

# JEWISH SPIRITUALITY

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FROM THE  
SIXTEENTH-CENTURY REVIVAL  
TO THE PRESENT

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Arthur Green

27. See my "On Translating Hasidic Homilies," *Prooftexts* 3 (1983) 63–72.

28. In the continuation of the same passage, however, it turns out that the individual worshiper is to see himself as *kohen*. This shift is a good example of the ambivalent relationship between the democratization of Jewish spiritual life and the promulgation of a new charismatic elite, both of which are typical of early Hasidism. The passage quoted here contains plays on both the words *qorban* (QRV, "draw near") and 'olah ('LH, "raise up").

29. The idea of prayer as spiritual sacrifice is quite ancient. It may be traced to Scripture itself (Hos 14:3) and is found in the Qumran literature (1QS 9:4; 10:6). A more radical expression of this idea, in which the worshiper places himself on the metaphoric altar, is found in Romans 12:1. See M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985). Compare with Philo *On the Special Laws* 1.270 and *Who Is the Heir* 184. Rabbinic sources also see prayer as spiritual sacrifice, 'avodah sheba-lev (*Ta'anit* 2a). *Numbers Rabbah* 18:21 attributes to Rabbi Simon the view that the worshiper at prayer sacrifices his own fat, blood, and soul. This motif becomes a favorite of later Jewish moralists; see I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1982) 2:183–246.

30. For the *Zohar's* treatment of the Temple cult, see Tishby's *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2:183–246. The *Zohar's* views on this topic are the subject of a doctoral dissertation currently in progress by Rabbi Seth Brody at the University of Pennsylvania.

31. Cf. the discussion of *zaddiqim* and preachers as healers in Piekarz, *Bi-Yemey Zemihat ha-Hasidut*, 120ff.

32. *Gittin* 62a, *rabbanan iqueru melakhim* ("rabbis are called kings"), apparently often confused in later quotation with *Nedarim* 20b, *man mal'akehey ha-sharet, rabbanan* ("Who are the angels? Rabbis?").

33. Kalonymos Kalman Epstein of Cracow (d. 1823), author of this work, was a leading disciple of Elimelech of Lezajsk.

34. *Ahavat Shalom* contains the sermons of Menahem Mendel of Kossov (1768–1826), progenitor of the Kossov/Vyznitsa dynasty.

35. Wilensky, *Hasidim*, 2:210.

36. Quoted in *Orot Yisra'el* (Jerusalem: n.p., n.d.), a collection of Ruzhyn teachings, p. 152.

37. See n. 12 above.

38. See M. Himmelfarb, "From Prophecy to Apocalypse: The Book of the Watchers and Tours of Heaven," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Green (World Spirituality 13; New York: Crossroad, 1986) 145–65. On the prophetic links of the early Enoch literature, see G. W. E. Nickelsburg, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981) 575–600. M. E. Stone has a very interesting note on prophetic models for Enoch in his "Lists of Revealed Things," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright*, ed. F. M. Cross et al. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976). [My thanks to M. Himmelfarb for her help with this note.]

39. See A. J. Heschel, "Inspiration in the Middle Ages," in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, Hebrew Section (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950).

40. See the discussion by M. Idel in his forthcoming *Religious Experience in the Thought of Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

41. Cf. the parallel sources quoted by R. Schatz-Uffenheimer in *Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1968) 175ff.

42. See the discussion in the forthcoming work by M. Idel (*Religious Experience*), which serves to update the treatment in Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Quietistic Elements*.

43. M. W. Levinsohn-Loewy, *Sefer Hashanah: The American Hebrew Yearbook* (1938) 113–27.

44. See Scholem, *Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 300ff., quoting the kabbalists R. Meir Ibn Gabbai and R. Isaiah Horowitz.

45. See the sources quoted in my *Tormented Master* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979) 320–5.

## HaBaD: The Contemplative Ascent to God

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THE HASIDIC MOVEMENT, which originated in the eighteenth century, was one of the most exciting spiritual phenomena in Jewish history, in its vitality, continuity, variety, and scope. This multifaceted movement, the successor to the mystical tradition of the Kabbalah, attempted to embody its mystical teachings within new social frameworks. It contained a number of different trends, which developed and changed during the course of its two-hundred-year history by adopting distinctive and varied shapes.

Among the major streams with a distinctive character and influence was the HaBaD movement. HaBaD—from the initials of the Hebrew terms *hokhmah* ("wisdom"), *binah* ("understanding"), *da'at* ("knowledge")—was the name of the movement established by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745–1813), who was among the principal disciples of R. Dov Baer (the "Maggid") of Miedzyrzec (d. 1772). R. Shneur Zalman's doctrine developed in dialectical relationship with that of the Maggid, while he established a unique Hasidic community in Belorussia and the Ukraine in the 1780s. His book *Liqqutey Amarim*, generally known by its popular title, *Tanya*, was first published in 1797. This work, considered the ideological manifesto of this school of Hasidim, was a kind of spiritual handbook—alongside Joseph Karo's halakhic code, *Shulhan 'Arukh*. It intended to expound the mystical ideas underlying the quest for God, while clarifying the implications of Lurianic Kabbalah for Hasidic worship.

Hasidic literature had two main concerns: (1) the formulation of a systematic mystical theosophy, based on kabbalistic thought and its Hasidic interpretation; (2) the propagation of Hasidism and detailed guidance in the Hasidic path of 'Avodat Ha-Shem (a central Hasidic term, usually translated

as "divine service" or "divine worship," but understood as including not only prayer or other strictly "religious" activities, but all aspects of the individual's life in both the activist and spiritualist version, according to Habad).

Because of this attempt to bridge the gap between theoretical mystical truths and their practical implementation, the entire system of Habad reflects the dialectic between spiritualism and activism, and the interplay between mystical interests and social-ethical concerns. This is because its teaching is concerned not only with speculative theology but also with the role of spiritual values and the pneumatic orientation in the daily life of the individual member of the community. It also addresses the implications of a mystical way of thought for a comprehensive religious world view, entailing commitment to the observance of Torah and *mizwot* and strict loyalty to the commandments of the halakhah.

In Habad, as in other Hasidic movements, one may find simultaneously the two contradictory tendencies of quietistic spiritualism and aspiritual activism. Along with abundant expressions of quietistic, spiritual concerns, seeking self-abnegation in the act of passive contemplation, withdrawal from worldly involvements, and communion with God, there is an activist element, demanding involvement in the material world in terms of practical *mizwot* and Torah study, on the one hand, and relationship to the concrete world on a social level, on the other. The uniqueness of Habad literature, which is an outstanding attempt to bridge mystical truths and their practical implications, lies in the formulation of a complex dialectical theosophic framework, which grants an important place to both aspects of religious experience.

Its essential innovation lay in the formulation of a religious outlook concentrating upon divinity: its essence, its nature, the stages of its manifestations, its characteristics, its perfection, its differing wills, its processes, the significance of its revelation and the possibilities of its perception—that is to say, a theocentric approach whose assumptions are formulated beyond the bounds of kabbalistic esoterism. These new spiritual truths were very carefully examined against the traditional commandments and accepted halakhic approaches. Great care was taken to present the new ideas as an attempt to formulate a new religious consciousness, rather than a new religious praxis, and as shedding light on the hallowed, traditional praxis from a new theocentric viewpoint.

In the light of the new relationship between God and the world, between finitude and the Infinite, the religious life was given a new spiritualist perspective and theocentric orientation. All was to be directed toward the realization of the divine will and the deciphering of it in the various levels of existence, far beyond the limits of the halakhic command and the ethos that

follows from it. Contemplation of both the hidden and the revealed divine essence, of the nature of its connection with the world, the significance of its wills and of the immanent law governing its activity in the cosmos, are understood by Habad as the essence of the divine worship demanded of humanity, encapsulated in the term *yihud* ("unification").

Habad stresses the dual character of this unification—the upper *yihud* and the lower *yihud*. The upper unification (*yihud ha-'elyon*), is identified with the spiritualistic worship of God, involving negation of the world and its inclusion within the Godhead by a deliberate effort to transcend the boundaries of existence, time, and space. *Yihud ha-tahton*, the lower unification, signifies the drawing of divinity into the lower realms, making it dwell in the world through Torah and *mizwot* and divine worship in concrete reality. As a result of the essentially dialectic structure of Habad theosophy, which is concerned with both spiritual transcendence of the world and divine immanence in the world, and which is directed in principle toward the two goals of the double divine will and the dual-focused worship on the part of human beings, one may easily misinterpret its world views, drawing far-reaching conclusions on the basis of one book or one chapter, when in fact these relate to only one aspect. Indeed, the spiritualist, quietistic dimension and the concrete, aspiritual activist dimension are organically interwoven with each other.

Habad teaching, found in scores of books and tractates, is extremely multifaceted. The fundamental dialectic lying at the basis of this teaching cannot be adequately expressed by one or another narrow perspective on the broad scope of interrelationships among the various dimensions. Its uniqueness must be fathomed by examining its teachings and writings against the broad perspective of its spiritual context, including the kabbalistic tradition, on the one hand, and its social and historical background, on the other. In examining the Habad tradition, one must bear in mind that the books, sermons, documents, and letters were all written in a sociocultural context in which the halakhic and kabbalistic associations were taken for granted, so that a passing allusion was sufficient to make its meaning clear.

In terms of the historical context, one must take into account that the views of Habad were formulated at the end of the 1780s and in the 1790s, following the death of R. Dov Baer of Miedzyrzec, during a period of severe attacks from both within and without. On the one hand, other Hasidic groups were severely critical of the Habad interpretation of the Maggid's teachings and of the Hasidic and kabbalistic heritage;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, this was the period of the sharpest attacks by the opponents of Hasidism, the Mitnaggedim, against Hasidism in general and Habad teaching in particular.<sup>2</sup> These two factors decisively influenced the presentation and

formulation of spiritualist teachings, as the consideration of avoiding exacerbation of the antagonisms among the rival camps was always a primary one for Habad leadership.

The picture presented by Habad literature reveals a living spiritual entity in process of becoming and in its self-questioning. These are not anthologies of kabbalistic teachings or polished volumes of Hasidic theory, but works expressing the vivid religious experience of those seeking closeness to God, struggling with established paths as well as breaking through to new ones within the framework of kabbalistic thought and its Hasidic interpretation.

Habad literature is concerned with four primary subjects: (1) the doctrine of Godhead (*Torat ha-Elohut*)—the formulation of a mystical theology; (2) the doctrine of the soul (*Torat ha-Nefesh*)—descriptions of the psychology of religious service; (3) divine service (*Avodat Ha-Shem*)—guidelines for the mystical spiritualist worship of God and the shaping of states of mind expressing religious obligations over and above the time-hallowed halakhic practices, which were seen as self-evident; (4) the suprarational (*Avodah sheme'ever le-ta'am we-da'at*)—confrontation with the religious problematics which follow from the contradictions among mystical axioms, their Hasidic interpretation, the demands of the halakhah, and personal experience.

Each of these areas was subject to extensive discussion based on the kabbalistic heritage, and exciting attempts were made to find the ethical, rational, and intellectual equivalents to the mystical tradition, testing the limits of rational thought and attempting to break through to the transrational. In contrast to these daring attempts in the areas of thought and speculation, we find in Habad, as in Hasidism generally, absolute and strict loyalty to the demands of the halakhah, combined with extreme conservatism in everything pertaining to religious praxis and the traditional ethos, which revolved around the study of Torah and the observance of the *mizvot*. However, despite its conservative appearance, there is no doubt that religious life underwent a far-reaching spiritualistic transformation. Such subjects as the relationship between spirituality and materiality, self-resignation, ecstasy, communion with God, contemplation, and faith, were all subject to detailed discussion, sharp polemics, precise examination, and daring definitions.<sup>3</sup>

### Mystical Theology

The Habad theory of divinity is rooted in an acosmic understanding of the world, in which there is only one true reality, the divine, every other reality being seen, in the final analysis, as illusory. The doctrine of acosmism denies

the substantial reality of the world's existence and claims the exclusive existence of the divine entity. In this acosmic approach, the world has no independent existence, and the entire cosmos is dependent on one being which negates the independent reality of its parts, and even their totality, the world, so that there is only one true reality—the divine reality.

For there exists in the world no entity other than Him . . . for there is no true substance other than Him. For if, because of the vessels and the concealment, other entities appear to be substantial, in reality they are not substantial at all. For He, may He be blessed, is the substance of all substances, and there exists in reality no other substance but Him. (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, I:2)<sup>4</sup>

The doctrine of the absolute nature of God's existence, which denies the true substance of every other being—expressed in the formula, "there is nothing apart from Him"—lies at the center of Habad theology. It provides the basis for a profound encounter with the meaning of the existence of the world—which seems to contradict the axiom of the exclusivity of divine existence—and an analysis of its revealed and concealed, or true and apparent, essence. Its acosmic doctrine is rooted in a challenge against the limits of human perception, or against the empirical view and rational criteria for judging reality—assuming that there is only one reality, the divine reality that fills the entire cosmos, and that any other apparent reality is an illusion. "From the standpoint of the Infinite, blessed be He, all the worlds are as if literally nothing and nihility" (R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 320). Acosmism is based on the divine viewpoint according to which all other existence is lacking in substance. This understanding is based on the distinction between existence (*qiyyum*) and substance (*yeshut*): things apart from divinity exist but are insubstantial, there being only one true substance—the divine Being. Any perception of reality as possessing substance in itself is merely short-sightedness, illusion, or falsehood, as in the following sharp words of R. Shneur Zalman: "Even though it appears to us that the worlds exist, this is a total lie" (*Torah Or* [1899], Tisa, p. 86b).

Existence is itself perceived merely as an image, a kind of radiance which emanates from the divine source, which is nullified relative to its source, and has only an illusory existence, being entirely dependent on the divine substance that sustains it (cf. R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 155, 174). Existence, in which God as a tangible entity is absent to human perception, is thus transformed into an insubstantial illusion, while divinity becomes the only substantial reality, even if it is not within the immediate field of human perception. In the light of the postulate of the exclusive existence of God, Habad worship centers on the understanding of apparent, visible reality and

the uncovering of the underlying divine essence, while apprehending the former's illusoriness. In other words, humanity is called upon to uncover the divine unity of reality, beyond the seemingly real cosmos.

