

3. The Maggid and Its Induction

As a technical term, “maggid” is known in Jewish literature in the medieval *Sefer ha-Tamar*, which is a translation of an Arabic source.¹⁰ Maggid phenomena were also common in the circle of *Sefer ha-Meshiv* in Spain. Rabbi Joseph Taitatzak of this circle brought the maggidic tradition to Thessalonica and Constantinople. Maggidic tradition was also widespread in Safedian Kabbalah, including its main practitioners, such as rabbis Isaac Luria, Hayim Vital, and Moshe Cordovero, as well as Joseph Karo, who was reported by other Kabbalists to have had a maggid experience. Other known cases are those of rabbis Menahem Azaria of Fano, Aaron Berakhiah of Modena (a student of Azaria), David Habillio, Moshe Zacut, Samson of Ostropol, and Moshe Hayim Luzzatto.¹¹

Ostropol, and Moshe Hayim Luzzatto.¹¹

Perhaps the most famous maggid experience in Jewish tradition was attributed to Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488–1575). Although mostly known for his monumental halachic monographs *Beit Yosef* and *Shulkhan Aruch*, Karo, remarkably, did not show special concern in his mystical diary *Maggid Meisharim* about his halachic work. This might hint at the higher importance he attributed to his dissociative revelation. As seen in *Maggid Meisharim*, Karo was fascinated by memory functions and used memory exercises (recitation of long memorized paragraphs of the Mishnah) to induce his maggidic-like experiences, mostly reported as automatic speech: “Behold the voice of my beloved knocketh in my mouth and the lyre sounded of itself.”¹² Much more often, the power revealed to

Karo, which in the vast majority of the cases is a feminine entity known as the *Shekhinah* (the feminine dwelling or settling presence of God), the Mishnah (the first major redaction into written form of Jewish oral traditions), or the Soul, states that “I am talking to you as a man to his friend”; this might be related to the above-discussed “speaking *Doppelgänger*” (see chapter 3). Yet Karo could never see his mentor and always reports the revealing power as speaking “in his mouth.” The same is reported by Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzatto, who never saw his *maggid*, stating that “I could hear his voice speaking in my mouth.”¹³ The description by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, one of the important figures of Safedian Kabbalah of the sixteenth century, points to speech as the feature distinguishing between the phenomena of the *maggid* and the *dibbuq*: “man can be entered by another soul—a holy or an evil—and similarly we have seen demons or evil spirits entering men and troubling them . . . similarly an angel may enter man and speak within him words of wisdom, and this is what is generally called *Maggid*.”¹⁴

The ultimate confirmation for this mutual interaction is provided in a dramatic moment when R. Karo is doomed to die due to his sins, but the leading scholars of rabbinical and Talmudic tradition intervened on his behalf and actually saved his life:

I am the Mishnah speaking well of you. Like Jacob my chosen one, Moses my elected one [Maimonides], Rashi [R. Salomon Itzhaki], the *Tosafot* scholars, and all the *Amoraim* [the scholars of Talmudic times.] and *Tanaim* [scholars of the Mishnah era] with whose sayings you occupy yourself. They have saved you from death, due to all malicious matters, and offered other precious persons [...] as ransom [in the sense of substitute].⁵⁰

Canec Maggid.

The maggid experience is likely to be induced by two steps. First are preparations, which include, among other things, fasting, sensory deprivation, and mortification as well as penance and abstinence. Thus, Luzzatto would “prepare himself for three days . . . by taking ritual baths and other things designed to appease the Maggidic angel who was speaking to him.”¹⁵ In contrast to this individual complex process, possession appears either spontaneously or as preceded by drumming, singing, dancing, or other crowd contagion. Second, the preparations are followed by repetitive and intense recitation of spiritual verses or passages of the Mishnah or divine names.¹⁶ The recitation technique is explained in a passage preserved in Rabbi Israel ben Sabbatai, known as the Maggid of Kuznitz (which

means the preacher of Kozienice), in his *Sefer 'Avodath Yisra'el* (written early in the nineteenth century):

I have heard it said that the holy Rabbi, our teacher Rabbi Gershon [of Kitov] once said this to our master Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, of blessed memory, "As long as you are able to recite voluntarily in your prayers the words 'Blessed are Thou' you should know that you have not yet attained the ideal of prayer. For when he prays a man must be so stripped that it is impossible for him to find the energy and the intellectual activity to speak the words of the prayers." This is perfectly true. Yet there is a still higher truth. This is when a man is stripped of all corporeality, of every kind of will, and is bound only to his Creator, so that he no longer knows how to recite his prayers because of the awe he experiences and because of his attachment to God, yet nonetheless he recites his prayers in the right order. This is because heaven has pity on

MYSTIC 1: JOSEPH KARO

Rabbi Joseph Karo was born in Spain and left with the exiles of 1492 to Constantinople and Adrianople, settling finally in Safed. There he wrote his most famous books, *Beit Yosef* and *Shulkhan Aruch*, but he also participated in the Kabbalistic circle that included Rabbi Moshe Cordovero. His dissociative experience began on the vigil of Shavuot night, when in commemoration of the giving of the Torah on this date, all-night Torah study is customary. Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, another famous Kabbalistic figure, reported Karo's experience in an epistle:

Know that the saint [Karo] and I . . . agreed to stay up all night in order to banish sleep from our eyes on Shavuot. We succeeded, thank God, so that as you will hear, we ceased not from study for even a moment . . . all this we did in dread and awe, with quite unbelievable melody and tunefulness . . . no sooner had we studied two tractates of the *Mishnah* than our Creator smote us so that we heard a voice speaking out of the mouth of the saint, may his light shine. It was a loud voice with letters clearly enunciated. All the companions heard the voice but were unable to understand what was said. It was an exceedingly pleasant voice, becoming increasingly strong. We all fell upon our faces and none of us had any spirit left because of our great dread and awe. The voice began to address us, saying: “friends, choicest of choice, peace to you, beloved companions . . . behold, I am the *Mishnah*, the mother who chastises her children and I have come to converse with you.”¹⁸

This report describes an experience of trance. As a consequence of the mystic reciting the Mishnah, preceded by sleep deprivation, a speaking voice appears, heard also by those in the mystic's surroundings. This appearance seems to be unexpected yet is perceived by the mystic and others as positive. It was not accompanied by catalepsy, and it happened in public. Although the description here is not provided by Karo himself, his various references in *Maggid Meisharim* to his maggidic-like experiences reveal that he remembered the experiences and even wrote them down.

5. Maggid, Dibbuq, and the Brain

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAGGIDIC EXPERIENCE

The maggidic experience in Jewish mysticism is willingly induced by a preparative phase of food and sleep deprivation and then by techniques of Yichud, repetitive incantation of Mishnah or prayers, and sometimes additional techniques such as letters pronounced or mentally imagined in combination or recitation of divine names. The most important characteristic of the maggid experience, in contrast to dibbuq possession, is the content of the messages, which both the mystic and those around him regard as revelations of a sacred entity. In most instances the maggid is exclusively expressed as a voice that uncontrollably emerges from the mystic's throat although it might be accompanied by other hallucinations, which are sometimes close to autoscopic phenomena. This might occur publicly or in solitude; however, in solitude the mystic must be

might be accompanied by other hallucinations, which are sometimes close to autoscopic phenomena. This might occur publicly or in solitude; however, in solitude the mystic must be aware of his revelation and remember it, whereas in public he might be amnesic to his dissociative phenomenon. In addition, the experience might be accompanied by various emotions, such as fear or happiness, as well as executive and motor actions that might range from weakness and heaviness to exhibitive activities such as undressing or dancing.

It is interesting to compare these experiences with the above-described autoscopic phenomena (chapter 3), which were also induced voluntarily by ecstatic mystics: in both cases, voices spoke, but in autoscopic phenomena the mystic heard

the speaking voice as coming out of the autoscopic image, whereas here the voice came out of the mystic's mouth; in autoscopic phenomena people experience having two bodies and one self, whereas here two selves inhabit one body; both experiences involve emotions, especially fear accompanied by trembling; finally, both are induced by the use of sleep deprivation and letter combination, yet here mystics used more memorization and recitation techniques, whereas in autoscopic phenomena they mostly pronounced letters and mentally rotated letters and images.

THE MAGGID AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Much of human mental and cognitive activity is unconscious in the sense of being inaccessible to phenomenal awareness. Examples are automatic processing (exercised activities performed without awareness), procedural memory (memorizing how to perform skilled activities such as driving or riding a bicycle), subliminal perception (processing of stimuli perceived before being consciously approached), or hypnosis (performance of activities or failure to remember certain experiences following appropriate suggestion). These exemplify the fact that consciousness is not an obligatory property of cognitive activity but an experience that might accompany it.²⁵ It might be suggested that during maggidic trance and possession, some mental activities inaccessible to phenomenal awareness are expressed.

phenomenal awareness are expressed.

Some researchers, however, suggest regarding consciousness not as awareness of mental states, but rather as a state in which people are able to integrate their self with the objective world outside of that self. This integration creates what is normally perceived as “reality.” During dissociative states the normally integrative functions of identity, memory, or consciousness are disturbed (or altered), whereas varying degrees of disruption in information integration across behavioral states

underlie the larger failures of integration of the self and certain cognitive faculties in dissociation. The disintegration is expressed as events or perceptions that would ordinarily be connected but during dissociative states become separated. Another explanation is that during dissociative states continuous self-processing is not available to consciousness since two or more information processors operate in parallel without sharing mutual influence.²⁶ This conscious/unconscious duality may rely on a combination of explicit and implicit memories, sometimes resulting in dissociative disorders.

A cognitive experiment might shed light on the induction of dissociation. Memory function in patients with dissociative identity disorder was compared with that in two different control groups: a group of healthy subjects and a group of "simulators." These simulators were healthy subjects as well, who were asked to make up an imaginary identity and to "switch" to this second identity during the experiment. Participants were given a seventeen-item data sheet for the "new" identity on which they were asked to assign name, age, sex, physical description, personal history, and personality style. In a procedural memory task (a sequential pattern of button pressing), patients with dissociative identity disorder improved their performance during the task, yet they lost this learned improvement when changing to their second identity. Simulators demonstrated a similar effect of "losing" the learned procedural memory when consciously changing their identity to their new invented one; this effect was not shown in the control group.³² This suggests that a conscious change in explicit memory (inter-identities) causes a change in implicit memory (performance). To reiterate, a conscious identity change in a healthy subject might lead not only to adoption of another identity, but also to expression of implicit performances of this second identity. These results might serve as a cognitive basis for the induction of maggidic experience.

