to do so in mutual recognitions of each other's right to freedom, self-determination, security, and peace --- as part of our own share in the task that all peoples face in this generation, of learning to share in peace and freedom the great unboundaried earth.

16. We intend to treat with respect other Jews and other Jewish communities whose approaches to Jewish life differ from our own, even if we feel compelled to oppose their statements or their actions.

17. We are committed to applying all of these values and principles to the renewal and revitalization of our personal and communal ceremonies, liturgies, rituals, life-paths, and spiritual practices, and to our processes for collective decisions-making and collective actions.

18. We will help in the formation of communities based on these values and principles.

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