The Habad theological position that "there is nothing but Him" (R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 155, quoting Deut 4:35) relates to the claim that there is no separate, independent existence apart from the one all-encompassing existence—that of the Infinite—thereby adding an important dimension to the idea of divine immanence. This is a major theological concept that was discussed and developed in all branches of Hasidic literature and occupied a central place in the doctrines of all Hasidic teachers. A fundamental axiom of Hasidism generally is that God is immanent in all things and that the world only exists by virtue of the immanent divine reality that it embodies. Habad adds to this the argument that the Infinite incorporated within itself the entire cosmos, in its substance, being itself the only truly existing substance, and all other existing things being mere manifestations thereof. Reality exists within divinity, while divinity penetrates all of existence, which is unified through it and exists by virtue of the divine substance ('*azmut*). Therefore, God and visible reality are in fact one. Reality has no independent existence and does not bring about multiplicity within God. Divinity contains everything, and there is nothing that exists in a substantial way outside of it.

All created things in the world are hidden within His essence, be He blessed, in one potentia, in coincidentia oppositorum (*hashwa'ah*), for He is the Creator of all, and there is nothing outside of Him, and nothing is concealed from Him, and He, may He be blessed, is equally present throughout the entire creation, that is, that all of reality must exist by virtue of His essence in all its details, for He brings them about into existence, and by His potency they came to be revealed. (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, III:29)

The independent existence of separate things (i.e., seemingly nondivine reality) is related to God's perception of these separated things. If, from the divine viewpoint, the realm outside of divinity itself is without separate or independent existence, then the understanding of reality as separate from God is itself illusory: "In the Holy One, blessed be He, the created things and the world are not a distinct entity from Him, heaven forbid, for there is nought but Him, be He blessed, and all things exist only by the truth of His existence" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, III:7).

This radical pantheistic position served as a platform on the basis of which one could distinguish between true and illusory existence, grounded in the apprehension of existence as rooted in one essence, whose different dimensions are all aspects, phenomena, or projections thereof. This substance is

God, and the world is nothing but a revelation or manifestation of His essence. The conclusion to be derived from this view is the belief in the unity of God throughout the entire cosmos, and the awareness of the nullification of the substantive existence of the world.

Habad Hasidism taught seven basic axioms concerning the relationship between God and the world:

1. *Pantheism*. God is the exclusive substance, and the world is nothing but a mode, projection, or expression of this infinite being. The existence of the visible world depends on the existence of that element which sustains it—God.

2. *Acosmism*. From the divine viewpoint, the world is lacking any distinct or discrete existence. Creation does not constitute a change within God (see R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 219), since "everything is like vanity and nihility compared to His essence and substance (*Mahut we-'azmut*)."

3. *Creation*. The divine being is the creator, originator, and sustainer of the world at all times, and the world is dependent on Him, as it is constantly being created (see *Tanya*, 144, 231).

4. *Immanence*. Divinity is present everywhere in absolutely equal substantiality. The distinction from the human point of view between "finite" and "infinite" is epistemological and not substantive. "For the being and substance of the Infinite, blessed be He, is equal in the upper and lower realms" (see *Tanya*, 143). From the divine point of view, there is total equivalence of all the various manifestations of existence, both physical and spiritual, the only distinction being on the level of human perception thereof.

5. *Panentheism*. All that exists is within God; however, "the worlds do not take in Him any essence at all, in terms of His truth, for there is nothing but Him" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, III:22). Divinity is present in reality, which is united with it, since the realm outside of God has no independent, substantive existence.

6. *The world as manifestation of God*. The world is an essential and necessary manifestation of God. One cannot speak of God's existence without God. God incorporates the world within Himself.

It is known that the Infinite, blessed be He, is called "Infinite Perfection," that is, that His glory, be He blessed, encompasses the entire process of emanation, from the very highest to the very lowest level. . . . And He, may He be blessed, is present in every detail, from the head of all levels to the smallest worm in the sea . . . and He brings them into existence, divides them and creates everything with His power, be He blessed." (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, I:6)

7. *Dialectical reciprocity.* To the central assumption of Habad theology—"the life and existence of the worlds which live and exist come from His potency, in His own substance, may He be blessed, and there is nothing else but Him, for there is nought without Him" (*Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, 4)—one must add the dialectical principle that God has no separate existence without the world, because the world—which is nothing but a manifestation of the substance of God—is understood as an expression of God's infinite perfection and of His desire for self-perfection, both in its substance, which is united with God and in its real manifestations, which are separate from it.

Underlying these assumptions is the question of the nature of divine presence in the world and its causes, which constitute the background to a panentheistic-acosmic world view which claims that everything which exists is in God, while simultaneously denying real existence to the world.

The panentheistic-acosmic viewpoint is expressed in the Habad concept of coincidentia oppositorum (*hashwa'ah*), which defines the absolute divine unity in all existence, or the understanding of the substantial equality of divine existence in all worlds. According to Habad acosmic doctrine, the character of divine existence in the world implies the absolute unity of the divine in all aspects of being or the substantive equality of divine existence in all the worlds, despite the apparent difference. The unity of the divine is not a simple one, but is rooted in the equivalence of those opposing, different natures which constitute reality. This substantive equivalence of divine reality in all of existence, both in principle and in action, is expressed in the concept of coincidentia oppositorum (*hashwa'ah*). *Hashwa'ah*, which is the dynamic aspect of the concept of unity or its practical translation, expresses the essential interdependence between the created and the divine reality. It implies that all attributes, including their opposites and contradictions, share a common root equalizing them with the Infinite, in such a way that differences are nullified. This point of contact between the finite and the infinite, between God and creation, in which reality shakes off its multiplicity and reaches toward nihility and abnegation, and in which all existing things are equalized in their root, is the subject of the acosmic orientation and mystical consciousness of Habad. *Hashwa'ah* is the development within Habad of the kabbalistic and Hasidic concepts of "the attribute of nothingness" (*midat ha-ayin*),<sup>5</sup> the element within the divine which allows for contradictions, in which the specific attributes of various elements are negated and equalized in their being, and within which all changes from one state of being to another occur. *Hashwa'ah* is the equivalent of coincidentia oppositorum—the dialectical characteristic of "the existence of two opposites in one subject," which is the true meaning

of unity. The dialectical law of the union of opposites and their merging in infinity becomes a basic law, applicable to all the worlds from the divine point of view, expressed in the term "the power of equalization" (*koah hashwa'ah*), which "includes all the diverse things of the world in one potency."

Equalization is a dialectical concept which, on the one hand, defines the nature of the existence of the world within divinity and, on the other hand, describes the nature of the presence of the divine substance in the different aspects of existence. "All the worlds in all their details are included in the power of His equalization" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, IV:22). "And He, blessed be He, is their power, in the aspect of His equalization and His perfection, blessed be He, which encompasses all the parts of the world in one potential and in equalization" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, I:14). "But this is generally called His attribute of flowing into all the details of all levels in the aspect of equalization" (*Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, II:30).

The concept of the power of *hashwa'ah* is used to describe the divine substance as encompassing all aspects of existence—a view known in the study of religions as panentheism—and is also identified with the process of transition from unity to differentiation, or the drawing down of the divine substance into various aspects of existence. However, the uniqueness of the Habad approach lies in its presentation of the "power of equalization" as the dialectical axis on which the two principal processes of divine existence take place—the transition from infinity to finitude, and the transcending of finitude in infinity:

For the entire intention is that His equalization, blessed be He, be revealed in actuality, that is, that all of reality, in all of its levels and all of its details, should be revealed, and that nevertheless they be unified and connected in their value, that is, that they be revealed in their differentiated essences and that nevertheless they be united." (*Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, IV:5).

The divine intention is that, simultaneously, the coincidentia oppositorum be revealed in its details and be united at its source. The manifestation in detail of *hashwa'ah* signifies the transition from infinite to finite, from nihility to existence, while its unification in the divine source means the transcendence of the finite in the infinite. The dialectical relationships between the finite and the infinite, the revealed and the concealed, the existent and the divine, are manifested in the process of coincidentia oppositorum, which expressed the union of opposites and the dynamic relationship between them. The Lurianic conceptions explaining the inner law governing divine life—abundance and contraction, withdrawal and

self-expression—took on a new meaning in their Habad interpretation, which anchored them in the two-directional process of coincidentia oppositorum.<sup>6</sup> This process—parallel to the active dimension of divinity and its being, uniting opposites in which finite and infinite are made equivalent—became a governing principle in Habad dialectics in general.

Acosmism, which denies the reality of the world and argues that the “apparently-separate-from-God” appearance is, in fact, identical with the manifestation of the divine substance in the cosmos, leaves unanswered the question of the transition from the infinite to the finite, or of the active motivation of the process of creation and the reason for the world’s existence. Habad theology’s answer to this question is rooted in the concept of manifestation of the divine wholeness. The aim of creation is the fulfillment of God’s will to create a separate, nondivine reality, which is in fact illusory. The purpose of this step is the manifestation of divine perfection within the aspect most opposed to its spiritual being—the depths of material reality, the world of separation and limitation, or in kabbalistic terminology, the world of opposition and of *qelipot* (“shells”). The transition from abstract being to that which exists in actuality takes place because of the divine will to manifest His perfection, as the divine perfection implies “inclusion of all the opposites”: “for He is called the perfection of all, and we call perfection only that which is made through encompassment of all opposites, as is known” (*Avodat ha-Lewi, Wa-yehi*, 77). Divine perfection requires the existence of its opposite for the sake of its own encompassing quality: this opposite was made through creation. Creation is understood as a means of attaining divine perfection, because it manifests the formation of “the inclusion of opposites”:

The entire principle of the creation and emanation of the worlds is that He, may He be blessed, is of the quintessence of simplicity, and one may not attribute to Him anything belonging to the realms of existence and limitation, and we see the coming into existence of the worlds, which emanated in the aspect of limitation and being, which is the attribute of descent. And this is in order to reveal His perfection, precisely through the opposite. . . . But all these aspects only pertain from the point of view of the worlds, but not from that of His substance, for He is absolutely simple, and there is none but Him at all. . . . For in terms of His own substance, may He be blessed, He is infinitely, immeasurably distant from these aspects, so that His intention, may He be blessed, was that His unity and His uniqueness, blessed be He, be manifested, even in terms of these aspects, through the existent and the limited, and then His perfection will be revealed, for He is the perfection of all, for the essence of perfection is that even those opposites which are opposed to one another be made one, as is known. (*Avodat ha-Lewi, Wa-yehi*, 74; cf. R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 317)

The creation of the world is understood as the bringing into being of the divine opposite, which was required for that realization of perfection conditional upon the inclusion of opposites. Divine perfection can be revealed only through the manifestation of the divine unity in its opposition and the inclusion of the opposites in oneness. The assumption that “the revelation of every thing is through its opposite” (see R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha’arey ha-Avodah*, II:10) became a universal principle pertaining to the realms of spirit and matter. The second, related principle was that divine perfection depends on the existence of the opposites and their transformation into their divine antithesis. The assumption that “the essence of (divine) perfection is revealed precisely through distance and the opposite” conveys the quintessence of the dialectic of relationships between God and the world, as the existence of the world becomes a condition of the revelation of Godhead and its full realization, just as divinity is the absolute condition for the existence of the world. This view of the relationship between the reason for creation and the manifestation of divine perfection is very close to the pantheistic idea, which sees the cosmic process as the actual coming-into-being of God or the manifestation of aspects of the divine being which are only expressed in creation.

In the Habad conception, creation and reality are understood as stages in the process of becoming of God, as the manifestation of the divine perfection demands the cosmic process which makes it possible for divinity to be revealed in all its dimensions and aspects. However, this is not a one-time or unidirectional process, but a dialectical one, as God’s perfection and His manifestation are conditional on the transformations from the infinite into the finite and back again into the infinite: “For this is the purpose of the creation of the worlds from infinity into finitude, that they be transformed back from the finite into the infinite” (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, wa-yeze, 44).

One must distinguish between two kinds of transformation. The first transformation, from divine infinite substance into finite essence, is the process defined as the manifestation of *hashwa’ah*. The latter transformation, from finite being back to infinite being, is defined as *yihud* (“unification”) or as the restoration of the coincidentia oppositorum to its source. This double dialectic is the aim of the divine will and the way to the manifestation of His perfection within the finite and negation of the finite at one and the same time: “For the essence of His intention is that His coincidentia be manifested in concrete reality, that is, that all realities and their levels be revealed in actuality, each detail in itself, and that they nevertheless be unified and joined in their value, that is, that they be revealed as separated essences, and that they nevertheless be unified and joined in their value”



(R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, IV:5). Divine perfection is expressed through this paradox of unity and multiplicity at once; divinity achieves its perfection by the double and contradictory law of manifestation through opposition and discrimination, on the one hand, and restoration of unity and incorporation, on the other—processes known in kabbalistic terminology as “contraction” (*zimzum*), “breaking” (*shevirah*), and “restoration” (*tiqqun*).<sup>7</sup> However, whereas in the Lurianic Kabbalah both “breaking” and “contraction” take place in the theogonic realm, with which humanity is uninvolved, and only *tiqqun* belongs in the human realm, in the Habad system humanity takes part in both processes, since neither is ever completed and both are understood as continuous processes: “But His essential intention, may He be blessed, was not manifested at the time of the Creation, for His essential intention was that there be further revelation . . . for the essence of the manifestation of this aspect is through the service of man” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, V:15; cf. IV:24).