6. Maggid and Dibbuq: Two Selves in One Person

Dissociative disorders challenge the ordinary corporeal experience as two “selves” are held in one body, in contrast to autoscopic phenomena, in which one self has two different bodies (feeling of a presence may represent an intermediate form). Two different forms of dissociative disorders are found in Jewish mysticism—the maggid and the dibbuq. While the dibbuq is experienced as a spontaneously occurring unwilled disturbance (and thus is perceived as a mental illness that should be exorcized), the maggid is perceived as an ecstatic experience. This experience is intentionally induced by specific techniques

aimed at getting the practicing mystic into the emanation of a “speaking voice” from his throat that reveals materials unavailable in his “original,” or “non-maggidic,” state of mind. By challenging memory capacities (and other components of the memory network) through the precise performance of the mystical technique, the mystic manages to interfere with the regular stream of conscious-explicit and unconscious-implicit memories to “create” another personality that denounces his “original” one by opposing different subjective contents and reflections. Together with autoscopic phenomena or the feeling of a presence, dissociative trance disorders propose that body and self might be related in ways not necessarily reflecting habitual perception; such experiences might therefore be of exceptional value to mystics interested in in-depth investigation of their own selves. Even nowadays, dissociative states might present a valuable advantage to consciousness studies and to the neuropsychological understanding of the human “self.”

R. Karo as a Kabbalist: Talmudic Scholar

The concomitant activity of R. Karo as a leading jurist and halakhic expert, the composer of the double codes of law, and an active and passionate mystic aroused deep discomfort among scholars of the previous generation. In his seminal and inspiring work on R. Karo as “Lawyer and Mystic,” Zvi Werblowsky regards the two spheres as essentially parallel and distinct.³⁴ He dedicated an entire chapter to the Halakhic traces of the revelatory moments, as documented in *Magid Meisharim*, but did not consider them an inseparably interwoven aspect.³⁵ The scholars of Jewish history, culture, and religion who founded the Hebrew University of Jerusalem originated mostly from areas dominated by Protestantism. In general, law was perceived as a relatively lower manifestation of religious life and experiences, in respect to inner “spiritual” space. They regarded the Halakhah as “legalism” largely devoid of any mystic or transcendental significance. The following generation of scholars followed suit and rarely attempted to discuss the interface of law and Kabbalah in R. Karo’s works.

They could certainly support their position on several grounds. The *Shavu’t* event, of major importance in the life of R. Karo, R. Alkabetz, and their companions in the mystical fraternity, inspired the “invention” of the Shavu’t Vigil (*Tiqqun Leil Shavu’t*) in later generations and become particularly popular in Israel in recent years. Yet this event left no trace in R. Karo’s halakhic works, even though the new ritual was considered as sanctified.³⁶ In general, R. Karo was highly cautious in publicizing his visions, and certainly in projecting their potential halakhic implications. To do so would have run the risk that an inexperienced reader of his diary might deduce that he based some of the halakhic rulings—those found in his writings or offered in his court of law—on his visions or on Kabbalistic reasoning as a legitimate basis for halakhic ruling. This would be liable to jeopardize the content or method of halakhic ruling (*pesiqah*).³⁷ Another consideration can be offered for Karo’s reticence

to combine these two domains. When he—along with others in the strong halakhic establishment in Safed—encountered attempts by individual pietists (*Chasidim*) to change local customs on the basis of mystical rather than formal halakhic motivations, he vehemently opposed such efforts.³⁸ Indeed, he did not even deign such attempts worthy of a halakhic battle, as did others among the same juridical milieu; rather he castigated his anonymous rival or rivals as marginal and outsiders to the rabbinical-Talmudic arena.

halakhic and Kabbalistic studies.”

Karo was one of the inheritors of the Castilian heritage, in this respect as in others. This approach created room for halakhic norms derived from authoritative Kabbalistic sources, but denied the validity of any halakhic argument based on an abstract theological foundation unrelated to any authoritative text—not for filling some halakhic void, and certainly not as an element of some halakhic sophistry.⁴⁵ Karo’s main contribution to the mystical-legal fabric of the sixteenth century and beyond was the inclusion of many Zoharic references in his double codes of law. He legitimized the Zohar, considered among his peers as typically related to the Sephardi heritage, and transformed it into a legitimate partner in Talmudic and legalistic discourse. The borders between these two domains, maintained even by R. Karo himself, become more porous and less certain. The main reason for this change was that each ritual activity reflected some secretive parallel in the divine. This position at times overcame even the sobriety of jurists involved in Talmudic discussions. It would lead R. Karo, in one instance, to rely in his code of law on a thirteenth-century Jewish-Italian Kabbalist, inserting directly in his text a dream that person had regarding a Tabernacle ritual, which had to be done in a way that would reflect and contribute to harmony in the Sephirotic world.⁴⁶

The interaction between R. Karo and the *Magid* figure is not a one-way experience in which the *Magid* utters his words and Karo serves as a passive receptacle. As noted above, the encounter leads to a progressive sense of empowerment, a growing immersion in the divine world, and even the divinization of Karo’s personality. The study of Torah acquires in this context an entire novel character of a heavenly journey. When ascending to divine domains, the figure of R. Karo is heralded not as a Kabbalist or a grand magician, but as a leading scholar. There he meets the important scholars of all previous generations, assembled in the divine Yeshiva. His entrance is described as a regal procession, hailed by all those in attendance. This is no mere symbolic description but a highly tangible one. The contact with these towering figures of Jewish past scholarship is personal and emotional:

and what you said, regarding the assertions of the God-fearing Jacob [the composer of the code of law *Ha-Turim*] and his father R. Asher, he did not make the right legal distinction. You have aimed well. You should know that generally the sayings of Maimonides are correct, since he adheres to ancient versions, such as the ones of R. Hananel and our Rabbi Hai, whose versions are clear, while at times the *Tosafot* scholars engaged in legal casuistry (*pilpula*) in opposing these versions, which is an error. And the interpretation provided by Maimonides is generally valid. Regarding the issue you interpreted, suggesting two modes, God smiled satisfactorily enjoying your casuistry, but the second [Talmudic] interpretation [you suggested] is clearer. Yet do not disregard the first one, which is sharp.⁴⁹

The study of Talmud becomes a sanctified activity, so much so that studying the section *Qodashim* of the Talmud— dealing with the ritual cycle in the Jerusalem Temple—is equated with service in the Holy of Holies (*Qodesh ha-Qodashim*) in the sacred Temple in Jerusalem, prior to its destruction.⁵¹ The study even of Talmud, if attached to its mystical dimensions, was elevated to a sanctified performance beyond its intellectualistic parameters and regarded as an enterprise that could influence the divine domains.

The diary is suffused with Talmudic terminology to such an extent that one has the impression of attending a Yeshiva study hall.⁵² The sublime and revelatory dimension blends with the technical and academic mode of studying Talmudic and legalistic literature. The mystical and the juridical have to a large extent become one. In spite of R. Karo's efforts to distance the inspirational and juridical domains, a policy underlined even further by the later editor of this text, the voices from above instruct him in very concrete cases he examines in his capacity as a Jewish scholar and judge. In the case of a woman wishing to convert to Jewish religion in order to marry a Jewish man, Karo is strongly advised not to accept her into the Jewish fold, a position that was reflected later in his rabbinical responsum in this regard. This also affected the status of the son born to this couple:

This soul should better remain gentile, and better stay thus, for she [and her daughter from previous marriage—R.W.] is a polluted soul, and they would never be rooted in the Jewish people. And their born son is a polluted soul. Had I not known that he is about to turn defective [sinful], I would not have prevented you from circumcising him. So regarding the man and woman about to approach you regarding their divorce, deal diligently with their case, because their match could never end well.⁵³

Time and again Karo is reassured that his halakhic rulings and readings of Talmudic and post-Talmudic discussions are correct, in contrast to the erroneous paths of other leading scholars.

The book *Magid Meisharim* is a pioneering model of personal writing, not by a secondary personality but by a leading rabbinical figure himself and not as a secondary activity or under the guise of some apologetic reasoning. The text accompanies the life, thoughts, and activities of R. Joseph Karo, and his self-construction as a mystic. No aspect of his life was excluded from this highly personal and intimate writing. Karo describes directly and lucidly his family life and intimate relationship with his wives, or his future son:

He [the *Magid*] further said: “You did well marrying a righteous woman, daughter of a Talmud scholar. You should know that you are about to have a blind son, and he will be extremely poor. Yet his heart will be open to Torah study. So he will not be completely blind as he would study Torah. His heart would be opened to the wisdom of Kabbalah, more than Salomon my friend [R. Salomon Alkabetz].”⁶⁹

Karo often refers to his body and his physical needs and habits:

Be cautious to eat and drink for the sake of pleasure and delight, even during the days of Sabbath and Festivities. Your thought should adhere to my Torah even when you speak to people or when you eat and drink. Thus your soul will rise to a heavenly Yeshiva while you sleep.⁷⁰

The work also refers to the important stations along the course of Karo’s life. He is reassured about the composition of his future works—both the *Beit Yosef* and *Shulchan Arukh*—and their enthusiastic acceptance, as well as regarding the position of his Yeshiva in Safed and the status of his personal position by comparison to other contemporary rabbis within the Sephardi Mediterranean-Ottoman domain: “He [the *Magid*] told me that he would help me to finish my magnum opus, devoid of any faults or defects, and that I would name it *Beit Yosef* [Joseph’s Home], for it is worthy of that name, since it is indeed my home in this world and the world to come.”⁷¹

Yet the leading thread of this immense mystical diary is the mystical empowerment of R. Karo along his long life, especially after the *Shavu'ot* event described above. His