The worship demanded of human beings for the realization of this divine perfection as the unification of opposites is anchored in the response to the double divine will—of the becoming of the finite as an expression of the divine will for manifestation and actualization, and the return of existence to its source and its negation as an expression of the divine will to be concealed and annihilated. Humans are called to draw divine existence into the very depths of the material world through their service of Torah and *mizvot* (and “service through transformation,” for the select few), on the one hand, and, on the other, to return the finite to its divine source by the worship of negation (*bittul*), elevation of sparks, communion with God and ecstasy. These two tendencies—the drawing of divinity into the finite and the annihilation of the finite within God—are indiscriminately intertwined, and the divine intention is realized only by the fulfillment of the two contradictory wills, which express the paradoxical lawfulness of the union of opposites. This form of worship, which draws its inspiration from both divine wills, is focused on the “finite” (*ha-yesh*)—its true essence as against its revealed appearance; its lofty source as against its mundane manifestation; and its acosmic truth as against its cosmic appearance. Reflection upon these different relationships of “finite” and “infinite,” both from the divine and the human point of view, is at the focus of Habad thought.

The theological relation between *ayin* and *yesh*—the “mystical nihil” and the “finite,” or between God and the world, parallels the dialectical relationship between substance and manifestation, which is also the dominant relationship among all these opposites.

Godhead—that substance which gives life to the cosmos in all its manifestations—cannot in itself be revealed. Its only possible appearance is by means of “clothing,” “instruments,” or “concealment”—that is to say, through finitude and the world. The relationship between the two dimensions is one of total mutual dependence: the expression of substance depends on the existence of tools for its manifestation, whereas the very existence of this manifestation is dependent on the substance that brings it into existence. The fact that substance and manifestation are two separate categories, while at the same time interconnected, is emphasized. There is no manifestation without substance, and substance cannot be understood without manifestation. This is so even if manifestation does not necessarily express the substance, while the independent existence of substance does not depend on its manifestation.

Divinity, which according to the acosmic axiom is the only true essence, requires the creation of vessels for its expression. The process of creation of vessels is that of the formation of the finite, the finite being tested against these two categories of substance and manifestation. The substance of the cosmos is the divine essence itself, while its appearances seem to be its total opposite, because they embody differentiation and separation rather than the unification of the divine. The revealed cosmos exemplifies finitude, limitation, and discrimination, as opposed to the infinite, unlimited nature and unity of the divine being. The relationship between these two categories in the becoming of the cosmos—substance and manifestation—is a changing dialectic relationship, dependent on human acts and consciousness. The revealed cosmos expresses the divine purpose of revelation through contradiction, and apprehension of the substance of true being, despite its contradictory external appearance, is the fulfillment of the divine intention. Humanity is called upon to recognize these two categories, while annihilating manifestation within substance.

The main requirement of Habad divine service is to recognize these two approaches in terms of which reality is to be perceived. In order to define clearly the distinction between these two dimensions, Habad coined the two expressions *koah ha-yesh* (the potency of the finite) and *gilluy ha-yesh* (the manifestation of the finite). The former relates to the essence of the true connection between God and reality, to the divine will to bring about the reality, to the divine life within reality which sustains it at every moment, the causality of the coming into existence of the finite, etc. The latter relates to the manifestation of this potentiality and the embodiment of the revealed finite, as they are understood from the human point of view of concrete reality. Humanity is called upon to bridge the gap between the divine point of view, “which even in its aspect of absolute finitude is the aspect of His



substance, may He be blessed" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, IV:26)—that is, the identification of material reality with the divine substance—and human empirical experience, which teaches us that material reality has a distinct, separate essence. The "potential of the finite," which is identified with the divine substance, was transformed into "absolute existence" after many concealments—that is, was transformed from divine potential to "hiddenness" and "opposite"—because of the divine will to self-manifestation.<sup>8</sup> Added to the basic assumption concerning the divine essence of materiality is a distinction between this essence being *in potentia* or being realized. Its being carried out in action—the becoming of the cosmos—takes place by contractions. However, the separate and distinct essence the cosmos formed by this process of *zimzum* exists only in terms of human perception and not from the divine point of view.

He, may He be praised, is equal in heaven and on earth, for finitude does not conceal for Him, in spite of the fact that He is the creator of all and through Him they act, and He exists in all details of the levels. Nevertheless He, may He be blessed, is alone, without distinction, in terms of His potency of paradox, which is drawn from the potency of his equalization, which may do anything, to bring into existence and to give life, without any concealment or distinction at all. All this is from His point-of-view, may He be praised, but from our point-of-view existence appears as a separate and distinct substance. (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, III:10)

A double paradox lies at the basis of this mystical theology. The first paradox relates to the understanding of Godhead as both united and divided. Indeed, it is defined by the arational duality of its being: "two contradictory opposites which cannot be comprehended by the human mind." This paradoxical duality uniting opposites underlies the unity of the divine: "As He is infinite, may He be blessed, and He is completely one and all division comes from Him, may He be blessed, nevertheless He is absolutely simple . . . and understand this well, and remember this rule, for this is the root and basis of the unification" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, I:11).

The second paradox involves the understanding of emanated reality as bereft of divine essence, on the one hand, and divinity as united in reality, on the other hand: "Therefore they are called emanated, for they are a new existence unconnected to His essence, for He, may He be blessed, is without all these, and is nevertheless immanent in them" (*Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, I:13).

The paradox of simultaneous unity and multiplicity and of existence and nihility is an expression of the more general problem of immanence and transcendence, with which kabbalistic thought had been concerned for

generations, and which acquired a new dimension in Habad thought. The acosmic outlook transcends the ranking of existence within the divine reality, because of the principle that divinity is the one and exclusive essence and that nothing exists apart from it. Duality, change, differentiated reality, and limitation are all nullified within the Infinite; they are merely imaginary, existing only from the point of view of created beings, while from the divine point of view all existence is totally equalized within the divine essence.

At the same time, because of the obvious difficulty in a simple identification of visible being with the totality of the divine essence, there must be a quantitative, if not a qualitative, ranking of this substance. This is accomplished by postulating the existence of a realm of His essence unapprehended by human beings: "For He, blessed be He, is absolutely equal even from the point of view of the worlds [i.e., immanence], but the potential of His equalization is neither known nor perceived, and is remote from apprehension [i.e., transcendence]" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, V:19). The conclusion to be drawn from this acosmic-immanentist argument concerning the equivalence of the forms of existence of God throughout the cosmos is thus qualified by the insistence on the inability of the human understanding to apprehend the "power of equalization" or by the contention of divine immanence.

Here we are not referring to transcendence in terms of substance, which distinguishes between various aspects of the divine essence (i.e., a concealed God and a revealed God), but transcendence of consciousness. This is because in acosmism, which recognizes one divine essence, the distinction between divinity and its appearances or emanations has no reality, since from the divine point of view all is one, and any differentiation exists only from the human point of view. Thus, any such differentiation exists only in perception and not in substance—the former being associated with the mistaken, illusory human point of view, the latter being connected with the absolute, unitary divine point of view. As we have said, the main emphasis is on the idea that the human's limited perception, which cannot apprehend the unity of the divine, may not lead one to an approach that suggests a change in the divine substance on its various levels. In other words, the understanding of divinity as transcendent is simply the outcome of the human's limited perception; divine transcendence then becomes an object of perception rather than a substantive reality. In Habad terminology, "He who surrounds all worlds" (*sovev kol 'almin*—R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 134–36) is a concept relating to the transcendent aspect of divinity in the sense of his nonmanifestation to human perception or awareness (see

R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-yihud weha-Emunah*, IV:9, 21), whereas in the kabbalistic perspective this concept refers to the divine light which breaks out of the boundaries of limited existence (vessels) and contact with the material and the world, because it is unable to tolerate its limitations.

"He who fills all worlds" (*memale' kol 'almin*; R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 111, 142) refers to the immanent aspect of the divinity or, in kabbalistic language, to the divine being which is condensed within the "vessels," within finite existence. However, because of the claim that this limitation has no ontic status from the divine viewpoint and that the "vessels" exist only within human thoughts, there is no substantial distinction between the two.

The uniqueness of the Habad conception, which yearned to decipher the divine unity within reality in terms of its acosmic assumptions, lies in its expression of full awareness of the cognitive transcendence in which the divinity is enshrouded, a transcendence that is expressed in the perception of reality as seemingly without divinity, despite the fact that the opposite is the case. The reason for this polarity in the perception of God, which may be defined as a tension between immanence (in actuality) and transcendence (stemming from the limitations of human comprehension), is rooted in its dialectical theology, which subjects the relationships of humanity and God to the realms of contradiction and paradox.

This perception of reality is based on two contradictory assumptions. In terms of God's true existence, or "from the divine point of view," the divine is everywhere immanent. There is absolute equivalence among all the different manifestations of reality. The only distinction stems from the level of human perception, which is able to stand the divine manifestation in its contracted form but not in its fullness. The confrontation with the paradox between immanence (the theoretical, the substantial, the unfelt, the longed-for in the formula "The whole world is filled with His glory" [Isa 6:31], and no place is empty of Him") and transcendence (which one experiences and at the same time denies) or that between truth from the divine point of view ("for the worlds are not perceived by Him as substance at all, for in His truth, may He be praised, there is naught but Him at all," that is, the acosmic truth) and the limitations of the sense perceptions (which perceive in the world a separate being, separating between humanity and God) is solved the moment that the concealed is transformed into the object of faith, and the revealed, the concrete, and the empirical are transformed into illusion. The refusal to submit to the limitations of sense perception and the creation of different methods for the transformation of concrete reality into something insubstantial, meaningless, and illusory, lie at the very foundation of the spiritual service of God. The fundamental Hasidic outlook, which argues that the sense of distance between humanity and God is

nothing but an illusion, lies at the basis of Habad doctrine, which confronts it from an ontological and epistemological viewpoint and wishes to understand both the nature of the divine closeness and the essential meaninglessness of his distance, by means of a dialectical mysticism. *This mysticism transforms transcendent existence, absent in God as a tangible substance, into a meaningless illusion, while the immanent God, who is outside the range of immediate fixed human apprehension, is transformed into the exclusive substantial reality.*

### The Duality of Perception

Despite the fact that, from an ontological point of view, reality is one—namely, the divine substance in the unity of its many manifestations, which themselves have no substantial existence—there are a number of ways of perceiving this true reality: the human viewpoint, which cannot avoid deducing the truth of existence from visible reality and is thus necessarily mistaken, and that of the true reality, as it is perceived from the divine viewpoint. In Habad thought, the distinction between the divine and the human point of view and the nature of the relationship between finitude and infinity are of central importance. The attempt to reconcile these two points of view or to transcend the limits of human perception, which perceives reality as a distinct entity, and to enter into the realm of divine perception, in which infinite and finite are united, is one of the central goals of the spiritualist tendency within the Habad system of divine worship. The attempt to reconcile visible reality and its divine source, which is the true reality, undergoes various stages of examination and reflection, beginning in the rational-logical sphere and ending in the irrational-mystic. Confrontation with the contradiction between true existence from the divine point of view and humanly visible reality implies an understanding of the nature of the divine unity within limited reality (see R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 246, 258) that requires one to assume that the criterion of substance lies within one's point of perception.

The coming about of substantiality ex nihilo (*yesh me-ayin*) is in Hebrew called *Beri'ah* (creation). Such created substance, in fact, is also esteemed as naught before Him; that is, it is essentially non-existent in relation to the force and light that effulges in it from the kelim of the ten sefirot . . . just as the ray of the sun. . . . However, this is so only "before Him," relating to His blessed knowledge, from netherwards. But in relation to the knowledge from below upwards, created substance is [in such a knowledge and apprehension from below] an altogether separate thing. For the force that effuses it is not apprehended at all. (R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 258).<sup>9</sup>

The conflict between these two approaches is crystallized in a theory expressing the transition from an ontological perception of being (beyond human understanding) and an epistemological approach. That is, the understanding of reality as divine is replaced by its being understood as an epistemological criterion for its concealment and manifestation in the different aspects of human perception:

What follows from all we have said above is that we must consider two aspects of Infinity, may He be blessed—namely, one aspect from the point-of-view of Himself, and the other aspect, from the point-of-view of the worlds. That is, from the point of view of His Essence, one may not depict him with any attributes or differences of levels, or any activities, because of His simplicity; but from the view-point of the world, we must consider the aspects of the contraction of light, and emanation of potentialities from Him, may He be blessed, who exists in every detail. And there is nothing in the existent world which is not done in accordance with His intent, may He be blessed, and His flow into them, literally, in an active sense, except that He is united in them and is not changed in them, and this is the perception from the view-point of the revealed worlds, which are divided. But nevertheless, we must depict His unity in all its divisions without change or distinction. But in terms of His own point-of-view, even though he is drawn down in them and contracted within them, and they are all united in an overwhelming unification . . . one cannot describe, with regard to His essence, may He be blessed, any division or separation at all, for one may say that, even though they are divided into different levels, nevertheless He is one of them: for He is equalized in them, in the very model of His potencies, may He be blessed, which cannot be perceived within the realm of apprehension or understanding at all. . . . And the second consideration, which is that of the view-point of the worlds, contains two aspects, namely, as they are towards Him, may He be blessed, and as they are towards us, and we must assume and imagine that, towards us, what seems as limited and separate existence, towards Him, may He be blessed, are unified in a perfect unity, without any change or distinction at all (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-emunah*, II:32)

The distinction suggested here between the two points of view is a perceptual one and not an essential one: the divine point of view, known in Habad literature by the term *le-gabaw* or *legabei didey* (regarding Him), which understands the true nature of reality, is contrasted with human understanding, *le-gabey didan* (regarding us), which perceives reality in an illusory, mistaken manner. Existence is not separate from divinity but is completely unified with it, because the concept of concealment and hiddenness does not refer to divinity, but is only valid from the human point of view. The unity of divine substance in all of its visible manifestations, which seems to contravene this unity, is in fact beyond the distorting nature of sensory, perceptually based consciousness. Therefore, the fact that reality seems to

contradict the nature of the divine unity from the human viewpoint is not an ontological but an epistemological question.

What is then proposed here is a dual, bilateral perception of reality. From the divine point of view, reality embodies the manifestation of the divine essence of being, but from a human point of view, which by its nature lacks this all-encompassing view of things, being is understood in terms of hiddenness, concealment, and the absence of divinity.<sup>10</sup> The manifestation of the divine to human comprehension is dependent on concealment, but the uncovering of this concealment, which is theoretically within human capacity, is the precondition for apprehension of the true revelation.