-
68. *Ibid.*, p. 3. See further discussion in Roni Weinstein, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity*, Littman Library of Jewish Culture, London, 2016, Ch. 2 – “Like Giants sitting on the Shoulders of Dwarfs”. The Rise of the Jewish Saint’, pp. 44–66.
69. Karo, *Magid Meisharim*, p. 25b.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 28b.
71. *Ibid.* p. 28b. Regarding the promise to compose his second magnum opus – the *Shulchan Arukh* – see *ibid.*, p. 30a.
-

need for self-assurance is repeatedly supported by the divine *Magid*, during the glorification moments when his entrance to the Divine Yeshiva is pronounced by a herald in front of a large choir of angels and members of the heavenly Yeshiva, and certainly during some precious moments of his divinization and complete adherence or immersion (*devequt* is the current Kabbalistic term) to the *Shekhinah*:

Thus you shall be elevated if your mind adheres to me [the figure of *Mishnah* or *Shekhinah*] as you should, if indeed you wish to see your spiritual figure as a king in his regiment. For so many soldiers surround him from all sides. Thus I, the Mishnah and all my soldiers often surround you, as you would be the major figure in the Holy Land. So you should imagine yourself as being often surrounded by me and my soldiers. You are as a king among us, surrounded by soldiers. You should not separate your thoughts from me or from my soldiers. Fare well.⁷²

- Karo's diary is replete with moments of self-examination, remorse, and a commitment to act differently in order to remain close to the Mishnah and the *Shekhinah*: "Those who think of food and drink adhere to the demonic powers in charge of food and drink. Those who ponder on fornication adhere to those powers in charge of fornication. And those who ponder on dominion and honor would adhere on those powers in charge of these. The result is that they [the demonic powers] tie him to a hellish torture instrument, because he is ruled by these demonic powers it is as if he were tied to these torture instruments in hell, due to the fact that the man was thinking of a certain pleasure and they start to dominate him [...] so, my son, devote all your thoughts to my worship and remain God-fearing."⁸⁵

"All the *elements of self-scrutiny* also appear but in a decidedly retrospective fashion in spiritual autobiographies or 'conversion' accounts written by Sufi masters after the completion of their *suluk* [...] That Hūda'i's case was not an anomaly is clear from the fact that virtually all the other extant Ottoman first-person accounts written in the mode of self-examination were written by Sufi writers still in the process of completing *suluk*. This is not to say, however, that this was the only factor that shaped their accounts."⁸⁶

- Karo is aware that his mystical vision turns him into a unique person, entirely different from his rabbinic colleagues.

"It has been argued that this divergent, more internalized approach to piety, particularly well represented among the Sufis of Anatolia and the Balkans, lent itself to a 'deviant individualism.'"⁸⁷

- Karo is ordered to document in writing the Magid's secrets and instructions and rebuked for occasionally failing to do so. Writing is even regarded as an exercise of his special spiritual abilities: "He rebuked me for not writing the revealed secrets, for had I written them I would have heard marvelous secrets [...] and he rebuked me for not writing the innovative teachings [...] he strongly insisted that I write everything said to me, and that I study twice and three times a week the wisdom of Kabbalah, and the wide gates [of this wisdom] would open to me."⁹⁶

- Karo's desire to become a martyr is a very prominent theme in his diary. His martyrdom is assured by the *Magid*, as a sign of his personal greatness and commitment: "On Thursday, the eighth of [the month of] Tishrei, after midnight [the *Magid* said], since you finished studying all six parts of Mishnah my cloud is upon you, the entire seven divine clouds unite and escort you daily. So be strengthened in God-fearing and in my Torah, do not separate yourself from them even for one moment. Thanks to these six [Mishnah] sections that you studied, I will benefit you with migrating to the Holy Land, studying and teaching, and having sons and grandsons, and you will burn for my Name's sanctity, and your ashes will lay in front of me [God]. Therefore be strong in God-fearing and in my Torah."⁹⁹ R. Karo waited his entire life for this instant of martyrdom, inspired by the real martyrdom of Shlomo Molho, but it never materialized.

In spite of the unambiguous rabbinical distinction between prophecy and Talmudic methodology, Karo presents himself as virtually a prophet: "It is I, I who speak [directly] to your Soul [*neshamah*], not to your Mind [*nefesh*], nor to your Spirit [*ruach*], but to your soul herself, for even if Prophecy has ceased among Jewish people it has not ceased in your case. Every time I arrive to guide you regarding the way to follow."¹⁰⁴

The printed diary begins not with one of the early revelations during the encounter between Karo and his Magid but with a type of guidance booklet containing a list of ethical, pietistic, and practical instructions, under the editorial title “Warnings and Emendations and Strictures” (*Azharot ve-Tiqqunim ve-Seyagim*). Perusing the entire diary, it becomes clear that the various items on this list provide an extract or résumé of the practical or concrete aspects of the revelations. It is beyond our reach here to determine whether this list was composed by Karo himself or later by R. Jacob Zemach, one of the first editors of *Magid Meisharim*.

In any case, it represented one of the important channels for the spread of Safed Kabbalah in the Jewish world: customs that were either completely invented by the local Kabbalists, or, alternatively, traditional rites charged with new mystical vigor, yet practiced only by pietistic persons in private, or willingly adopted by mystical confraternities, later flowed to wider circles in the city. They were later still carried into faraway Diasporas, where they were absorbed as sanctified and legitimate, as if like old times.¹³¹ Seen from this perspective, the diary is a laboratory and workshop for ritual, moral, and even theological innovations. This is testified by R. Karo himself, when he recounts that the teaching he acquired via the Magid served him quickly in his public preaching to the community:

Later he [the Magid] expounded the first chapter of Mishnah, tractate *Avot*, saying that he need not provide a secretive-mystical reading followed by the literal sense, so that ordinary people could understand. He related to some objections raised by previous commentators [on tractate *Avot*], and still more, and resolved them all [...] and thus I interpreted the entire chapter and presented it in my public preaching, and I was lauded for what I said [in public].¹³²

as mentioned in the sacred Zohar, and so I came to castigate you so that you would completely avoid drinking wine during the day, and practice some ascetics, and during night hours you would not drink but one glass.”¹³⁴ One has the impression that despite his prestigious position as a leader and scholar in Safed, Karo himself believed that he could never achieve a state of innocence beyond sin. It is reflected in his problematic vision, if compared to previous Jewish discussion in this regard, that only in the apocalyptic period of the Resurrection of the Dead, following the messianic era, would the human “Evil Inclination” (*Yetzer ha-Ra*) be calmed and cease to bother human beings: “During the resurrection of the dead, which is the era following the messianic days, the world will be cleansed of passions and longings for worldly matters. In this time the Evil Inclination will cancel itself, and the commandments ordering active practices will be abolished, as will some of the commandments prohibiting certain practices.”¹³⁵ It is mostly his bodily basic needs such as food—drinking wine or even water¹³⁶ and eating too much—that constantly preoccupy the rebuking voice. It certainly concerns the sexual domain, even regarding the intimacy with his legitimate spouse:

I would bestow upon you a righteous and modest spouse[...] and beware to retract from worldly pleasures, as I instructed you, and sanctify yourself during the coitus [...] A man must not enjoy this world at all, even when obliged to eat and drink and do ‘other things’ [a euphemism for sexual relations]. One should participate in these activities only to sustain his body and for the sake of later worshipping God, and not for his own pleasure. Had it been possible to do all things necessary to sustain his body [food and sexuality] without any pleasure involved, it would have been better.¹³⁷

The work follows R. Karo in his daily life, his relationship with his family, intimate moments with his wives, corporeal habits, sleep and waking, or personal and “professional” aspirations. His emotions and moods of self-criticism are a recurring theme throughout the diary. Yet the text is far from being a documentation of a personal life for its own sake. It revolves around meetings with a divine agent, named the *Magid*, *Shekhinah*, *Mother* (or better *Rebuking Mother*), *Matronita*, or *Mishnah*.¹⁴¹ The interaction is often stern and demanding on the part of the Magid, yet there are soft moments of proximity and even an erotic flavor of hugging and kissing. In some exceptional moments, Karo is elevated to high spheres in the divine world. The various entries in the diary present a journey not only of revelation of Torah secrets and various aspects of Jewish heritage and life but no less so an intensifying glorification of R. Karo himself. Pace Moshe Idel, in certain moments he is even absorbed in God and becomes completely immersed in the *Shekhinah*.

An alternative mode of reading *Magid Meisharim*, and a constant theme in this diary, is the fundamental contact between R. Karo and imminent past scholars, the fountains of Talmudic scholarship. Karo is elevated to the Divine Yeshiva, where all the great names of Talmudic erudition of past generations face one another in regular and continuous study, as conducted in his contemporary world. There he was hailed and heralded by an angelic voice, and his exceptional erudition and talent were recognized by past scholars, from the Mishnah through the seventeenth-century sages. Past and present blend into one continuum of Jewish erudition, and all the scholars are searching for Talmudic truth and rabbinical consensus. The intimate interface between arduous Talmudic labor and grand mystical vision was masterfully described by Maoz Kahana:

The highlight of amassing and organizing [Talmudic] knowledge is, in fact, a moment of unification of God, the exhilarating moment in which the internal harmony between various halakhic traditions of the legal culture is revealed to the industrious composer. This exhilarating moment—constructing the Holy Temple by letters of the law—is identical and concludes the utopian methodology for exhausting the legal books, as expressed by R. Joseph Karo in his preface to *Beit Yosef* [...] In his world, of a librarian, bibliographer and omniscient Halakhist, a cosmic unification of God is possible by means of a methodology of utopian-sober and daily writing, to which he aspired and materialized by writing *Beit Yosef* along dozens of years, by the unique ruling method that he set for it. In this sense, no less significant than inserting the Zohar to *Beit Yosef*, one should consider the *Beit Yosef* and *Shulchan Arukh* as the utopian-legalistic materialization of total-knowledge methodology that the Zoharic-cosmogonic perspective furnished one of its bases, and actively participated in its self-construction [of total knowledge]. The diligent halakhic sage seen in the prism is a kind of creative and active Kabbalist. The law canon would be completed only after years of arduous work, yet the godly unification—this momentary tabernacle—is

the daily highlight of writing each and every item of the law, when all the various sources integrate into an effective synthesis, explaining and illuminating one another. The Holy Temple is constructed by letters and words, words-courses of the Divine-total law, joining one harmony and construct an entire universe. *A universe saturated with Law.*¹⁴²

As much as R. Karo was no ordinary Talmudic scholar, so were his double codes of law no regular halakhic corpus. In at least two encounters with the Magid, Karo receives a promise that he will live to complete his codes, and is even provided with their exact titles: *Beit Yosef* and *Shulchan Arukh*. The plan behind this immense corpus was vividly exposed in his important preface to *Beit Yosef*, and to a lesser extent to *Shulchan Arukh*.¹⁴³ Its goal was to foster unity and harmony in the Jewish tradition and to be implemented in concrete Jewish life and rituals. The gap between heaven and earth was to be bridged by his halakhic work. Time and again, the diary documents how specific Talmudic discussions and their ramifications that preoccupied Karo due to his responsibilities as rabbi, judge, community leader, or public preacher were discussed in the Divine Yeshiva. At times he was provided with an assurance that his mode of reading or interpreting certain Talmudic discussion (*sugya*) was correct, and it even filled the almighty God with satisfaction and aroused a smile. Beside the political-institutional aspects of his codification project, discussed in other chapters, the law had turned into axis of salvation. But some caution is needed here: salvation does not necessarily imply active or urgent apocalyptic stands or some form of collective Jewish messianism. It defines law and normative instructions as a prologue to the reformation of Jewish life and tradition.¹⁴⁴

Heritage of universal justice dating back to the biblical prophets.

Karo did not have access to any political tools or instruments of coercion. But his vision directly projected into the Jewish environment the same vision of law as a channel to salvation. He would study Talmudic lore as a regular scholar, yet in tandem he related his Talmudic devotion to mystic terminology and presented it as a continuous encounter with the Divine Yeshiva and its past scholars; suggested pietistic model of devotion and adherence to God (*devequt*), and ultimately dreamed of becoming the leader of the Jewish Ecumene: “It is I, the *Mishnah*, speaking through [or: in] your mouth, the mother castigating her sons [or children], the one embracing you. And you shall often adhere to me, I shall return to you and you shall return to me. I shall raise you to become master and leader (*sar ve-nagid*) over the entire Jewish Diaspora in *Arabistan*.”

Indications in the *M.M.* leave us in no doubt that Karo's life was one of continuous mortification and ascetic austerities. Yet practically every communication of the Maggid opens with severe reproof: Karo had eaten too much, drunk too much, slept too much, failed to meditate sufficiently on the *Mishnah*, or to maintain the uninterrupted practice of the presence of God.² By his failings he had forfeited the privilege to receive further visits from his Maggid. In fact, he had even forfeited his life. Only the abundant mercy of God and the untiring intercession of the rabbinic scholars whose opinions he so carefully elucidated in his *B.Y.* had repeatedly saved his life and even restored the maggidic manifestations. The fact that Karo was sentenced to death by the celestial court on various occasions³ and at various dates is by itself sufficient to show that in all probability no one particular sin was meant. But not always is the grace of forgiveness granted without sacrifice.

Karo was punished for his sins by the death of his first wife and three children,¹ as well as with illness,² and more than once the Maggid indicates that he owed his life to the vicarious death of others. We may assume that every time Karo survived one of the frequent epidemics in which some of his fellow citizens died, this kind of explanation immediately suggested itself to him. But the fact that it suggested itself and was promptly taken up by the Maggid both as a reasonable theory and as an argument for further exhortation clearly demonstrates not only the egocentricity³ of Karo's self-esteem but also the severe anxiety underlying his sense of sin.

That penitence was one of Karo's main concerns is borne out by the Maggid's repeated assurances that his exhortations and ascetic instructions represented God's answer to Karo's fervent prayers 'to teach you the awesome ways of penitence'.⁶ We cannot be sure when and why Karo began to practise penitential discipline.⁷ That there was a definite moment of 'conversion' seems to be obvious. In 1536 the Maggid assures Karo that all his earlier sins had been forgiven 'since the time that you repented',⁸ i.e. began to adopt penitential practices; a few days earlier he had already referred⁹ to 'those former days when you repented'. Whether this first spurt of intense penitence represents merely a conversion from a less extremely ascetic and more 'normal' religious life to one of extreme

would have been the first to admit that, given the choice to evade martyrdom by flight, it was one's religious duty to 'choose life'. Karo too must have known that by fleeing from Spain and Portugal to the hospitable shores of Turkey he and his family had evaded martyrdom. Yet his unconscious longing was strong enough to convince him that sometime, no matter where or when, circumstances would arise that would make martyrdom a reality. He was destined to be burned 'so that you should become clean and pure. . . . Consider yourself, therefore, as a perfect burnt-offering and [take care to] be without any blemish that might invalidate the sacrifice.' His martyrdom has no messianic significance or bearing whatsoever; it is a purely personal matter, the *rite de passage*, as it were, by which his sinful, material existence would be finally transmuted into a spotlessly pure and spiritual one. For that reason also martyrdom must be by fire, for³ 'he who is killed [by the sword] or strangled for the holiness [of God's Name] is like a sin-offering or a trespass-offering [of which part remains and is eaten by the priests],⁴ because his flesh remains in this world . . . but he who is burned for the holiness of God is like a burnt sacrifice which rises wholly upwards.' The burning is a process of de-materializing and

a spiritualizing transformation; as such it is actually a rite of ascension, for as the flesh is consumed by the flames 'your smell will rise like frankincense'¹ and 'all your sins and trespasses will be devoured by fire and you will ascend [in radiant whiteness] like pure wool'.² Karo's fantasies of martyrdom and the penitential discipline of his ascetic life have a common foundation: an oppressive sense of sin and a fervent desire to rid himself of sin as well as of the material body. What mortification can achieve only imperfectly in this life is triumphantly consummated in death by the purifying flame that annihilates both body and sin. A handful of ashes remains on the altar, whilst a spotlessly pure and white soul is received into glory.

wanderings were permanently recurring phenomena in Jewish history as long as the people deserved God's wrath, and exclaims: 'woe unto us that this generation was not found worthy [to see the expected advent of the Messiah] . . . and we cannot be certain about further expulsions, the sword of the oppressor, and the cup of trembling of which our fathers have drunk. *And I have seen the great . . . R. Joseph Karo greatly fearing and worrying about this all his life.*' Karo is repeatedly taken to task by the Maggid for worrying too much about financial and other practical matters instead of putting his trust in God:

. . . and do not be anxious about your sustenance, for I have told you many times that your sustenance is provided for and that you shall not lack anything. . . .¹

Do not pay attention to the thoughts which Samael [the Devil] and the Serpent put in your heart, to worry about worldly matters . . . for God has been with you; forty years you did not lack anything nor shall you lack anything [in the future], for your sustenance is prepared for you and you need not be afraid of anything. . . . You have seen how on that occasion God sent you as much relief with two hundred zuz as [normally] with five thousand. . . .²

. . . and do not think about financial matters except when you are in the privy or in an unclean place [where one must not think of holy things or practise the presence of God]. Thoughts about business do not avail but, on the contrary, harm you. . . .³

Do not worry at all about your material needs . . . for I have already promised you that you shall not lack bread and raiment; neither must you worry because of them that have risen against you⁴ for they shall not harm you. . . . You must not pay attention to this or any other matter, but only to the fear of the Lord and to his *Torah*, by day and by night, and be exceedingly humble.⁵

Henceforth be careful to perform worldly actions only so far as strictly necessary for life. If there is any pleasure connected with any such action, do not regard the pleasurable side of it but be perturbed, and strongly desire to be able to perform the action without feeling any pleasure. When you eat consider yourself as if a sword were held over your head and hell were gaping under your feet. For if you eat and drink more than necessary or even if you eat the right amount but intend to derive pleasure from it, then you will be punished. Consider in your heart that you are standing before the King of all kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, whose *Shekhinah* is constantly above your head . . . wherefore all pleasures should be repulsive to you . . . and all your thoughts should be focused on me, my *Torah*, and my fear. In all your actions you should consider yourself as if a sword was held over your head and hell gaping under your feet—even when engaged on good works. . . . For you should always fear that some unworthy or foul thought spoil the [good] action . . . or that you do not perform it to perfection. . . . Particularly at the time of prayer discard all thoughts which the Evil Inclination [i.e. the devil] and his hosts, together with the powers that are above him, namely the Serpent and Samael and their host, put into your heart. Unify [i.e. concentrate] your heart at all times and at every hour and minute to think of *nothing but me, my Torah, and my worship*. This is the mystery of the union in which man is verily united with his Creator, for the soul adheres and unites itself to Him, whilst the body and the limbs become a true dwelling of the *Shekhinah*

the Law and pray at one and the same time.¹ Real contemplative thinkers, such as Bahya in the eleventh century, did not hesitate to consider excessive rabbinic casuistry as an unpardonable waste of precious time that had better be devoted to spiritual progress. The conflict came to a head in eighteenth-century hasidic mysticism; it was clearly present, albeit unconsciously, in the minds of the great Safed contemplatives.² Karo's Maggid expresses the typically rabbinic view of the matter: the study of the Law can simply be equated with *devekuth*. The *Torah* is God's word, his revealed *logos*, a mystical manifestation of the *Shekhinah*.³ The blessed man is he whose 'delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night' (Ps. i. 2), for by studying the *Torah* and making it the object of his intellectual labours and the exclusive (or near-exclusive) contents of his mental life he actually cultivates his communion with God.