In the acosmic outlook, the substantial distinction between finite and infinite is negated and transferred to the epistemological plane. The claim of absolute equivalence of the divine substance in all manifestations of reality is tested against the epistemological criterion of revelation and concealment and is transformed from a question of substance into one of apprehension. As a result of this conception, a substantial effort is devoted to uncovering the nature of the finite, and a double, spiritual interest is crystallized: on the one hand, an attempt to break through the boundaries of the finite and the borders of comprehension in order to perceive the reality of the divine, while the locus of confrontation is in the human soul (i.e., the spiritualist interest); on the other hand, a conscious renunciation of the possibility of human apprehension of the divine unity beyond its revelation to human consciousness through Torah and *mizvot* (i.e., the a-spiritual interest).

### The Theory of the Soul

In addition to the three dialectical tendencies discussed above—corporealization and annihilation, the human and divine viewpoints, the extension of the real and the negation of the real—there is an additional dialectical structure found in the Habad doctrine of the soul,<sup>11</sup> built upon the assumption that the ontological duality of the divine essence is reflected in the structure of the human soul. The basic assumption of Habad psychology, borrowed from the Lurianic doctrine of the soul, is that the human being possesses two souls—a divine soul and an animal soul—reflecting two parallel structures expressing concealed and revealed relationships, unity and diversity in the cosmos as a whole.

The divine soul is “a portion of God above”—the divine element present in the human, originating in the *sefirot* and representing recognition of the true, integrated reality, the longing of the spirit to return and cling to its source, and the restoration of the finite to the infinite (see R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, chap. 2). The animal soul is rooted in the “bright shell”

(*qelipat nogah*), which unites within itself good and evil and represents the appearance of differentiated reality, the worlds—that reality which does not perceive itself as a part of the divine unity—as well as the longing after the illusory reality with which one ought not to be satisfied (see *Tanya*, chap. 1).

These two souls are interdependent: the divine soul is the source of vitality and a condition for the existence of the animal soul, while the animal soul is the garment allowing the manifestation of the divine soul and its individual existence. The relationship between these two souls (which includes parallel frameworks of intellectual potences and ethical characteristics which correspond to the system of *sefirot* and the system of *qelipot*) is not a static one. The divine soul wishes to transform the animal soul, to incorporate it within the Godhead, and to change its very essence, while the animal soul wishes to alter the nature of the divine soul and bring it down into physical reality. The purpose of the descent of the divine soul and its embodiment in the animal soul is the same as that of the creation of the world as a whole—namely, “to reveal His glory, may He be blessed, in the lower realms.” As in the former case, this takes place through its opposite. The uniqueness of the Habad doctrine of the soul does not lie in its components, which are by and large borrowed from earlier kabbalistic doctrines, but in its theocentric orientation, which states that the relationship between the divine soul and the animal soul correspond to relationships between the physical and the spiritual which exist in the cosmos as a whole. As we have said above, the dominant factor in this relationship is interdependence: the physical cannot exist without the spiritual, which sustains it, and the spiritual cannot be manifested without the material in which it is embodied. The spiritual is revealed by means of the physical, but wishes to negate and incorporate the physical within its own essence.

The innovation of the Habad approach consists in its understanding of the different parts of the soul as different levels of awareness of the divine being as separated or as united, while drawing a parallel between the unification of the divine within the worlds and that of the divine soul within the animal soul.

Habad doctrine contains a parallel, dual structure of positive and negative spiritual forces, which share a common source despite their separate manifestations. These structures are known by different names, dependent upon the context within which they are discussed. At one pole is the Infinite, the holiness, unity, revelation, the Good Urge, all represented in the divine soul; at the other pole are the finite, the “Other Side” (*sitra 'ahra*), separation, contraction (*zimzum*), hiddenness, and the Evil Impulse, all of which are represented in the animal soul. The dialectic between finite and infinite is simultaneously one between the animal soul and the divine soul, between

evil and good, between the “Other Side” and holiness. Thus, a metamorphosis in any one of them bears consequences for the rest as well. The central role of the doctrine of the soul in Habad derives from this—that the locus of theogonic events passes to the human soul, in which the two dialectic elements of manifestation and concealment are represented within the guise of the divine soul and the animal soul. The relationships between the different parts of the soul are not circumscribed within the confines of human psychology, but are first and foremost the reflection of different situations within the divine reality and different levels of awareness of the divine being as separate or as united.

Both souls reflect the dialectic of annihilation and realization in the divine reality. The divine soul, whose descent into the world is in order “to reveal His glory, may He be blessed, below,” longs to return to its divine, supernal source, while the animal soul, whose purpose is to enable the divine soul to be revealed, wishes to descend to the depths of corporeality.

The animal soul is the focus of religious life, as it constantly confronts the challenge of change of essence, spiritual metamorphosis and struggle between its natural inclinations (toward fragmentation and corporealization) and that which is expected of it (annihilation and incorporation). The animal soul represents empirical-sensory cognition, the posture or consciousness of reality which must be changed and the illusory consciousness against which battle must be done, separation and division, the being which ascribes to itself separate existence in place of the unitary consciousness which is the goal of religious worship. The divine soul, on the other hand, represents the mystical consciousness of the divine nature of the cosmos, absolute unity, and the divine point of view. The process of transformation of the animal soul into the divine soul is one in which separation is transformed into unity, and an ever-changing, transient consciousness based on sensory experience is transformed into one based on mystical perception. This is, in fact, the essence of the transformation of evil into good, since in Habad thought evil is first of all a reality lacking any substance, which is nothing more than an expression of mistaken differentiative perception (see R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 20, 74), while good expresses a unified perception and cognition of the trust of existence.<sup>12</sup>

There was a dialectical assumption in Habad that the maximal realization of the spiritual element is possible through its revelation by its own opposite and that the cognitive confrontation with this situation of opposition, its abstraction and restoration to its source, brings about expression of the truth of its existence. The implication of this idea of the relationship between the divine soul and the animal soul, or of the relationship between God and manifest reality, is that of a dialectical manifestation of divinity

through its opposite. Confrontation with reality, while recognizing its function as a manifestation of the divine reality, set as its goal the restoration of the contradiction to its source, the revelation to divinity. This approach granted principal importance to reality and to finitude and to their function in the totality of the divine wills and demanded that they be understood as part of the totality of processes and tendencies, and not in isolation.

The struggle with existence, its cognitive confrontation, and the metamorphosis within it all occur in the realm of the soul and the apprehension or anticipated consciousness. The animal soul represents seemingly separate reality, the self-being that sees itself as being separated from God, while the divine soul represents the true reality, conscious of its divine origin and of the negation of its external reality or being to its true essence, which longs to be included in a comprehensive unity within God.

The Habad doctrine of the soul emphasizes the dynamic, transformative element in religious life; there are no static, uni-meaning values, but everything is expressed or realized in processes of embodiment and expansion, confrontation and change between the poles of the physical and the spiritual, the animal soul and the divine soul. It was not created through an interest in psychology, but from a theological point of view relating to what occurs within the human being and the soul as such. The human being is rather understood as a vehicle for serving the divine goals of revelation by means of transformation and as a stage for the occurrence of the metamorphosis of the hidden divine being into revealed reality, on the one hand, and for the restoration of revealed being to its substantial source, on the other.

### The Worship of God ('*Avodat ha-Shem*)

The Habad approach to divine worship is based on its dialectical theology, which ascribes to God two tendencies or contradictory wills pertaining to the process of creation:

As the purpose of the descent and drawing down of the light of His Divinity, may it be blessed, was that it be embodied in the created beings and grant them life through the process of contraction (*zimzum*) . . . until they come to exist in the manner of finite or separated being, this is so that afterwards the finite be abnegated in the infinite . . . and this gives pleasure to Him, may He be praised, that there is a finite that is abnegated, and it is precisely this that He wills." (R. Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, Bereshit, 9)

The aim of creation was rooted in the divine will to create a finitude, separated from Himself, a seeming nondivine cosmic reality which, in terms

of its true existence, is only illusory. The purpose of the service of God is to negate or annihilate this distinct being, to strip its corporeality, and to cause it to ascend through the levels of spirituality until the previous divine unity is restored. However, this is not the single divine will that guides humanity in its relationship to the world, since this relationship must be based on the awareness of the permanent dialectical relationship between God and existence. The process of creation is interpreted as an expression of the divine will to reveal His perfection, a perfection expressed in the dual will of simultaneous concretization and annihilation of the nondivine cosmos. As divinity did not fully express its will in the act of creation, this perfection depends upon human worship.

All Habad divine worship, in both its "spiritualistic" and "nonspiritualistic" aspects, is inspired by this tension between creation and God.<sup>13</sup> Corresponding to these two dimensions of the becoming of the finite as an expression of the divine will to be revealed and the annihilation of the finite as an expression of the divine will to be concealed, there are two commandments relating to the service of God. One is the drawing down of divinity into the finite (A), and the second is annihilation or self-abnegation of the finite to God (B). The drawing down of the divine will into the finite, or its unification in the cosmos, is expressed in the service of Torah and *mizwot*, and the annihilation of the finite and its restoration to its divine source are expressed in the service of *bittul* (self-abnegation), contemplation, communion, ecstasy, and other means of incorporation of the physical in the spiritual through spiritualization. (A) "The essential worship is to draw down the light of the Infinite, blessed be He, into the realm of the Finite, that the glory of God be revealed specifically in the sense of manifestation of the Finite, and in this worship . . . the essential intention is revealed in its inwardness" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, I:33). (B) "Just as they [i.e., the worlds] are united by His power, may He be blessed, in the aspect of upper unification (*yihuda 'ila'a*), so must they be united in the aspect of the lower unification (*yihuda tata'a*), that they be annihilated towards Him, may He be blessed, that they not be made manifest as existing and separate in terms of their own essence" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, V:19).

As a counterpart to the duality of the divine will, a dual submission of the human will is demanded: on the one hand, self-abnegation of the human will to the divine will in the sense of annihilation and utter lack of individual will; on the other hand, the realization of the divine will as defined through one's obligation to fulfill or perform Torah and *mizwot*, through which divine will is revealed in the cosmos.

The teachers of Habad stressed the uncompromising necessity of both dimensions of divine service—pertaining as they do to the two different divine wills and the two aspects of human submission—by several pairs of mutually dependent concepts, such as inwardness and externalness, breathing and blowing, going and returning:

But the phrase "all that has breath" [Ps 150:6] is specifically used, because the term *neshamah* (soul) comes from the word *neshimah* (breath), for man has the characteristic of going and returning (or "running back and forth" [*razo' wa-shov*; Ezek 1:14]), and also because it is said of breath itself, "I will pant and I will gasp" [Isa 42:14]. . . . And the aspect of *razo'* (ascending) of the soul is that of self-sacrifice at the time that one recites *Shema'*—that is, the surrendering of one's will, because the soul is the will . . . that is, that he uproot his will, which is implanted in the vanities of this world, to have only one will, directed toward his Father in heaven, as is said, "Whom have I in heaven but thee" [Ps 73:24], that he has no other desire or will whatsoever, that is, when he reflects in his heart that there is nothing but Him, and everything is annihilated in Him, may He be praised. . . . And whoever delves deeply into this matter, and more, will understand in his heart that he should not turn to aught but to God himself and his will will be only towards Him, may He be blessed, to cling to Him with yearning of the soul. And as it is in *razo'* [i.e., the movement towards God], so shall it be in *shov* [i.e., the return to the material world] as well, that "these things which I command you this day [shall be on your heart; Deut 6:6]. . . . For the holy One, blessed be He, has naught in this world but the "four ells" of the *halakhah*, by means of which His dwelling is made specifically in the lower realms, for this is His wisdom and His will, etc., and it is incumbent upon every man that your heart run out and return to the One. (R. Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, Miqez, 72)

These two aspects of the worship of God, which relate to the two aspects of the divine will, are parallel to the two Lurianic symbols of *shevirah* (breaking) and *tiqqun* (restoration). However, whereas in the Lurianic myth *shevirah* relates to the theogonic realm and *tiqqun* is partially connected to the human realm, here the two realms are understood as corresponding to the two tendencies of the divine will—differentiation and integration, manifestation and concealment—as well as being subject to human worship and to human consciousness of them, as an expression of the duality of the divine will.

The two aspects of the relationship of material reality to the sustaining spiritual element—on the one hand, drawing it into the world and, on the other, abnegation toward it—are understood within the broad categories of realism and spiritualism, which dictate a bifurcated approach to the service of God: that which draws Godhead down from above, relating to the God residing in reality, the immanent divinity, seeking to worship God within the givens of time and place; and that which seeks to annihilate the limits

of the body and of finitude and to break beyond it, to negate the cosmos and to incorporate it within the divine Nothingness, out of its longing for the transcendent Godhead (see R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 85). The fact that these two tendencies are mutually contradictory is no obstacle to this teaching, in which paradox and the dialectic of contradiction, "two opposites in one subject," is a fundamental element.

There are two aspects in the worship of God: one, the intense love, with burning fire, to leave the body. . . . This is the aspect of "great love," which the vessels of the heart cannot contain, for the heart cannot contain such tremendous ecstasy. Thus, it cannot stand in the vessels of its body and wishes to leave the material vessel of the body. The second is that of ecstasy which dwells in the heart, and whose concern is to draw down divinity from above to below, in the various kinds of vessels, through Torah and *mizvot*. (R. Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, wa-yishlah, 49)

The mystical theology of Habad is based on the dialectic between the physical and the spiritual, the real and the divine, the concrete and the abstract, the immanent and the transcendent, the finite and the infinite, the limitations of human perception and the truth of divine reality, the animal soul and the divine soul. The religious effort demanded of the human being entails the discovering of the abstract essence of visible, concrete appearance or the exposure of the divine substance of the physical realm in every dimension of existence and being. From another point of view, the implication of this demand is the liberation of human consciousness from the bonds of the illusion of the concrete and its orientation toward the truth of reality from the divine point of view or, in Habad terminology, *bittul ha-yesh we-hasagat ha-ayin* (abnegation of the finite and apprehension of the infinite)—that is, the revelation of the truth of reality as united within a seemingly differentiated reality.