Throughout the *M.M.* *devekuth* means meditating on the Law in general and the *Mishnah* in particular. The oft-repeated reproach of having interrupted *devekuth* and broken the 'union' with God simply means that Karo had interrupted his studies for a short time. He is therefore bidden to cleave 'to me, to my *Torah*, to my *Mishnah*, to my fear', &c. *Devekuth* and *hirhura de'orayetha* are synonymous:

Be careful not to interrupt the *dibbuq* [i.e. *devekuth*, 'communion'] between you and your Creator . . . for the study of *Torah* strengthens the communion, and grace is infused into him from heaven to strengthen the communion further.⁴

'This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth' [Joshua i. 8], meaning . . . that when you eat and drink or talk to people and cannot study with your mouth, then think of it [in your heart] all the time.⁵

Devekuth, for Karo, does not mean what it meant for the kabbalists whose theories on the subject have been mentioned in an earlier chapter. Positively *devekuth* means the study of the Law (to a lesser extent that of Kabbalah too²) and prayer; negatively it means the suppression of all thoughts that might distract attention from study and prayer. On the moral side *devekuth* implies complete and extreme 'indifference'. We cannot here follow the develop-

The most extreme penitential discipline of fasts and mortifications could easily be integrated into the traditional halakhic-moralist framework. What Karo owed to the contemporary kabbalistic revival was not his ascetic piety as such but his mystical life, i.e. the maggidic manifestations. Kabbalism provided him with a theoretical background and practical examples¹ of mystical manifestations, celestial messages, demonstrations of special divine election, and the like. This paranormal psychic activity never, so far as our present knowledge goes,² produced striking, original insights. The Maggid had nothing to say that went beyond the knowledge, desires (conscious or repressed), and ambitions of Joseph Karo. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Maggid's behaviour is his habit of reproving and humiliating Karo whilst at the same time fostering his sense of unique greatness. The psychological significance of this combination of narcissism with internalized aggression will be discussed later. As far as Karo's sense of greatness goes, the peak is undoubtedly reached with the Maggid's repeated promises that one day he would work miracles like the rabbis of talmudic legend³ 'and the name of heaven [i.e. God] will be sanctified by you [through these miracles] . . . and all the world will know that there is a God in Israel'. The privilege of working miracles and the value of miracles as a public demonstration of God's existence and power seem to have been standard motifs of the contemporary 'maggidic pattern'. The recipient of the revelations recorded in the amazing *Sefer ha-Meshib*⁴ was made the same promises with almost the same wording.⁵

ideals that left a large part of their personalities unconscious and a large part of their unconscious infantile. Karo differed from most of his contemporaries not in his mental and psychological make-up, but merely in his psychic constitution which enabled his unconscious to use the extant kabbalistic patterns of maggidism in order to express itself.¹ The result should not occasion any surprise, since the psychological ravages of repression (of whatever kind) are too well known to call for comment. What does, perhaps, need emphasizing is the truism that psychological jargon, here as elsewhere in historical research, gives us only part of the truth and not always the most important part. To associate the Maggid's revelations with the repressions wrought by halakhic piety is at best a platitude. To assert that they reveal the inevitable results of such piety is not even an illegitimate generalization but merely a meaningless partisan declaration. For the historian of religion the question is simply this: why did halakhic piety tend to produce this increase of psychic-mystical phenomena precisely in the sixteenth century? Was it because sixteenth-century Jewry had been so severely shaken by the catastrophe of the general expulsion? Was it because new and special psychic mechanisms were necessary to impose stability on souls whose old world was broken and whose eschatological mood plainly indicated that what they wanted was a really 'new' world? It is certainly significant that both the *Sh.A.*, the tentative *organon* of religious unity and stability, and the *M.M.* were composed by the same Joseph Karo in the same sixteenth century. The kabbalistic revival was only part of the Jewish response to the great upheaval. Another, no less important, part is to be found in the reassertion of halakhic piety. The final crystallization—or perhaps petrification—of rabbinic orthodoxy, and its last great codification were attempts to counter the threat of disintegration experienced as a result of the recent catastrophes. Even more

(i) The Maggid¹ refers to something Karo had discussed—orally or in writing—on the previous day. But since *B.Y. ad Y.D.* 198 contains more than one thorough discussion of Maimonides's views² (viz. of *Tur*'s presentation or alleged misrepresentation of these³), it is difficult to dogmatize about the exact meaning of the statement, 'both views are correct'. The Maggid's words, 'and your remarks regarding the statement of Jacob who fears me [i.e. *Tur*] that "his father [i.e. R. Asher] did not draw this distinction" are

perfectly correct', clearly refer to *B.Y. ad Y.D.* 198: 31 towards the end.¹ When the Maggid further declares that 'in the matter of *sipporen* where you suggested two possible solutions, by your life, God was pleased with your discussion; however, the second solution is the correct one', he merely confirms Karo's own conclusion after a very thorough examination of Maimonides's position *re* 198: 21. For *B.Y.* there concludes with the words, 'wherefore I incline to the second solution that I have proposed'.² It is a comforting thought that God is on the side of the authors and appreciates sheer intellectual virtuosity for its own sake; for Karo is bidden by the Maggid not to delete the first solution although the second only was true and correct.

second only was true and correct.

(ii) This is the only instance in the *M.M.* where an explicit reference to the *Tur* is actually given ('*Tur* ch. 199'), though it is not stated that book *Y.D.* of the *Tur* is meant.³ The whole paragraph is a characteristic example of a maggidic message, simply and directly concerned with Karo's immediate interests and preoccupations, and without an eye to a prospective reading public. Again it is impossible to be quite sure which comment in the *B.Y.* is meant when we are told that 'Maimonides was glad that you expounded his opinions'.⁴ The statement that 'what you wrote concerning *hafifah*⁵ is true and well-founded' may refer to 199: 10, where the rulings of Maimonides⁶ are defended against

commentary *B.Y.* on this chapter.

(iii) This paragraph, which concerns the validity of a ritual bath when 'the dripping water was more than the flowing water',⁷ is of special interest. It refers, of course, to *Y.D.* 201: 2, where Asheri records R. Tam's permission to use rivers for the purpose of ritual immersions all the year round, even in early spring when the thaw would cause the 'dripping water' (i.e. the snow carried by the river) to exceed the 'flowing water' (i.e. water originating from

a fountain source) in the river. The stricter view, attributed to R. Isaac of Dampierre and also shared by R. Me'ir of Rothenburg, is followed by R. Asher and by his son, the author of the *Tur*. In justifying this ruling, the name of R. Me'ir is mentioned as a supporting authority, but neither Jacob Asheri nor Joseph Karo (in *B.Y.*) in his detailed discussion *ad loc.* seems to base the stricter decision on R. Me'ir's additional, extra-halakhic reputation as a saint and martyr.¹ It is not surprising, however, that the Karo of the *M.M.*, with his curious passion for martyrdom, should fasten on R. Me'ir as the main protagonist of the debate. Instead of saying that the *halakhah* follows the majority opinion against R. Tam, the Maggid puts the cart before the horse by declaring that 'the law is as stated by my beloved and god-fearing R. Me'ir, the law is everywhere as stated by him for he was perfect; and through his imprisonment—in which he also died—his sins have been atoned for and he remained pure and unblemished, and ascended to a very high sphere among the righteous'² and adding, almost as an afterthought, that other authorities too agreed with him. The Maggid then explains that although, in principle, the stricter opinion should be followed, *post factum* one may rely on R. Tam's ruling. This compromise, which is justified at length by kabbalistic arguments, is not mentioned at all in *B.Y.* although it is implicit in *Tur*'s wording. The Maggid's approval of Karo's refutation of R. Yeruham leads to an unexpected and curious digression on the latter's place in the heavenly company of saints: 'wherever you criticize his views you are right. I call him "Yeruham my hidden one" because he is hidden in the Garden of Eden. For there are saints whose merits are not sufficient to allow them to appear publicly in Paradise but only to be there in secret, and he is one of them.' This extraordinary declaration is, however, mitigated by the assurance that 'none the less he has attained a high and precious rank'.

After this abstract of the discussion in *B.Y.*, the Maggid's message should be abundantly clear:

והשתא אתוסף אשר קדישי [to salute you] בגין דפלפלת במילוי בפסקים ובתשובות. ומאי דאסיקת במסקנה בין הכא ובין התם קסבר דאין טובלין בתוכה אפילו אם נקב הוא כשפופרת הנוד, ויטבול בה שכ' בפסקים לאו בתוכה קאמר אלא ע"י וכמו שכתבת. ומה שדייקת מתשובה יפה דייקת, וכן מה שדייקת מדברי אשר יפה דייקת; ומה שפי' בדברי יעקב דחילי האמת כפירו[שך] כי הוא סבר שהתשובה והפסקים חולקים ותפש דברי (התשובה) [הפסקים]¹ עיקר משום דידע שכתבו אחר אותה תשובה וכדכתבת אבל בעלמא לא. . . .

Before this enthusiastic confirmation of *B.Y.*'s treatment of Asher the Maggid also reports: 'In your discussion of the words of my chosen Moses [Maimonides] . . . you advanced the correct interpretation. Concerning the three different answers which you suggested in defence of Maimonides's view, the last one is not true; none the less do not delete it.' This seems to refer to Karo's lengthy discussion of Maimonides's ruling in his Code, *Miqva'oth* vi. 3, at the end of which he suggests three possibilities

matters pertaining to O.H.

1. The Maggid repeatedly assures Karo that he was always accompanied and surrounded by hosts of angels except, of course, when entering a privy. On such occasions he should take leave of the accompanying angels with the traditional formula 'By your leave, you honoured ones' (*hithkabbedu mekhubbadam*). This instruction is eloquent testimony to the esteem in which Karo was held by his Maggid, viz. himself. The beautiful talmudic tradition of taking leave, on entering a privy, of the guardian angels that accompany every man had long fallen into desuetude—if, indeed, it was ever practised at all. Karo himself states the reason for the abeyance of this custom by quoting (*B.Y. ad O.H.* 3) an earlier authority to the effect that 'only a god-fearing and pious man on whom the *Shekhinah* rests should say this, but not an ordinary man because it would appear like arrogance', and suggesting that this might be the reason why the formula was never used.² The

¹ *M.M.* 42b.

² Code, *Shehiṭah* i. 7 and iii. 12.

³ b. *Hullin* 18b, s.v. אר.

and vague fears of inferiority which Karo may have unconsciously harboured. The Maggid clearly pays Karo all the compliments which his ascetic and truly humble *ego* would not permit him to acknowledge in waking consciousness. This self-congratulatory attitude also shows that Karo's halakhic activity was a straightforward intellectual effort without any personal doubts or conflicts accompanying it unless it were doubts about the recognition of his authority. The dreams of the earlier Tosaphists¹ as well as some references to 'compensatory' dream-messages in the Talmud² are examples testifying to unconscious conflicts or, at least, unconscious misgivings and uncertainty concerning halakhic decisions. In a dream the 'unconscious' may either provide solutions to halakhic problems or else express objections to decisions that had been reached previously by the usual and correct methods of rabbinic casuistry. Halakhic dreams could thus be either intuitive or compensatory (i.e. manifesting unconscious doubts and conflicting tendencies). Karo's Maggid, however, was different: he confined himself to complimentary confirmations *post eventum*, i.e. to strengthening Karo's self-esteem. In this respect the Maggid definitely promised more than he seems to have kept, for in a long communication³ he actually assures Karo that 'whatever is doubtful to you, whether it be halakhic decisions or the interpretation of the Talmud and its commentaries, I shall answer you, provided you meditate on your problem and express the desire that an answer be given to you [from above]'. The truth of the matter is that the Maggid rarely taught anything. Even in purely homiletical and non-halakhic matters he would often simply repeat and confirm, perhaps also slightly enlarge on, what Karo had produced the day before.⁴ One cannot but agree with Hakham Şebi's caustic

remark that 'Rabbi Joseph Karo was a better scholar than his Maggid'.¹ No doubts, conscious or unconscious, seem to have troubled Karo in his halakhic activity.² Sure of himself³ and of his sovereign mastery over the vast material that he marshalled, he wrote the *Summa* of rabbinic law with full confidence in the sufficiency of his intellectual equipment. His alert mind was always self-critical enough to assess the varying value of his learned feats and to distinguish between mere exhibitions of intellectual brilliance and the true, responsible elucidation of a law or of an author's opinion.⁴ Pressing the psychological point of view one might perhaps maintain that Karo did harbour unconscious doubts or fears of inferiority which were compensated by the Maggid's emphatic words of praise.

the Maggid's function, as will appear later, was mainly expressive (i.e. 'revelatory'), normative, and punitive. The Maggid thus exhibits a good many of the characteristics of the classical super-ego; he stands in a precise, compensatory, and inverse relation to Karo's ascetic life. Whenever Karo fell short of the standards set by himself and his circle, the Maggid was there to reprove him; whenever he succeeded in satisfying his own exacting but essentially realizable demands, the Maggid was there to accord that praise and flattery which Karo could hardly bestow upon himself. For a man of Karo's learning and intellectual calibre the essential difference between *halakhah* and ascetic piety reduced itself to this: that in the former he would be less liable to failure and to a continuous sense of insufficiency. In the circumstances, the halakhic communications of the Maggid must have been among the most gratifying to their recipient and author.

MORE intriguing, perhaps, than any of the literary and kabbalistic problems connected with the *M.M.* is the figure of the Maggid himself, though perhaps we had better say 'herself'. The problem here seems to be not so much the ultimate interpretation and explanation of this psychological, viz. mystical, phenomenon, but rather the preliminary description and understanding of the identity and nature of the Maggid as they emerge from his own testimonies. Is Karo satisfied to take his experience simply as it comes to him, perhaps with a few theoretical hints thrown into the bargain? Or does he make a serious attempt, conscious or unconscious, to arrive at a systematic or at least consistent interpretation of the phenomenon? The answer yielded by the text of the *M.M.* is by no means as unequivocal as one could wish.

A number of initial facts can be established with certainty and ease even after a cursory examination of the evidence. The maggi-dic revelations came to Karo at all possible hours: 'the night after the end of the Sabbath, after *habdalah*',¹ 'during the afternoon prayer whilst the reader was reading from the Torah-scroll',² 'Wednesday during the afternoon prayer, whilst I was reciting *Mishnayoth*'.³ The favourite hour, however, seems to have been after midnight, in the early morning—more particularly on Sabbath mornings. The pattern comes out very clearly in a typical passage:⁴

Sabbath night. . . . I had eaten and drunk very little, studied *Mishnah* at the beginning of the night and then slept until dawn. When I woke the sun was already shining and I was grieved, saying to myself, 'Why did I not rise when it was still night so that the *speech* should come to me as usual [!]' . Then I began to recite *Mishnayoth* and when I had read five chapters 'the voice of my beloved knocketh' [cf. Cant. v. 2] in

my mouth, sounding by itself and speaking thus: 'The Lord be with thee wherever thou goest, and whatever thou hast done or shalt do the Lord maketh to prosper in thy hand [cf. Gen. xxxix. 2-3]. But always cleave unto me, unto my fear, unto my *Torah*, unto my *Mishnayoth*, and not as thou hast done this night. For although thou hast hallowed [i.e. mortified] thyself by [abstaining from] food and drink, yet thou hast slept like a sluggard . . . and didst not rise to recite *Mishnayoth* as thou art wont to do. Thou hast merited that I leave and forsake thee, since by thy prolonged sleep till dawn thou hast added strength to Samael, the Serpent, and the Evil *Yeşer*. Yet by the merits of the six orders of the *Mishnah* which thou knowest by heart and by the merit of the mortifications and austerities which thou hast practised in former days and also now, it has been decided in the Celestial Academy that I return to speak unto thee as before, not to leave thee and not to forsake thee. Thus have I done, as thou seest, for I am now speaking unto thee as a man speaketh unto his friend [cf. Exod. xxxiii. 11], and thine eyes behold that for many generations no man has reached this high degree of perfection but only some chosen few. Therefore, my son, hearken unto my voice whatever I command thee and devote thyself always, day and night without interruption, to my *Torah*; think of no worldly thing but only of *Torah*, of my fear, and of my *Mishnayoth*.' Then I slept again for about half an hour and awoke with grief, saying, 'Now the speech has been interrupted because I fell asleep', and I recited [more] *Mishnayoth*. [Then] the voice of my beloved [again] knocketh in my mouth, saying, 'Thou shouldst know that God and the whole Celestial Academy send thee [the greeting of] peace and have sent me unto thee to reveal unto thee the works of God.' Thereafter a deep sleep fell upon me and I slept for about half an hour and I awoke, full of grief that he [i.e. the Maggid] had not spoken to me at greater length, as usual. I again began to recite *Mishnayoth* and before I had finished two chapters, the voice of my beloved was knocking in my mouth, saying, 'Though thou hast thought that I had forsaken thee . . . do not think thus.'

This characteristic and representative specimen passage de-

There can be no doubt that Karo was wide awake when the voice came to him:

I have come to delight myself with thee and to speak in thy mouth, *not in a dream but as a man speaketh with a friend*.³

In the early morning of . . . I awoke and could not sleep, so I rose and dressed, said a few prayers, and thereafter he said unto me, 'The Lord be with thee, etc., *I have woken thee in order to speak to thee*, to seek thy face and I have found thee [cf. Prov. vii. 15],⁴ behold thy time is a time of love [cf. Ez. xvi. 8].'⁵

In fact, the voice generally came to Karo soon after waking up. Very often Karo fell asleep again after the maggidic manifestation, to wake up a second time and receive further revelations:

Sabbath night. . . . The Lord be with you. . . . Thereafter I slept till half an hour after daybreak. When I woke I was aggrieved that he had not spoken unto me as usual *at length* [!] and I began to recite *Mishnayoth* and hardly finished two chapters when 'the voice of my beloved came' [cf. Cant. ii. 8] and spoke: 'Is it good in thine eyes what thou hast done this night to drink water twice? . . . For this thou hast deserved that I leave and forsake thee, but I shall not do so.'⁶

During his speech a deep sleep fell upon me and I slept for more than an hour. When I awoke, I paced up and down in the house reciting *Mishnayoth* till about half an hour after daybreak, then I sat down on

We may assume that as a rule Karo was alone during these visitations. Once or twice the diary reports the sudden cessation of the Maggid's speech because of interruption by strangers: '. . . then people came in and interrupted the speech and he concluded abruptly and departed [with the valediction] "peace be with thee". . . .'³ '. . . then people came in and interrupted the speech.'⁴ A week later the Maggid resumes his discourse where he had broken off: 'Concerning the matter which I discussed with you on the [last] Sabbath when we were interrupted, I shall now give you my love [i.e. proceed with the explanation].'⁵ 'I should like to tarry longer with thee, for thy time is a time of love, but the hour of prayer has come. Yet I shall return to this subject, provided thou cleave unto me, unto my *Mishnayoth*, unto my service, unto my fear, and do not separate thy mind from me even for one moment.'⁶

The frequent use of phrases like 'behold the voice of my beloved knocketh in my mouth and the lyre sounded of itself'⁷ confirms the automatic character of the phenomenon.⁸ The experience

seems to have been that of an involuntary movement and irresistible automatism of the larynx¹ and lips. The vibration of the lips is referred to once when the Maggid explains:

Therefore cleave unto me, unto my *Torah*, unto my *Mishnayoth*, etc. 'When thou goest it shall lead thee, when thou sleepest it shall keep thee [and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee! cf. Prov. vi. 22]'. 'When thou sleepest [or liest down]'—this is to be understood literally, as it is written [Deut. vi. 7] 'when thou liest down and when thou risest up'. For when thou fallest asleep amid thoughts of the *Mishnah*, then my seven worlds shall keep thee; and when thou awakest after having fallen asleep amid thoughts of the *Mishnah*, then it will speak in thy mouth and thy lips will vibrate.²

Here we find a rudimentary attempt at formulating a theory of the maggidic phenomenon. The 'instrumental cause' is the study of the *Mishnah* immediately before falling asleep. This prior recital of *Mishnah* actually converts the 'lying down' (Deut. vi. 7) into a kind of incubation: the sleeper is surrounded and guarded by the seven worlds of the *Shekhinah* and on awakening reaps the mystical fruit of this incubation in the form of automatic speech.³ This theory, proffered by the Maggid himself, is a remarkable and interesting attempt at self-interpretation though it certainly is far from doing justice to the actual phenomenon. For one thing, the Maggid usually did not speak immediately after Karo's awakening; the impression gained from the majority of entries in the diary is that Karo, after waking up, had to recite *Mishnayoth* for some time before the Maggid would manifest himself.

reason for this particular vexation he begins to stammer:³

For although many tribulations will befall you, they serve to purify your soul so that you will be guiltless [i.e. cleansed] of your iniquities. Also the members of the Great Synagogue will suffer even greater tribulations, and the mystery of it is, and the mystery of it is, and thus he kept on saying for more than an hour as if refusing to tell me, until he finally said, 'The mystery of it is that the members of the Great Synagogue have sinned by speaking unseemly words against Heaven . . ., and God's anger, as it were, was roused and [now] He punishes them measure for measure and [therefore] it was decreed that you should not be associated with them for some time.'