### Worship through Self-Abnegation (*bittul*)

The acosmic view, asserting the nihility of creation, demanded that the consciousness of this nihility become the basis for a spiritualist worship which sought the restoration of the finite to the infinite, a form of worship known in Habad terminology as '*avodah be-bittul*' ("worship through negation").<sup>14</sup> The concept of *bittul* expresses the awareness that the human being is nullified or seen as nothing in relation to the divine element, and the human's relationship to reality is seen as negated in contrast to the divine element that enlivens it.

The fundamental relationship between God and that which He created is expressed by *bittul*, the value that most expresses the uniqueness of God

demanding by the acosmic approach. *Bittul* is the ideal archetype of the mystical life, or the basic orientation of finite and infinite. It is not to be understood as an everyday practice (even though it is meant to be attained at the time of prayer), but as a fundamental attitude which serves as the basis for the relationship toward all divine worship. The centrality of the concept of *bittul* within Habad is parallel to that of *devequt* ("communion") in Hasidism generally. In pre-Habad Hasidism, *bittul* was not a value in itself, but a means toward attaining the desired communion, whether as a stage toward its attainment or as a means of acquiring the passivity that is conducive to the ecstatic state of being moved by the divine Spirit. In this Hasidic approach, *bittul* is understood as a stage in the acquisition of the highest human perfection, which involves the destruction of natural forces in order to allow the divine to act within humans.

In Habad, *bittul* is understood as the spiritual practice derived from the acosmic assumption and as humanity's portion in the dialectical process of divine concretization and annihilation. Thus, the dominant interest in the process of *bittul* is the theocentric one, understood as aiding in the realization of a dimension of the divine not realized at the time of creation. Hence, the negation of the finite is not understood simply as an expression for the human being's mystical longings, but as an obligation incumbent upon the human being, who serves as a tool of the divine dialectic of concretization and annihilation.

The significance of the service of negation is based on the assumption that the spirit is able to negate physical reality: according to Habad psychology, the divine soul's yearning toward its source and its desire to cling to its root are the source of the very possibility of *bittul* (see R. Dov Baer, *Ner Mizvav ve-Torah Or: Sha'ar ha-Emunah*, 66a-b).

The service of *bittul* begins with *hitbonenut* ("contemplation"),<sup>15</sup>—rational, intellectual speculation on the finite and the infinite, of being and nothingness. In the Habad lexicon, contemplation (*hitbonenut*) is derived from *tevunah* ("understanding") (see R. Shneur Zalman, *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* [*Tanya*, 246-47]). Its aim is to grant the human a perspective beyond the artificial constraints of ordinary consciousness. The goal of contemplation is for one to understand, within human limitations and in the realm of the ratio and the intellect, the greatness of God who "fills all worlds" and "surrounds all worlds"; to comprehend His apparent distance from humanity, and His actual closeness to humanity, to apprehend the truth of existence—a perception of the world as if it is not and of reality as illusory—and to recognize Godhead as the exclusive reality and source of the life of the cosmos. *Hitbonenut* is defined as a means of perceiving the divine unity and is

explicated within a detailed, systematic framework of the processes of understanding and of apprehension.

R. Dov Baer, the son of R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, wrote a detailed treatise on this subject entitled *Quntres ha-Hitbonenut* (*Tract on Contemplation*).<sup>16</sup> In the introduction, the subject is defined as follows:

The nature of this tract is that it speaks about the divine unity, in every detail of the structure of manifestations of the ten *sefirot* of Emanation, Creation, Formation and Action—in short, everything that man is able to bring close to his understanding in apprehension embodied and grasped in the mind and the heart, in all details of the structure or order of the emanation, from the first stage of contraction [i.e., of the divine substance—*zimzum*] down to the end of the World of Action, and this is called, the tract on Contemplation. (R. Dov Baer, *Ner Mizvav ve-Torah Or, Sha'ar ha-Yihud*, Introduction)

The teachers of Habad interpreted the kabbalistic doctrine of emanation as a way of perceiving the unity of the divine substance, despite its different manifestations. *Hitbonenut*, or contemplation of the doctrine of emanation, became a tool for perceiving the divine unity, while contemplating the spiritual structure of reality in relation to the infinite and the significance of immanence and transcendence (see R. Dov Baer, *Liqutey Bi'urim*, 57a).

Contemplation of the greatness of God, in the sense of directing one's thoughts and understanding toward Him, constitutes a fundamental imperative. The continual consciousness that the world is filled with and surrounded by divinity is the essential subject of contemplation, whose purpose is to bridge between the transcendental experience of a world without divinity and the immanent longings for a world united with divinity. The underlying assumption is that intellectual reflection will bring about a mystical-ecstatic arousal which will transcend the limits of sensory cognition.

For when the intellect in the rational soul contemplates and immerses itself exceedingly in the greatness of God, the way in which He fills all worlds and encompasses all worlds, and in the presence of Whom everything is considered as nothing—there will be born and aroused in his mind and thought the emotion of awe for the Divine Majesty, to fear and be humble before His blessed greatness, which is without end or limit, and to have the dread of God in his heart. Next, his heart will glow with an intense love, like burning coals, with a passion, desire and longing, and a yearning soul, towards the greatness of the blessed *Eyn Sof*. This constitutes the culminating passion of the soul (*kelot ha-nefesh*) of which Scripture speaks. (R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, chap. 3, p. 14; Eng., I:32)

The purpose of *hitbonenut* is the understanding of God's paradoxical presence in the cosmos, which simultaneously unites his existence and his



nonexistence, known as "the knowledge of his unity." In order to attain this knowledge, one must comprehend the theosophic-kabbalistic meaning of the concepts of *zimzum*, emanation, the theory of the *sefirot*, and other subjects known as "knowledge of the Kabbalah." The purpose of this contemplation is to serve as a means for the excitation of the soul to mystical arousal, for breaking out of the boundaries of finite and empirical consciousness, and to achieve unio-mystica.<sup>17</sup> The path of rational contemplation is open to all, including those who lack the pneumatic capability, although the ultimate goal is the transition from intellectual understanding and rational contemplation to pneumatic unity, self-abnegation, and expiration of the soul (*kelot ha-nefesh*).

Habad was attacked from several quarters for its teaching of contemplation, which facilitated the rational study of kabbalistic esotericism, by its daring attempt to create rational intellectual parallels to kabbalistic-mystical concepts and to remove the esoteric aura surrounding the study of these subjects in the mainstream kabbalistic tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Habad historiography suggests that its opponents within the Hasidic camp thought that "worship should only be via the moral traits (*middot*) and through simple faith, and that augmentation of contemplation of divinity is unnecessary, and that, to the contrary, enhanced knowledge of divinity, if not coupled with the actualization of the attributes of the heart, will make it less than worthwhile. But "our teacher" [i.e., R. Shneur Zalman] argued the knowledge of Divinity as being the principal matter."<sup>19</sup>

Those theological and mystical principles which were known in Habad as "the words of the living God" (*divrey Elohim hayyim*) were the main subject of contemplation and were articulated and explained in the most rational and logical way possible, including detailed instructions concerning the attainment of the goals of *hitbonenut*. The teachers of Habad argued whether rational contemplation was an end in itself or a prior condition and instrument for the attainment of ecstasy (*hitpa'alut*), or whether the fact that an individual can grasp the inclusion of the entire cosmos within divinity by means of rational contemplation means that he is exempt from the mystical-spiritualistic enthusiasm which seeks the unchanging God beyond the world. In the eyes of both its supporters and its critics, Habad was characterized by the centrality it gave to the rationalistic posture which sought the point of contact among human intellect, physical reality, and the divine essence, and saw the knowledge of divinity as the essential thing. In fact, the Habad outlook was unique in its confidence that rational contemplation does lead to suprarational apprehension and that this apprehension is not dependent on pneumatic being but on an intellectual method (which

is described) of study of theological principles and contemplation of their meaning for the service of God.

The acquisition of these theological-mystical suppositions and their detailed knowledge were a precondition of pneumatic-spiritual and transrational experience. The transition from the rational-intellectual to the suprarational stage required, in addition to profound study of the Kabbalah, of Hasidism, and of prayer (see R. Dov Baer, *Liqutey Bi'urim*, 61a), an ability compounded of the annihilation of individual awareness, the obliteration of consciousness, and the negation of the will, which are believed to prepare the human soul for the mystical experience of incorporation within the divine. Habad Hasidism confronted the question of the relationship between intellectual contemplation—that *hitbonenut* which entails "intellectual ecstasy" (*hitpa'alut ha-sekhel*; R. Menahem Mendel, *Derekh Mizwotekha*, 39)—and emotional ecstasy—"excitation of the heart" (*hitpa'alut ha-lev*). Its teachers wrote detailed tractates clarifying the correct and incorrect relationship between intellectual and emotional effort within the worship of God. The criterion was the mystical attainment of communion and abnegation, against which both "contemplation of the mind" and "excitement of the heart" are measured.

The introduction to R. Dov Baer b. Shneur Zalman's *Quntres ha-Hitpa'alut* (*Tract on Ecstasy*) contains evidence of the great tension surrounding this question:

The time has now come when it is my clear duty to explain thoroughly for all our fraternity the fundamental principles of Hasidism. For many—indeed, practically all, great and small—delude themselves, are mistaken and walk in a crooked path. . . . For instance, there is the matter of that type of confusion, of which all our fraternity is guilty, regarding contemplation in prayer. When a man dwells in understanding on the subject and is successful in his mind's efforts, he forbids himself the category of heart-ecstasy, which seems to him to be forbidden for a number of reasons. For rumor has it that ecstasy interferes with comprehension. He forbids mind-ecstasy too.<sup>20</sup>

R. Shneur Zalman's disciple, R. Aaron Ha-Levi, devoted many pages to refuting the claim that *hitbonenut* without "arousal of the heart" is the principal matter, arguing that the entire validity of *hitbonenut* depends entirely on the ecstatic or transrational arousal that it brings about.<sup>21</sup>

According to his view, *hitbonenut* represents the way of rational worship, which is limited to the finite realm, and is itself nothing more than a means serving the realm of transrational experience, but lacking in significance as a goal in itself, despite its great importance. According to another view, that of R. Dov Baer b. Shneur Zalman, by means of intellectual contemplation one attains the highest possible levels of self-abnegation and unity with God

(*Sha'arey Teshuvah*, I:87, II:27). The goal of *hitbonenut* is to apprehend the truth of reality—the perception of the world as nonexistent and of divinity as possessing the only true existence, or the denial of visible reality and the apprehension of the exclusive reality, that of God, while distinguishing between apprehension of the extension of the divine substance within the world (immanence) and contemplation of that non-emanated divine substance which is not coterminous with the cosmos (transcendence). The former apprehension must precede the latter and is the subject of contemplation.

The concept of *bittul* (negation) is the central concept in Habad spiritualistic teaching, which expresses the ethos demanded by the acosmic thesis—the incorporation of the finite and its nullification within the infinite.

The service of *bittul* requires one to acknowledge the finite realm and to understand its place within the divine scheme from various points of view, expressing the level of unity of spirit within matter—“for to that which is not finite the term *bittul* does not apply at all” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, II:21).

The principal possibility of negation of finitude is based on the understanding of reality and the infinite. The finite is formed for the sake of the divine will to reveal his wholeness in the lower realms. It was formed through many contractions (*zimzumim*), which conceal and hide the power of divine *hashva'ah* (“equalization”). These contractions are meaningless from the divine point of view, for which the finite and the infinite, the revealed and the hidden, are equal, but they are meaningful from the human point of view, which cannot withstand a divinity that is not concealed. This axiom relating to the existence of the finite and its contraction from the human point of view alone opens the way for the negation of the finite, which does not in fact actually exist, in order to apprehend the divinity embodied in reality.

From God's point of view, above and below are equal in Him, may He be blessed, As is light, so is darkness, and the emanation is only according to our perception and from the aspect [viewpoint] of the created worlds, from infinite to finitude, that they not be negated in existence . . . that is, the truth of His unity, may He be blessed, is equal in the upper and lower worlds. . . . And in order to bring about finitude from absolute infinity, there must be the aspect of contraction. (R. Shneur Zalman, *Torah Or*, Miqez, 80, 71)

The finite, in its potential, is identified with the divine substance, while its actualization, realized through the process of *zimzum*, brings about the separate essence of the finite. But this essence or being only exists from the human point of view, but lacks any existence from the divine point of view.

Worship in *bittul* embodies the realization of the divine will since, by it, the manifestation of the divine, which is not revealed under any other circumstances, occurs: “Therefore, when the lower beings are united in the worlds and devote their souls to God by negation of the finite as revealed unto us, thereby performing His will, then His will, may He be blessed, is awakened in the cosmos through His own substance, which is not in the capacity of drawing down; and this aspect is called ‘surrounding all worlds’” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, V:24).

One finds within Habad literature many different kinds of service of negation, accompanied by complex discussions relating the service of *bittul* to the doctrine of the soul and the understanding of the finite. The three main kinds of negation are “negation in relation to the transrational substance,” “negation of understanding and knowledge,” and “negation of feeling and ecstasy.” This threefold division is based on the theoretical axiom which interprets the relationship of the spiritual and the physical in terms of three categories: potential essence, the manifestations of this essence, and its reflections (or: potential, actual, and reflective). This scheme refers to the relations of spirit and matter on all levels, toward which human worship is directed. The service of *bittul* thus reflects simultaneously different levels of human self-consciousness and awareness as well as the relationship between human will and the divine will within which the human being longs to be annihilated.

The theoretical basis for this threefold categorization of the service of negation is rooted in the understanding of the role of the finite and its relation to the divine manifestation, by its division into potential, actual, and reflective stages of the divine unification within the worlds. In kabbalistic terminology, this parallels “complete holiness” (*qedushah gemurah*), “brightness” (*nogah*), and “dross of kings” (*sigey melakhim*) (see R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, II:21).