On another occasion the Maggid announced that he would reveal to Karo the mystery of his wife's soul as well as her previous *gilgul*, but when he got so far began to stammer and finally delivered himself of some obscure sentences, charging Karo 'not to reveal this thing to any man . . . neither must you write it down in such a manner that others may understand it'.⁴ Once the Maggid communicated a complete homily 'according to the plain sense'⁵ on the first chapter of *Aboth*. However, 'when he came to the *Mishnah* [*Aboth* i. 17] "all my days I grew up among sages"' he stammered and said 'you cause me to stammer by the wandering [or worldly] thoughts in your mind at the time of prayer, for you do not concentrate sufficiently [on your prayers] . . .'.⁶ The same argument also accounts for errors and mistakes generally:⁷

Perhaps the most instructive example of such theorizing about the recipient's influence on the *inspirator* is provided by the Maggid's interpretation of Deut. xxix. 9 ff.¹ The Maggid's exposition is in the usual style of kabbalistic homiletics, but is based on a misquotation of the first verse, which the Maggid glosses as if it read 'ye stand this day [all of you before the Lord your God], your judges, your officers, your elders', whereas, as Solomon Alkabets immediately objected,² the correct reading is 'your captains of your tribes, your elders, your officers' [cf. A.V., Deut. xxix. 10]. The Maggid immediately took up the challenge:³

Behold the lyre sounded of itself and said: 'Though at times I expound a scriptural verse which does not exist in the form in which I quote it, [this happens] because I quote as it is in your mind. None the less my explanation is true and it is your duty to make it fit the correct reading of the text. This is the meaning of the verse [Job xxxii. 8] 'but there is a spirit in man', that is to say that things are shown to man as they are in his mind,—'and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding', that is to say that although the [inspired] explanations are true, yet they have to be [re-]interpreted to fit the text.'

The Maggid applies the same principle to the utterances of the prophets and thus practically formulates a theory of inspiration that avoids the more patent difficulties of the verbal inspirationists. The wording of all revelations, so we are told, is subject to individual vagaries and shortcomings; only the general sense is inspired and true. Celestial communications therefore impose a further exegetical duty on the recipient, who has to show that the general purport of the message also fits the correct wording of the sacred text.

We have noticed already¹ that the manifestations of the Maggid were audible to bystanders and that Karo himself was awake and conscious:

You see for yourself the high degree which you have attained before the face of the Lord's people, that *you are spoken to with a loud voice* . . .² And now you see that when I speak to you your eyes are open and you are looking around, and your voice is loudly audible when I speak in your mouth.³

It appears that Karo was fully aware of the relative uniqueness of this type of maggidism. In fact, the period during which maggidism in the form of automatic speech flourished in kabbalistic circles was only about to begin and Karo could legitimately look upon himself as an exceptional case. Thus he is assured by the Maggid, 'Your eyes behold that for many generations no man has reached this high degree, except some chosen few.'⁴ 'Go and see what you have attained and to what high degree you have ascended that the [inspired] words are spoken in your mouth in this manner.'⁵ 'The *Shekhinah* is speaking to you and you have attained what nobody has attained for many generations.'⁶ Already in Alkabets's Epistle the singularity of the manifestation was stressed: 'Behold, has a people ever heard a voice speaking [thus] in your midst, "ask thy father and he will show thee; thy elders and they will tell thee" [cf. Deut. xxxii. 7], whether for many centuries such a thing has been heard or seen but you have been found worthy of it.'⁷ Similar marks of divine favour to others are either denied or minimized. The Maggid of Rabbi Joseph Taytazak had to be admitted but was pronounced to be of an inferior order.⁸ It seems that Taytazak's Maggid manifested himself in automatic writing whereas Karo could pride himself on the audible reception of the divine word

A useful point of departure, from a methodological point of view, would be an investigation into the history and development of the noun *maggid* as a technical term for certain types of revelations. Unfortunately the material on this point is particularly scarce and does not permit any conclusions. As we have seen before,¹ all sorts and manners of revelation and illumination were known in Jewish mystical tradition. Dreams, angelic messengers, manifestations of the prophet Elijah and of the souls of departed saints, inspired intuitions, magically induced infusion of the Holy Spirit, and many other modes of inspiration have been recorded. But not until the sixteenth century does the term *maggid* appear as descriptive of a specific agent of celestial communication.² By the time Cordovero and Luria were active in Safed, both the term and the phenomenon were commonplace enough to be mentioned as a matter of course in discussions of mystical practice.³ As time went on, *maggidism* increased and in certain periods almost assumed epidemic proportions. But Karo himself still speaks of his *Maggid* as 'the voice' or, more often, simply as 'the speech' (*ha-dibbur*). Similarly Alkabets, in his Epistle, reports: 'And we heard the voice speaking in the mouth of the *ḥasid*. . . . Later, at midnight, the speech returned a second time. . . . Also on the Sabbath the speech

² Professor E. E. Urbach draws my attention to what may be the earliest example of the use of the noun *maggid* as a technical term. It occurs in Rashi's commentary to b. *Pesahim* 105b, on the phrase **אָנָּא לֹא חֲכִימָאָה אָנָּא וְלֹא חוּזָאָה** *אָנָּא וְלֹא יַחֲדָאָה אָנָּא אֲלֵא גִמְרָנָה וְסִדְרָנָה אָנָּא*. The expression **חוּזָאָה** is explained by Rashi (both in the commentary attributed to him and as quoted in Ashbam's commentary) 'מַגִּיד'. This seems to suggest that the origin of the term should perhaps be sought in the circles of the German *Ḥasidim*. It will be remembered that Vital too refers to the subject of *maggidim* as mentioned in the *Sefer Ḥasidim* (cf. above, p. 79) though the word does not occur in any of the extant texts. It is unnecessary to draw attention to the obvious and important distinction that Rashi's *maggid* (= **חוּזָאָה**) signifies the visionary, viz. the recipient of revelations, and not—as in later usage—the *vox coelestis* or angelic inspirator. The actual meaning of the talmudic phrase *Pes.* 105b has been carefully studied and elucidated in a recent Ph.D. thesis (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) on 'The redaction of tractate *Pesah Rishon* of the Babylonian Talmud', by A. S. Rosenthal (pp. 223–52 of the typescript).

from the seventh to the middle of the month.

The reference to a written source is less clear in the second passage, though there too it seems very probable.⁸

Returning to the question of the *Maggid's* identity, it appears from the evidence already adduced that the speaker is none other than the *Shekhinah* herself. The text of Alkabets's Epistle as well

as the quotation preserved in the approbation of the Jerusalem rabbinate¹ explicitly state that the speaker was in exile, suffering tribulations, and was lying 'in the dust' whence he, viz. she, expected to be 'raised up' by the pious exercises of the brotherhood. On the other hand this *Shekhinah* did not merely reveal herself as a result of the study of *Mishnah* but was herself identical with the *Mishnah*: 'and he heard the voice speaking from the *Mishnah* herself'²—'behold I am the *Mishnah*, the mother which correcteth man, I came to speak to you'³—'I am the *Mishnah* that speaketh in your mouth'⁴ alongside of 'the *Shekhinah* speaketh to you'⁵—'I am the *Mishnah* that speaketh in your mouth, I am the mother that correcteth her sons, I am called the *Maṭronitha*'⁶—'Verily I am the *Mishnah* that speaketh in your mouth, it is I that dry the sea and wound Rahab,⁷ I am the mother that correcteth man, I am the redeeming angel⁸ in the mystery of Jacob'⁹—'my *Mishnayoth* are "an ornament of grace unto thy head" [Prov. i. 9], the "ornament of grace" that is the *Maṭronitha*, for all sefiroth attend her.'¹⁰

Although this *Mother-Shekhinah-Maṭronitha* is usually referred to in the masculine gender,¹¹ her feminine character is enhanced more than once by unmistakably erotic overtones. A few examples must suffice here: 'I embrace thee and cleave unto thee always'¹²—'through the merit of the *Mishnayoth* I cleave unto thee and kiss thee kisses of love and draw down on thee the thread of the love of Abraham'¹³—'I would find thee without and kiss thee [cf. Cant. viii. 1] with kisses of love as it is written [Cant. i. 2] "let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth"'¹⁴—'Lo, I am the *Mishnah* that speaketh in thy mouth, that adorneth itself with excellent ornaments, [to wit] the strings of *Mishnayoth* which thou always recitest, for thou mountest the second chariot.'¹⁵

tribulations, and was lying 'in the dust' whence he, viz. she, expected to be 'raised up' by the pious exercises of the brother- hood. On the other hand this *Shekhinah* did not merely reveal herself as a result of the study of *Mishnah* but was herself identical with the *Mishnah*: 'and he heard the voice speaking from the *Mishnah* herself'^—'behold I am the *Mishnah*, the mother which

correcteth man, I came to speak to you'^—'I am the *Mishnah* that speaketh in your mouth'-'* alongside of 'the *Shekhinah* speaketh to you'⁵—'I am the *Mishnah* that speaketh in your mouth, I am the mother that correcteth her sons, I am called the *Matronitha*'^— 'Verily I am the *Mishnah* that speaketh in your mouth, it is I that dry the sea and wound Rahab,^ I am the mother that correcteth man, I am the redeeming angel^ in the mystery of Jacob'^

—

'my Mishna-

yothe are ' 'an ornament of grace unto thy head" [Prov. i. 9], the ' 'ornament of grace" that is the Maironitha, for all sefiroth attend her."" Although this Mother-Shekhinah-Matronitha is usually referred

to in the masculine gender," her feminine character is enhanced more than once by unmistakably erotic overtones. A few examples must suffice here: 'I embrace thee and cleave unto thee always'^

'through the merit of the Mishnayoth I cleave unto thee and kiss thee kisses of love and draw down on thee the thread of the love of Abraham' '3—'j would find thee without and kiss thee [cf. Cant, viii. i] with kisses of love as it is written [Cant. i. 2] "let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" ""*—"Lo, I am the Mishnah that speaketh in thy mouth, that adorneth itself with excellent ornaments, [to wit] the strings of Mishnayoth which thou always recitest, for thou mountest the second chariot.' 's

The exact heavenly status of the Maggid is a matter of some ambiguity. As the *Mishnah*, he/she may be considered to be identical with the divine *logos*. In kabbalistic terminology—and this is a commonplace of classical kabbalism—the *Mishnah*, as the embodiment of the 'Oral Torah', symbolizes the tenth sefirah *Malkhuth-Shekhinah*, in contrast to *Tif'ereth* ('the Holy One, Blessed be He'), for which the 'Written Torah' serves as a symbol. The 'Oral Torah' is precisely and almost by definition the speakable or outspoken, i.e. manifest and articulate, mode of the hidden divine Wisdom, and this is also precisely the mode of the *logos* and the *Shekhinah* with regard to the higher, more remote, and less manifest aspects, viz. sefiroth of the Godhead. The symbolic equation *Shekhinah* = *Mishnah* of classical kabbalism goes a long way towards explaining the dual identity of our Maggid. However, against this interpretation of the Maggid as the *Shekhinah* in her quality as an hypostasis of the last and most manifest aspect of the

Aaron Land of Posen, where they were reciting *Mishnah* by heart as was his custom to do.¹ We have seen that Karo seemed to attach great importance not only to the recital of the *Mishnah* but to his doing so by heart. He is actually praised by the Maggid for renewing the former glory of the *Mishnah* by restoring the latter to her original position of 'Oral Torah' (in the literal sense) after having been treated for so many centuries as a text: "These are the holy days of the month of Nisan, and you have hallowed them even more by studying the *Mishnah* by heart; thus you have restored the crown to its ancient splendour by making [the *Mishnah* again] to be the "Oral Torah".² Elsewhere the Maggid implies that devotion to the study of *Mishnah* was comparatively rare: 'God will not take away from you his love and his grace, because of the *Mishnayoth* that you recite. For nowadays they that study her are few, and "there is none to guide her [i.e. the *Mishnah*/*Shekhinah*] among all the sons whom she hath brought forth" [cf. Isa. li.