The guiding principle is that “outside of the realm of the finite, *bittul* does not at all apply” (*Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, II:21), that is, the service of negation requires acknowledgment of the finite and an understanding of its position within the divine creation from various points of view, which expresses the unification of spirit within matter.

On the highest level, symbolized by the “world of emanation” and of worship known as *bittul mi-zad ha-'ezem* (“negation of the substance”), the finite is expressed from the divine point of view. This is an acknowledgment of the acosmic position, which sees the finite as without substance in terms of its own true existence—from the divine point of view—and its understanding as a means of concealment of divinity from created beings. From the human point of view, on the highest levels of negation, that of negation

from substance, there is no feeling at all, so that the question of self-consciousness is inapplicable. The human being ascends beyond that view which distinguishes between contradictory elements and awareness of them and achieves realization of the aspect of equalization (unification of opposites) by understanding, on the one hand, that reality is denied of the divine essence, and yet he perceives divinity as united with reality, on the other hand—and includes them all in one potentiality. The emphasis upon the lack of self-awareness stresses incorporation within the divine unity, while losing the awareness of distinct consciousness.

The second level of negation expresses the recognition of the unification of divinity with the world, which is still understood as a separate being from God, *bittul* expressing “the understanding of His expansion, may He be blessed, throughout the worlds, and that there is nothing apart from Him, and that He, may He be blessed, is unified in all actions” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, II:21). This paradoxical approach says that “the unification is because all the worlds and all of the aspects within the world are manifested on the level of division, yet He, may He be blessed, is nevertheless unified within them” (*Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, II:21). In this negation, one is still aware of the finite as a separate existent being, deriving the truth of existence—the fact that existence is a projection of the divine being and lacks substance of its own—from manifest reality. Here finitude understands its source, or the manifest understands its potential, while remaining separate in its being and its awareness of it. This negation is known as *bittul be-haskalah we-da'at*—negation through understanding and knowledge.

The third level of negation is defined as an emotion, which is an application of the sensory reflection that distinguishes among essences and understands their unity, despite the distinctions felt by human consciousness. On this level, the relationship between divinity and existence as two distinct elements is emphasized, because as the distance between them becomes smaller, so does the love become smaller, according to the Habad outlook, as “feeling and ecstasy are towards that which is remote in its essence, but as we draw closer to it the ecstasy becomes less, until at the point of the love that one feels for oneself, one is completely without ecstasy” (*Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, II:21). In principle, the discussion of *bittul* focuses upon *bittul be-da'at* and upon negation of substance—that is, *bittul shele-ma'lah min ha-da'at* (transrational negation). The distinction between the two levels of *bittul* appears on the level of the unity of the worshiper with God. On the lower level there is a distinction drawn between two essences, the worshiper and the object of worship: the worshiper approaches God but is yet separated from Him, in the sense that the worshiper is still conscious of

himself as an independent entity and distinct from God. On the higher level, the consciousness of the uniqueness of the divine negates the existence of anything apart from God, including the being of the worshiper himself, who is united with God. The act of approach can only take place between two distinct essences, but the awareness that only one essence exists brings about the negation of the other in respect to it.

*Bittul be-da'at*, negation from the aspect of revelation, depends on *hitbonenut* and causes communion from below to above, while *bittul mi-zad ha-'ezem* (negation in terms of substance) is “uninterrupted, even at the time that he does not meditate,” while the communion which it brings about comes from above to below. The ultimate object of *bittul be-'ezem* is the transcendent divine substance, while the other levels of *bittul* make do with the aspects of divinity embodied in the various “vessels,” that is, the immanent aspect of divinity, or some other limitation accessible to humanity.

Both forms of *bittul* are necessary and are interdependent, *bittul be-da'at* being a stage in human apprehension which distinguishes between opposites, while *bittul* which is above reason unites and annihilates opposites within the all-inclusive unity. Nevertheless, the achievement of this transrational *bittul* is dependent on the realization of *bittul be-da'at* (see R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, II:40). The ultimate goal—awareness of the absolute unity of the divine being, or of the unity of being and the mystic nihil as “literally one essence,” and of the misleading nature of sensory-based human perceptions—must confront the double reality visible to the eye, with the finite and the infinite, with all their contradictions. At the time of this confrontation, human consciousness comes to encompass more and more of reality, until and at the highest stage it enables one to transcend the limitations of this reality.

*Bittul* is understood as one of the general foundations of the cosmos, its significance being that each and every creature and reality contains the potential for annihilation within its source. *Bittul* is not only an act on the part of created beings but also a divine principle present in the entire cosmos. The basis of the transition from the concrete to the abstract exists in potential throughout creation, but the active potential within the creation, with its transformative possibilities, is present only in one's thought and consciousness, and only by its means is the transition from the corporeal to the spiritual at all possible. The goal of the worship of abnegation is to realize and actualize this given potential—that of negation to the source.

This negation is contingent upon a certain consciousness of the nature of the divine reality of the cosmos and an understanding of the divine unity,

in which the divine essence exists in the world, while its essence is unchanged. This consciousness likewise asserts that there is no reality apart from the divine one, so that everything which seems to refute this position must be seen as if it is nonexistent. There is no argument in Habad over the fact that reality appears to be separate from divinity, but rather over its perception as such. The demand is to perceive reality as divine, despite the fact that it appears to be the opposite—indeed, precisely because this is so. Habad masters admit that, as material reality seems lacking in divinity, the recognition of its divine nature becomes that much more difficult: “Without understanding His unity, may He be blessed, in the worlds, even if one believes that ‘the whole world is full of His glory’ [Isa 6:3] all the worlds appear to be purely material, and the Holy One, blessed be He, is infinitely denied within the material realm” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha‘arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, introduction). Spiritual worship is based on an understanding of the nature of the divine union within the worlds, which cannot be judged on the basis of appearances, but through cognition, faith, and reflection. Thus, *bittul* expresses the preference for the spiritual value of reality above its manifest, apparent material value.

According to the acosmic view, reality, which is seemingly distinct from divinity, is united with divinity “in a tremendous unification,” and the aim of *bittul* is to understand its true stature as the realization of the divine will, despite its apparently being the opposite. The bridge between the understanding of reality as it is and as it appears to our eyes is performed by means of *bittul*. In other words, *bittul* is an expression of the effort contained in the unique vision of reality from the divine viewpoint to abandon the human perception, which sees existence as separate from divinity and as an expression of the recognition of the truth of reality, and not of its illusory, visible appearance. “The negation of the worlds and their unification is such that the worlds are not understood as an essence in themselves, but as united with Him, may He be blessed, until nothing is revealed but the light of His substance that is united with them” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha‘arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, IV:32).

One might see the worship in *bittul* as “practical acosmism,” as that form of praxis which seems to be demanded by the acosmic assumption and as the best expression of this consciousness. The performance of *bittul* demands total abnegation of the individual self and the total elimination of the element of personal interest within divine worship. This demand entails, as well, the annihilation of human will, a lack of personal interest, and a state of unawareness. The hour of prayer was the period set aside for the performance of negation in practice, but such statements as “and that they should also be as a permanent remembrance all day that the world and

his body and his soul are not an essence at all, in this knowledge he attached himself to Him, may He be blessed” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha‘arey ha-Avodah*, IV:39) take the service of negation above and beyond a certain time period, to become the general spiritual orientation of divine service.

The teachers of Habad differed in their opinions concerning the possibility of achieving perfect *bittul* and the role of the various imperfect forms of *bittul* in relation to complete *bittul*.<sup>22</sup> The uniqueness of the Habad view lay in this: that, despite the aiming for absolute *bittul*, for the annihilation of human will and the denial of all desires and interests, there was room for longings and achievements which were of a lower but more realistic order and which opened the way for those who are prevented from attaining *bittul* in the fullest sense but whose consciousness and feeling nevertheless lead them on this path (see R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha‘arey ha-Avodah*, *Sha‘ar ha-Tefillah*, chaps. 40, 41).

### Transrational Perception—Faith

The highest level, that of *bittul mi-zad ha-ezem*, or “abnegation beyond reason and comprehension” (*bittul me-ever le-ta’am we-da’at*), cannot be attained by means of rational categories, as its basic assumptions conflict with that reality which is understood by the intellect. Only by means of the “transrational” dimension may one grasp that divine reality in which “two contradictory things,” or the transcendent and immanent viewpoints, “may be held at once”: “For in truth, He is above knowledge and intellect and understanding, for the Infinite, blessed be He, is not within the realm of knowledge and understanding at all, but is above the intellect, for in the transrational realm two opposites may be contained in one subject” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha‘arey ha-Avodah*, III:19). The aspect of *bittul* that transcends reason is also defined through the concept of faith: “Abnegation is that aspect of faith which is above understanding and apprehension” (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha‘arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, III:26). Faith is seen not as the opposite of knowledge but as a stage that goes beyond it, to be reached only after one has realized the limits of knowledge and consciousness to their fullest extent. To understand that “the worlds are not related to Him at all” one makes use of the abnegation of the intellect, because the religious fulfillment of this position must precede its understanding. But knowledge cannot aid in perceiving the unity that flows from it, for “negation in one’s substance,” because this transrational level cannot be comprehended by the human understanding. The effort to abnegate existence “above reason” expresses the supreme human endeavor to arrive at the divine point of view of true reality and to overcome the limitations of

material experience, in order to transcend the limits of the finite and the restricted.

As we have mentioned, the point of departure of the Habad system is the duality of perception, which distinguishes between the divine point of view, which perceives the true reality, and the human point of view, which is imprisoned in the illusory empirical perception and which is derived from an apprehension of reality as it appears. The service of *bittul* beyond reason is defined as within the realm of the impossible, because it expresses the apprehension of the divine point of view and the complete abandonment of the human viewpoint. However, this impossibility is occasionally achieved when one breaks out of the limits of the finite and comprehends the nature of the divine unity in existence. After the limits of knowledge have been exhausted, the intellect is no longer the vehicle for this mystical awareness, but other tools are needed, expressing transrational modes of consciousness. Faith plays a crucial role here, as a transrational form of consciousness; this type of religious worship is defined in the concept "to adhere on the level of not-knowing" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, II:32) or "to believe with a faith which is above intellect and apprehension" (R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 165). Faith entails a relationship to a realm which is not understood or subject to perception, along with the willingness to exclude certain areas from rational categories, to define them in the realm of the paradox and to leave them without an answer. Various events occurring within the divinity—the transition from the infinite to the finite, the simultaneous unity of the *sefirot* within the Emanator and their separation from him, the unity of opposites within the Emanator, and the creation of finitude from infinity—all these areas are beyond human comprehension, and must remain so. This position, which acknowledges the presence of realms of divinity which are beyond the limits of rational apprehension, and which accepts the a-rational unity as a definition of divinity, is faith.<sup>23</sup>

Faith is based on a dialectic contradiction, which recognizes the impossibility of its resolution and the dissatisfaction with the limits of consciousness, which cannot answer the paradox at the root of all existence—the presence and the nihility of God within the cosmos. This supreme paradox is embodied in the question of divine "being" and "non-being" with regard to the world, and in the relationship between unity and nihility of God within reality, from the divine and human points of view.

Reality is governed by a paradox, consisting of two contradictory religious positions, which determines reality's existence: one that demands God's immanence in the world, and one that denies it from him; or put in other terms, the immanentist position taught by Hasidism, against the transcendent position, inherited from Lurianic Kabbalah, which had made creation

dependent on God's self-contraction and subsequent abandonment of the world. The two approaches both contradict and simultaneously affirm each other. Immanence and transcendence are interdependent, because the logical possibility of creation depends on the contradiction between the two. Were immanence to attain its full and logical conclusion of identity between the cosmos and divinity, there could be no cosmos; and were transcendence not to extend itself into immanence, there could be no cosmos, for God would remain hidden within himself. The problem of divine finitude and infinity lies at the focus of Habad's paradoxical understanding of the relationships between God and the world, and they become the subject of faith, which is defined as "two opposites in one subject."

One must stress the Habad axiom that those contradictions originating within the limitations of human thought have no ontological existence within the divine being and possess no objective existence, because the distinctions between the contradictions at the root of existence—that is, the unity and nihility of God within the cosmos—or between true reality and illusory reality are distinctions existing only within human consciousness. The fact that it is beyond human capability to overcome these is itself the meaning of that divine transcendence which is beyond the limits of awareness. The profound gap between the apprehension of the paradoxical divine essence and the capacities of human perception can only be bridged through faith, by submission to paradox.

It must be emphasized that "transrational faith" is not at all naïve, and is not to be confused with simple faith. It is sustained by the realization of the limits of knowledge and the acknowledgment of the limitation of intellectual consciousness which is unable to confront the dialectical contradiction lying at the basis of existence, and the assumption of the existence of a transrational realm, the relation to which is premised on relinquishing any hope of its apprehension. The recognition of the existence of this realm does not exempt one from a profound confrontation with the limits of human cognition, with discursive thought, with rational clarification and the exhaustion of those questions to which it is possible to give an answer. Only confrontation with the dialectic region of existence through "reason and understanding" can bring one to the "transrational"—to that realm of passive annihilation of realization of the divine unity within reality.

The performance of faith, and of transrational *bittul*, demands that one break through the bounds of cognitive transcendence in which divinity resides. There is no doubt that this religious approach, underlying the conceptions of negation and faith, which refuses to suffice with the cosmos known to the limitations of human cognition, is a transcendental one, insofar as it negates the possibility of encountering God within the realms

of existence and insists on the obliteration of this reality on the way toward the meeting with that which is beyond it. The worship of negation is not intended to exhaust the multiplicity of relationships between God and the world, but is only one side of them—that which strives to restore finitude to infinity, while the perception of the relationships between God and the world as a whole are essentially dialectical, expressing simultaneously the contradiction between the two and the world as manifestation of divinity. The former is expressed by the service of *bittul*, whereas the latter, in which the world is understood as the place in which the divine will is made manifest, is embodied in the service of Torah and *mizvot*. The highest expressions of the worship of *bittul* are dependent on an existential-religious situation in which the elements of human personality and self-interest are entirely obliterated. This worship is totally dedicated to the divine substance and expresses a willingness to entirely depart from the limitations of the finite, that is, to die (see R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, Petah ha-Teshuvah, chap. 12).

This radical departure from the world and commitment to an extreme anti-existentialist position characterized the transition from intellectual speculation upon the nature of the finite and the infinite to the ecstatic effect involving that *bittul* which transcends mind and reason, known as *mesirat nefesh* ("self-sacrifice"), which is the transrational stage following the abnegation of reality through contemplation:

Thus, he must first negate the finite by means of contemplation during *Shema*<sup>24</sup> and Prayer, and unite it in the aspect of Man, which is the divine soul, to arouse the unification through the attribute of intellection and understanding; and then, by means of intellect and understanding, he will turn over his soul to the level which is above knowledge, known as *mesirat nefesh* above knowledge and understanding. (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, III: 20 [22]).

The gap between the intellectual negation of existence, which is addressed to every individual, and *mesirat nefesh* and that abnegation which is beyond reason, is very great, involving the complete negation of human nature, a radical anti-existential stance, conscious abolition of the reflective consciousness, and longings for the extinction of the soul within divine union. The obliteration of the reflective consciousness, in order to free oneself of the finite, combined with active readiness to die, to reject life and to surrender one's individual will, for apprehension and knowledge, is true *mesirat nefesh*.<sup>24</sup>

But to feel disgust for his life, literally, to be on the level of "my soul expires," with extinction of the soul . . . that he literally sacrifices (his soul) with his

will and his substance and with all ten of his powers. And the focus of his life is to be absorbed in the source and to be drawn into the body of the kind, and to be disgusted with his life, even with that life necessary for Torah and worship and survival of the species—he does not desire that life at all, but only to cling to the source. ('*Avodat ha-Lewi*, Shemot, Wa'era, 17)

And the true connection is by means of the blue thread, because blue (*tekhlelet*) is called *esha tekhela* (lit., "blue fire," read as a wordplay on *kilayon*, destruction), which consumes and burns all things, that is, the complete extinction and destruction of the finite, in the aspect of *nefilat apayim* ("prostration," i.e., the *Tahanun* prayer) in which he gives over his soul to death, that is, that he does not in truth wish to be alive in a finite existence, but "to you, O Lord, do I elevate my soul" [Ps 25:1], in the sense of extinction and absence of the finite, and this aspect is that of connection, that of *sovev* and *memale* (i.e., transcendent and immanent), as mentioned above. ('*Avodat ha-Lewi*, Tezaveh, 47b).

The derivation of the term *tekhlelet* from *kilayon* (extinction) transforms the blue thread of the *zizit* into a symbol of the vehicle connecting finite and infinite existence. By means of the obliteration of visible, finite being and its negation within true being, divinity, he attains his mystical ideal—the annihilation of separate existence and its absorption within God.

Surrender to the paradox of the simultaneous existence and nonexistence of God within the cosmos and conscious submission to nonknowledge, express one's willingness to sacrifice everything and to sacrifice one's being. Within a religious teaching, all of whose efforts are directed toward penetration to the depths of divine unity, the renunciation of this knowledge on behalf of the divine substance is a very great sacrifice, and the level of "to be negated and to adhere to that aspect which is not known" is the very summit of the religious effort. Fulfillment of the goal of worship—perceiving the divine essence of the finite in its true existence—is dependent on consciously relinquishing its apprehension through the intellect, the imagination, or the consciousness.

At the same time, as all of creation is an illusion from the divine point of view, it follows that human perception and the imagination of the contemplator embody infinite capability and force, since existence is not concealment of God at all. From the divine viewpoint, created beings are always close to Him, and partitions only exist from the human point of view.

This perception of the finite as an illusion, which lies at the very basis of the acosmic teaching, transforms the removal and abnegation of the finite into an effort strictly within the context of human consciousness, since from the divine point of view it does not really exist. From a mystical viewpoint, the abnegation of reality is understood as a precondition of the

unification with God, expressing the consciousness of nihility and nothingness necessary to attain the desired state of literal unity of the soul with God. One abandons all those elements which separate the human realm from its divine essence—human will as a separate will; human consciousness as entailing reflective thought, which distinguishes between the thinker and the object of thought; the human perception of opposites, which is replaced by the understanding of reality as unified; and the personal, specific interest in individual existence. This was replaced by various stages of ecstasy, on the various levels of *bittul*, and by the annihilation of the individual as possessing self-consciousness, will, reflection, and every other dimension that separates him from the truth of his existence. The extinction of consciousness and the emptying of being prepared the way for unity with God, in the course of the ascent from the concrete realm to the abstract: at the peak of this unity, the human no longer exists as a separate being, and the human being's essence is entirely united with divinity. One finds in Habad literature descriptions of this experience of mystical annihilation:

Then all men's wills, attached to separate matters from His very substance, are all considered as naught, for they are included in this essential will which pertains to all his substance. . . . That is to say, his whole being is so absorbed that nothing remains, and he has no self-consciousness whatsoever. . . . And from the attribute of this pleasure is made manifest the aspect of simple will, for this will causes the ascent of the soul to be absorbed in the substance of the Infinite, blessed be He, in the very essence of absorption, that is, that all the substance of his soul is included and connected within it. . . . And this is "my soul shall glory in the Lord" [Ps 34:3] that all of his soul is totally absorbed within God. (R. Dov Baer and R. Hillel of Paritsh, *Liqutey Bi'urim*, 55a-b)

Despite the mystical longings expressed in Habad literature, it must be emphasized that the relationship between the aspect of rational-intellectual reflection and the mystical-ecstatic orientation—or, in Habad terminology, "ecstasy of the mind" (*hitpa'alut ha-moah*) and "ecstasy of the heart" (*hitpa'alut ha-lev*)—was by no means a simple or unequivocal one, but rather one that raised many difficulties, as may be seen from the documents and writings of this period.

Although *hitbonenut*—that is, contemplation and ecstasy of the mind—was clearly interpreted as a religious imperative, subject to detailed instructions and guidelines, the mystical, ecstatic, and emotional implications derived from this effort remained problematic. As the greatest part of Habad literature deals with explicating and defining the various means of spiritual worship of God and the formation of guidelines of a mystical and contemplative character, a difficulty arose concerning the setting of

objective criteria for spiritual worship. Communicable external expressions for its testing—over which there were differences of opinion—needed to be found. Another aspect of the problem was the great fear of vulgarization, both of the acosmic teachings in general and of the doctrine of divine immanence in the cosmos in particular, so that an entire literature appeared that dealt with fixing and defining limits against the cheapening of religious worship and false interpretations of the spiritual teachings and mystical enthusiasm.<sup>25</sup> There is no doubt that the strong emphasis on "anti-spiritualism" is the outcome of the awareness of the balance needed in the light of the spiritual teachings and their dangers.

From R. Dov Baer's *Quntres ha-Hitpa'alut* (*Tract on Ecstasy*), from the introductions to R. Aaron Ha-Levi's works, and from other writings of the disciples of R. Shneur Zalman and of his son, one can see that there was both a theoretical and a practical confrontation with spiritual values and their implications for daily life. Some circles opposed and even prohibited the practice of "ecstasy of the heart"; on the other hand, others forbade "ecstasy of the mind."

The distinction between the authentic and the false in all of the various kinds of worship, particularly concerning the question of *hitpa'alut ha-lev*, is based on the object of the worship: "he does not call out to God, but only to make his own voice heard"—that is, true divine worship requires that it be dedicated entirely to God and based on forgetting of self. On the contrary, unfit service is that which pretends to be directed toward God but in fact is directed toward the individual himself. The critical test for the desired state is "lack of feeling for his own self entirely, with the divine ecstasy felt in the heart of flesh" (R. Dov Baer, *Quntres ha-Hitpa'alut*, 11), while the dangers of misleading and falsification in spiritual-emotional worship are spelled out in detail:

The exact opposite of this is the external ecstasy of the fleshly heart, with an inflammatory enthusiasm of strange fire, which stems only from the heating of the blood, and possesses nothing whatever of the fire of the Lord. It is no more than a laying bare of heart and flesh with sparks of fire, by which a man warms himself in order to sense the aspect of ecstasy—and it is a most excessive error. (R. Dov Baer, *Quntres ha-Hitpa'alut*, 9)

The distinction between physical ecstasy and spiritual ecstasy is very sharply drawn. Not only are these two different states, but there are also many intermediate stages, which indicate failure, whether in the physical or the spiritual pole, as opposed to the optimum, defined as "total removal of the finite." The criterion for the attainment of the various degrees of *hitpa'alut* is the degree of consciousness of self and external reality. The



various teachers of Habad differed with regard to the relationship between self-consciousness and the degree of authenticity of the ecstasy, its motivations, its implications for different kinds of worship, and the essential underlying interest.

### The Service of Torah and *Mizwot*

Within the teaching of Habad, a conscious distinction is drawn between the mystical ideal, which sees the "knowledge" of God and his unity as the goal of spiritual worship, and which longs to depart from corporeality and that form of service which expresses the performance of God's will in the realm of practical action, of Torah and *mizwot*. The former strives to abstract the borders of space, time, being, and consciousness, whereas the latter is interested in manifestations of the divine within the limits of given reality, in which it sees an accessible embodiment of the divine will. This distinction between spiritual worship and material service is simultaneously one between passive and active service. The category of passive spiritualist service includes love and fear, contemplation and knowledge of the divine unity, communion and ecstasy, abnegation (*bittul*), self-sacrifice, and faith. The active sacramental service entails knowledge of the revealed Torah, the study of its laws, and the performance of the *mizwot*.<sup>26</sup>

Habad teaching clearly stated that no practical conclusions regarding religious practice are to be drawn from the acosmic approach, which sees creation as a mere illusion and imaginary thing and seeks to transcend corporeality. Rather, one must fulfill Torah and *mizwot* in practice and cling to the sacramental ethos of practical action at the same time that one subscribes to the ultimate truth of the acosmic view in theory and sees in it a binding religious consciousness: "It is forbidden to believe that creation is merely an illusion, for all of Torah and *mizwot* are performed within corporeal, material reality as it is, yet we are also obliged to believe that the cosmos is literally void and nothingness!" (*Avodat ha-Lewi*, Be-ha'alotkha, 21b).

Precisely because the main emphasis of Habad teachers was on pneumatic worship, which stresses spiritualist and contemplative values, extra emphasis is placed upon the practical performance of *mizwot*.

A man should not think that his main concern should be the study of this knowledge . . . [that is], knowledge of His unity, may He be blessed, in order through this understanding to be excited in his soul, to serve Him, may He be blessed, with love and fear and self-sacrifice and abnegation . . . but the main practice should be the study of that Torah which is revealed to us, namely the Talmud and *posqim* . . . in order to know the laws, which involve

the performance of His blessed will." (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Yihud weha-Emunah*, Petah u-Mavo She'arim)

Because of the dialectical approach, which in principle sees both material and spiritual worship as valid expressions of the respective divine wills for concretization and annihilation, one does not find any open indication in Habad of a confrontation between mystical and halakhic values. If tension does exist between the demand for complete transcendence of corporeality and the finite world, on the grounds that one who adheres to physical existence cannot cleave to God since the *mizwot* themselves require a material consciousness and physical actions, Habad teaching dealt with this by means of the dialectic of essence and revelation, or the duality of perception.

At the basis of the relationship to Torah and *mizwot* is the paradox which places alongside one another the understanding of material existence as utterly lacking in substance from the divine viewpoint, and that which interprets it as the domain within which the divine is manifested. Thus, at the very basis of the desired service lies an understanding of the double relationship between divinity and reality. The statement of the essential divine intention – "the revelation within the aspect of the finite, specifically, which is called 'the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of heaven'; that is, that the act of negation take place through the aspect of the yoke and negation of self-will towards Him, may He be blessed, without any understanding or *middot*" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey be-Yihud weha-Emunah*, IV:26) – generates a new definition of the relation between the human and divine wills. The act which most expresses the submission of the human will to the divine will is that of the fulfillment of Torah and *mizwot*, which embodies the divine will within the finite world of limitation and being. However, the effort to comprehend this will beyond the limitations of material borders and being places the service of negation in the center. The fulfillment of the divine will through Torah is clarified out of the need to find a communicable religious basis embodying the infinite will within finite reality.

Torah and *mizwot* are considered from two differing viewpoints, the divine and the human. In the former, Torah and *mizwot* symbolize the divine will to be revealed within reality, whereas in the latter (human) viewpoint, they express the possibility of encountering God within the finite realm.

The basic assumption that the essence of the Torah, which embodies the divine will, is extremely elevated, while its concrete manifestation perceived by humanity is extremely inferior, is examined from several dimensions. From the divine viewpoint, the revelation of the divine will within the

Torah is the same in the upper and lower spheres, as is true of every other aspect of being, even though the divine unity within creation is not clear to humans, despite its truth. As we have said above, from the divine point of view the divine will is equal in its limited and its limitless existence, insofar as the infinite and the finite are equal in that perception which negates substantial existence to every limited being. Therefore, the discussion concerning the relationship between the transcendent divine will and its manifestation in Torah corresponds to the discussion of the principal transition between infinite and finite reality.

The contrast between the elevated source and essence of the Torah and *mizwot* as divine will and their inferior manifestations, which are compared with darkness, sackcloth, and concealment, parallels the essential contrast between infinity and the finite. From this view of the contradiction between essence and revelation, the demand arose to uncover the truth of the Torah through its manifestations, which express the opposite of this truth.

The divine essence embodied in Torah may only be encountered by removing the apparent barriers created by the finite or by the abnegation of revealed being and by recognition of the lack of differentiation in the substance which was emanated; however, the manifestation of the light of the infinite in terms of the world and its adherence to the divine substance as limited or contained in the vessels, demands the service of Torah and *mizwot*.

The double nature of the Torah—"for the Torah speaks entirely on the level of finitude and limitation and practical commandments, yet nevertheless there is hidden within it His inner will, and of His true wisdom, which are seemingly two opposite things" (*Avodat ha-Lewi*, Wa'era, 14)—expresses well the manifestation of the divine will in the sense of limit and finitude. The finite, as has been mentioned, is the expression of the divine will that is manifested by means of its opposite, while the corporeal Torah and *mizwot* express that finitude and opposite which conceal the divine unity and the supernal divine essence contained therein. Habad teaching is not satisfied with the service of Torah and *mizwot* in the simple sense as a means toward encountering the divine will, but it contains a radical insistence upon the need to comprehend the spiritual essence embodied in Torah, which must be discovered and revealed within the bonds of the finitude of its physical manifestation.

The dual divine intention, of "revelation through the vessels" (*hitgalut mizad ha-kelim*) and "transcendence of the limitations of the vessels" (*yezi'ah mi-gidrey ha-kelim*), which parallels the manifestation through the finite and abnegation of the finite, dictates the relationship to the service of Torah and

*mizwot*, on the one hand, and to the service of *bittul*, on the other. The Torah in its corporeal manifestations symbolizes separate finite existence, or the divine will embodied within the finite, while *bittul* symbolizes the disembodied divine substance beyond finitude. The Torah expresses the divine emanation in the finite, its drawing down and realization, while *bittul* expresses the negation of finitude and its annihilation. The Torah is defined within the limitations of the vessels, while the principle of *bittul* transcends the limitations of the vessels. In other words, divine perfection is manifested by drawing divinity down into the world by means of Torah and *mizwot* (see R. Dov Baer, *Sha'arey ha-Emunah* 68a), while simultaneously finitude is negated and restored to its divine essence through the service of negation-of-the-finite and contemplation. The dialectic within the dual divine intention of manifestation within the finite, on the one hand, and negation of the finite to the divine nihil, on the other—which demands of humans that they "draw Divinity down into the vessels" and together with that "transcend the limits of the vessels"—lies at the very basis of the entire Habad conception of divine worship. The relationship between *bittul* and the service of Torah and *mizwot* is one of "running and returning" (*razo' wa-shov*): *bittul* is the running—the leap into the spiritual spheres—while the performance of Torah and *mizwot* is the "return"—to corporeal reality. The attainment of *razo'* ("running") is intended to illuminate, upon its return to reality, the darkness of the *shov* ("return").

The relationship between the two aspects of divine service is not a permanent one, but is presented differently by different authors, so that one sees a certain difficulty pertaining to the relationship between spiritual service and material service and a defense of the role of Torah and *mizwot* in the light of their dual significance. The two contradictory dimensions of the Torah—that which represents concealment, *zimzum*, and hiddenness, and that which embodies the divine substance—gain a new status from the point at which it is determined that the preferable service in the present world relates to reality as it seems to exist, devoid of divinity, and to God in His unattainable transcendence. Reality may be approached through the divine commandments of Torah and *mizwot*. In the future, divine service will relate to a reality in which God's presence is immanent, "for in the future His substance, may He be blessed, will be made manifest in all creatures, that is, that His glory, may He be blessed, will be clearly revealed in all of reality, for then the Torah will be revealed in its root" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-Avodah*, IV:9). The use of the dimension of time to bridge the dual face of the Torah, in its spiritual essence and corporeal manifestation, sharpens the assumption that the understanding of the Torah as the embodiment of the divine will is not concerned with the present but

with the future, and that the relationship between the two dimensions is the clarification or full realization of the present, corporeal Torah, in order to apprehend the spiritual Torah and to be revealed in the future. The service of Torah and *mizwot* is thus understood as a consequence of the historical, cosmic situation in which reality finds itself—the Exile (*galut*). The significance of this *galut* lies in the absence of manifestation of the divine unity within reality, as a result of which existence is in a situation of hiddenness and separation, in which the service that must follow from this reality is in concealment, that is, within the Torah and *mizwot* embodied in physical acts.

This situation of *galut*, requiring hiddenness and corporealization, applies to all the aspects of existence, to the human soul and to the Torah. From this, one arrives at the conclusion that the adherence to the divine substance within the realm of being ought to be by means of the vessels and the corporeal being—which exist only from the human point of view but are not immanent within the divine substance itself, on the one hand, and do not represent the divine existence revealed to us through its contractions, which are capable of apprehension, on the other hand.

The separate, corporeal nature of the earthly manifestations of Torah and *mizwot* transform them into a means of struggle, which embodies the efforts to elevate the evil to good within the finite realm of existence separated from divinity. The forum for this struggle is the human soul, in which one also finds the two elements of divine essence *in potentia* (the divine soul) and its active manifestation (the animal soul), which are parallel to the divine essence embodied in Torah and its lower manifestations within limited being given over to us. This duality, embodying the divine intention—the manifestation of divinity within the finite, on the one hand, and the incorporation of the animal soul within the divine soul, as an expression of the incorporation of the finite in the infinite, on the other hand—is accomplished by means of Torah and *mizwot*. In brief—the service of Torah and *mizwot* is intended to grant expression for the religious attempt to encounter the divine life concentrated within the vessels in a manner subject to human apprehension. It also helps one recognize the transcendent limits of the mind and the cognitive distance of human beings from holiness, despite its influx upon them and their existence within it. The religious demands and spiritual struggle characterizing the world of Habad Hasidism are based on a decisive change in inner religious consciousness, not one in external ritual or ethos. The deepening of human awareness, the broadening of consciousness, and the breakthrough in the limits of comprehension, together with the reexamination and reinterpretation of the

entire accepted religious tradition in the light of the new perspective, stand at the center of Habad's interests.

### Notes

1. See D. Z. Hillman, *Iggerot Ba'al Ha-Tanya*; A. I. Brawer, "On the Dispute Between Rabbi S. Z. of Lyady and R. Abraham Kalisker" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 1 (1924) 140–52, 226–38.
2. On the role of Habad in the polemics between Hasidism and Mitnaggedism, see M. Wilensky, *Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1970); R. Elijor, "The Minsk Debate" (Hebrew), *Mehqerey Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet Yisra'el* 4 (1982) 179–235; and the Habad sources cited in the bibliography of this article.
3. See L. Jacobs, ed., *Tract on Ecstasy* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1963); R. Elijor, "The Controversy over the Leadership of the Habad Movement" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 49 (1980) 166–86.
4. All references in this paper to the writings of R. Aaron are to section (lit., "gate") and chapter. Thus, I:2 refers to "gate" I, chap. 2.
5. See G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1948) 139–40; R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Ha-Hassidut ke-Mistiqaq*, index, s.v. *ayin* (nothingness); J. G. Weiss, "The Great Maggid's Theory of Contemplative Magic," *HUCA* 31 (1960) 139–40.
6. On the fundamental concepts of Lurianic Kabbalah, see the discussions in this volume by L. Fine (chap. 3) and L. Jacobs (chap. 4).
7. In Lurianic Kabbalah, *shevirah* ("breaking") and *zimzum* ("contraction") are stages in the transition from unified divine being to discrete, differentiated reality. For an explanation of the role and significance of these concepts, see the works cited above in n. 5; see also G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah (1626–1676)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973) 22–43.
8. "Likewise, the entire attribute of separation-out of holiness comes from *hipukh* (opposite)—for the manifestation of His divinity, may He be blessed, cannot be revealed except through concealment, for in terms of His substance, may He be blessed, it is not manifested at all" (R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, II:12). On the teaching of "opposites" and its implications for Habad worship in its extreme spiritualist version, see R. Elijor, *Torat ha-Elohit*, 244–88.
9. English: *Likutei Amarim*, part 4, trans. J. I. Schochet (Brooklyn, 1972) 186–87.
10. See R. Menahem Mendel, *Derekh Mizwotekha* (Poltava, 1911) 110.
11. On the kabbalistic sources of the Habad doctrine of the soul, see I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1961) 2:3–67; idem, *Torat ha-Ra'weha-Qelipah be-Qabbalat ha-'Ari* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Students Organization, 1965) part 4; M. Teitelbaum, *Ha-Rav mi-Ladi*, part 2 (Warsaw, 1910); and the introduction to Jacobs's edition of *Tract on Ecstasy*. The first fifteen chapters of *Tanya* concern the doctrine of the soul, and all Habad texts include detailed discussions of this subject. See, e.g., Menahem Mendel (Zemah Zedeq), *Derekh Mizwotekha* (Poltava, 1911) 1–38; R. Aaron Ha-Levi, *Sha'arey ha-'Avodah*, *Sha'ar Yehud ha-neshamot* (Sklow, 1821) etc.
12. See *Derekh Mizwotekha*, 15–16: "And this is a great rule, that the essential difference between the Side of Holiness and the Other Side (*sitra 'ahra*) is the attribute of *bittul*, that in holiness there is the negation of the finite . . . which is not the case in the Other Side. . . ." In scholarship on Habad, there are various different views concerning the Habad doctrine of evil; see further the sources mentioned above in n. 3.
13. For differing opinions concerning the spiritual and antispiritual characteristics of Habad

divine service, see R. Schatz, "Anti-Spiritualism in Hasidism"; Y. Tishby and J. Dan, "Hasidism"; and M. Haramish's dissertation "Mishnato ha-'Iyyunit."

14. On the concept of self-abnegation in Hasidism, see J. G. Weiss, "Via Passiva in Early Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 11 (1960) 137-55; R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Ha-Hassidut ke-Mistiqaq*, chaps. 1-3; idem, ed., critical edition of R. Dov Baer of Miedzyrzec *Maggid Devarav le-Ya'aqov* (Jerusalem, 1976) index, s.v. *bittul*; Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography* (New York, 1947) 49-55; R. Elier, *Torat ha-Elohot*, 178-243.

15. L. Jacobs, ed., *Tract on Ecstasy*, Introduction.

16. *Quntres ha-Hitbonenut* was first published in Kapost in 1820 as *Sha'ar ha-Yibud*, the second section of R. Dov Baer b. Shneur Zalman's *Ner Mizvot we-Torah Or*.

17. See G. Scholem, "Devekut, or Communion with God," *Review of Religion* 14 (1949-50) 115-39; also in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays* (New York: Schocken, 1971) 203-27.

18. See D. Z. Hillman, *Iggerot Ba'al ha-Tanya*; A. I. Brawer, "On the Dispute"; and R. Elier, "The Minsk Debate."

19. H. M. Heilman, *Bet Rabbi*, 87.

20. See L. Jacobs, ed., *Tract on Ecstasy*, Introduction; also R. Elier, "Dob Ber Schneersohn's 'Quntres ha-Hitpa'alut'" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 54 (1979) 384-91.

21. See R. Elier, "The Controversy over the Leadership of the Habad Movement" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 49 (1980) 166-86. L. Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity*; H. J. T. C. Lowenthal, "The Concept of Mesirat Nefesh."

22. See n. 21; cf. Elier, *Torat ha-Elohot*, 189-326.

23. See R. Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, 173; and compare the introduction to R. Yizhak Epstein of Homel, *Hanah Ariel* (Berdichev, 1912).

A comparison between the Habad concept of faith and that of Brastlav Hasidism should prove extremely instructive. On the complex meaning of faith in Brastlav, see A. Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979) 285-336; J. G. Weiss, *Mehqarim be-Hasidut Brastlav*, "The Question in the Thought of R. Nahman of Brastlav" (pp. 109-49), and "Mystical Hasidism and Hasidism of Faith" (pp. 87-95).

24. For a different interpretation of the Habad concept of *mesirat nefesh*, see Lowenthal, "The Concept of 'Mesirat-Nefesh'."

25. See n. 21 above.

26. On the controversial role played by Torah study and the meaning of the *mizvot*, see R. Schatz-Uffenheimer, *Ha-Hassidut ke-Mistiqaq*, 157-67; and J. G. Weiss, "Study of the Torah in Israel Baal Shem's Doctrine" (Hebrew), in *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie* (Hebrew volume; London: Soncino Press, 1967) 151-69. The understanding of Torah and *mizvot* in Habad is discussed in M. Teitelbaum, *Ha-Rav mi-Ladi*, 172-95; R. Schatz, "Anti-Spiritualism in Hasidism"; A. Steinsalz, "Habad," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 14:1436-40.

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There is considerable bibliography in Hebrew concerning the Habad movement, including both that produced within Hasidic circles and the writings of European Jewish historians published between the beginning of this century and the Second World War. The general works on the history of Hasidism composed in the early twentieth century, such as those by Horodezky, Marcus, Bunim, et al. are of little value for the understanding of Habad and its thought. Orthodox historiography concentrated on the biography of R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady and his family and has preserved many important biographical details and interesting sociological and historical

characteristics. These works include Heilman, Teitelbaum, Hillman. A brief biography in English appears in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (14:1432-36). Noncritical "modern" biographies are Glitzenstein, Mindel. There is extensive bibliography on R. Shneur Zalman's central work, *Tanya*. The book has been translated into English (New York, 1962; London, 1973), and translations of its individual sections are available in updated editions. All references to *Tanya* in this essay are based on the photo-edition of the 1937 Vilna imprint, the standard Hebrew edition of the *Tanya*. Interesting evaluations of the place of the *Tanya* and its exoteric and esoteric aspects appear in the introductions to *Tanya*, to R. Aaron Ha-Levi's *Sha'arey ha-'avodah*, and to R. Dov Baer's *Torat Hayyim*; see also Tishby and Dan.

For descriptions of the spiritual characteristics of Habad, see Schatz, Tishby and Dan, Elier, Jacobs, Haramish, Lowenthal. On the spiritualist-quietistic background of Hasidism in general and that of the Maggid of Miedzyrzec in particular, which decisively influenced the teachings of Habad, see Schatz-Uffenheimer, Weiss ("Via Passiva"; "Contemplative Mysticism"; "Mystical Hasidism"). For a bibliographical survey of Habad literature, see Haberman ("Sha'arey Habad"; "Torat ha-Rav") and the most recent editions of *Tanya*, which contain much important bibliographical information. The appendixes to this book include listings of manuscripts, imprints, and various editions; see, for example, the 1982 Brooklyn edition.

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