The evidence of the testimonies adduced so far does not go beyond Safed and the later period. It seems, however, that Karo's devotion to the study of the *Mishnah* must be dated as early as his European period. In fact, one brief and allusive statement in the *M.M.* actually suggests that the study of the *Mishnah* by heart was cultivated also by Karo's 'rival' Rabbi Joseph Taytazak of Salonica⁶ and his circle. The Maggid praises Karo's diligent study of the *Mishnah* and adds 'for although there are others too who know the six orders of the *Mishnah* [by heart], one does not speak to them in the manner one speaks to you,⁷ even though you know that you have committed graver and worse sins than they'.⁸ The *M.M.* leaves no doubt that Karo's Maggid, though explicitly conceived as the *Shekhinah*, was associated with the *Mishnah* from the very beginning. Also Alkabets records in his Epistle that the first manifestation of the Maggid occurred 'when we had begun to read the *Mishnah* and had read two tractates. Then our Creator privileged us to hear the voice speaking in the mouth of the *hasid*.' That this was no accident appears from the account of the proceedings

revelations included a third type of message that may well turn out to be decisive for our psychological understanding of the phenomenon. In 1621 Isaiah Hurwitz had reported¹ that the Maggid's words contained 'many exhortations and many virtuous practices and many ascetic rules which he taught him: "eat this, but that you should not eat", forbidding him many permitted foods as if they were [ritually] prohibited ones'. But the Maggid did much more than that. In addition to imposing severe restrictions on Karo—restrictions which, incidentally, were in complete accordance with the ascetic code of the kabbalistic saints—the Maggid also functioned as his bad conscience. A very large part of the Maggid's time is taken up with reproving or even sternly rebuking Karo for minor transgressions of the severe code of ascetic discipline. Time and again he is told that his failings were such that his celestial mentor should have deserted him, were it not for special divine grace and favour.² The Maggid's prescriptions include not only extreme continence in food, drink, and sleep but also positive mortifications and frequent fasts,

and do not enjoy anything of this world as I already instructed thee and as thou didst practise it, in part, this week. Behold, today thou hast terminated a forty days period of fasting, corresponding to the forty days of the formation of the embryo. Although on some days thou didst enjoy things of this world, yet since they were altogether forty days they were [graciously] accepted [by God].³

Of course, it is a far cry from a super-ego, influenced or dominated by the mother-image, to a full-blown oedipal, libidinous fixation on the mother. If, nevertheless, we venture to suggest that traces of such a fixation are discernible in the Maggid,⁴ we must not base ourselves solely on the Maggid's markedly maternal character or on the erotic overtones already referred to. Indirect, though no less valuable, evidence is provided by Karo's attitude of extreme reverence to his wives, as well as by the Maggid's declaration that at least one of them was essentially male since her soul was that of a famous talmudic scholar. We may thus, perhaps, conclude, without overstating our case, that certain elements of the oedipal situation were active in shaping the figure of the super-ego as manifest in the Maggid. As the Maggid exhibits a positive dislike of horseradish,⁵ it is, perhaps, a pity that we do not know how Karo's mother felt about this particular vegetable.

If our interpretation is not completely mistaken, then Karo is another example of the psychological type of the son whose ambition to achieve great things is fed by the mother, viz. the mother-image. We have already had occasion to point out the element of ambition, flattery, and praise in the maggidic communications in connexion with the halakhic contents of the *M.M.*¹ It will therefore occasion no surprise to learn that homage is paid to Karo by the hosts of heaven,² that his writings would all be completed and accepted as authoritative throughout Israel,³ that he would raise more disciples than any other talmudic scholar for the last five hundred years, and that none but his students would enjoy academic standing.⁴ He was destined to be the spiritual chief of Israel,⁵ and even to perform miracles.⁶ Surely these ambitions were more than the average ideals of even the most distinguished Talmudist and, as we have seen, they were not devoid of eschatological overtones.⁷ It is all the more surprising, considering the eschatological mood of the age, that there is so little direct and immediate messianism in either Karo's or the Maggid's utterances. The messianic storm was only beginning to gather, and the kabbalist circle of Taytazak, Alkabets, Karo, and Berab seem to have seen themselves on the verge of the messianic era but not as messianic personalities. Not even Karo's unconscious in its wildest dreams would dare to go that far. It was left to a younger generation of kabbalists to grope hesitantly towards the half-conscious wish-dreaming of a messianic calling.

ALBERT EINSTEIN, Litt.D.
The Institute For Advanced Study
School of Mathematics, Princeton, New Jersey

May 3rd, 1949

Senior Surgeon H. L. Gordon
U. S. Marine Hospital
Stapleton S. I., N. Y.

Dear Dr. Gordon:

My opinion about the origin of new ideas and new understanding I might characterize as follows:

A new idea comes suddenly and in a rather intuitive way. That means it is not reached by conscious logical conclusions. But thinking it through afterwards you can always discover the reasons which have led you unconsciously to your guess and you will find a logical way to justify it. Intuition is nothing but the outcome of accumulated earlier intellectual experience. In other words: I do not believe in any possibility of mental creation outside the realm of common psychology.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) *A. Einstein*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

P.S. Your ms. will be returned to you under separate cover.

I Am The Mishnah

"I am the Mishnah. The old Mother who rebukes men, came to speak to you . . . You were uplifted and through you, I too . . . though if there were ten of you,

you would have been raised higher. Be courageous, my sons . . . If you only knew one part of the thousand thousands of thousand myriads of myriads of the sorrows that encompass me—you would never have allowed joy to enter your hearts or laughter your mouth, for on account of you I am cast into dust. Never cease to study me. It is mellow in the eyes of the Lord. And now exclaim in a loud voice as on Yom Kippur, 'Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever!' "

We then rose to our feet while the joints of our loins became loose. We exclaimed in a loud voice, "Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom for ever and ever!"

And he said further, "You are fortunate! Return to your study and do not leave even for an instant!"

not the year. They are arranged in a yearly cycle according to the weekly portions (parashioth) of the Bible readings. The entries dated by year give us a time range from 1536 to 1572. 1536 is the year of Caro's arrival in Safed, but from the contents we know that some entries were made when he was still at Nicopolis, i.e. *before* 1520.

We may therefore assume safely that it was written for a period of not less than fifty-two years, and that Caro heard the Maggid's voice, at the least, from the ages of thirty-two to eighty-four.

There is no doubt that many original entries of our Diary are missing from the printed editions, as the author refers to many items with the expression "As I have told you before," and many of them are missing from the present text. The very cautious and reserved bibliographer H. J. D. Azulai (1726-1806) must have had a sound basis for his assertion, "According to my humble opinion the printed [text] is only a fiftieth part [of the original manuscript]" (*Shem Ha-Gedolim*, I, 58).

A "True Confession"

There is an old proverb: "The heart does not reveal itself to the mouth" (*Midrash Psalms*, 89,2). But in Caro's case the heart did reveal itself to the mouth. On one occasion Caro unwillingly raised the veil over his soul, when the Maggid told him, "—I am the echo of your thoughts."

Caro's Diary is a record of a great soul laid bare, a true confession of ambition and striving after fame and acclaim that agitate the hearts and subconscious mind

even of self-effacing ascetics, though not allowed to rise and be recognized as such.

A *maggid* might be defined as a beneficial *'ibbur*, were it not for the fact that unlike an *'ibbur*, a *maggid* is construed not as a disembodied soul but as an angelic being. Spanish Kabbalists actively sought this form of possession through the deployment of a variety of magico-mystical techniques. An examination of *Sefer ha-Meshiv* (Book of the Responding Angel) reveals the extent to which practices for obtaining revelations through *maggidic* possession were of central importance in fifteenth-century Spanish kabbalistic circles. "This work," wrote Moshe Idel, "represents the first precedent for the rise in the revelatory element in the later Kabbalah of the sixteenth century—as testified to by the work *Maggid Mesharim* [Angel of Righteousness, by R. Joseph Karo]." ⁹¹ The aggressive pursuit of revelation through magical means, entailing the supplanting of one's own personality with that of an "other," is not far removed from the cultivation of beneficial *'ibburim* that was a staple of Luria's prescriptions for his disciples. *Dybbuk* possession, which proliferated contemporaneously with *maggidism*, may thus be regarded as "an instance of 'inverse *maggidism*.'" ⁹² The inversive parallel between *dybbukim* and *maggidim* is most clearly manifest in the eruption of involuntary speech in the host. Like the *dybbuk*, the *maggid* made its presence known through speech. The literature on *'ibbur*, however, indicates that the visiting soul generally remained silent in its temporary abode, discernible only by the clairvoyant (like Luria) and through what presented itself as a visceral influence, the embodiment of the qualities of the departed rather than his (speaking) personality.

Karo would seem to have wedded the two paradigms in an unprecedented manner. The famous recipient of the most famous *maggid* in Jewish history, Karo was also shown by Idel to have been the exorcist in the first known possession narrative in early modern Jewish sources.⁹³ Karo was not the only recipient of *maggidic* revelations to have been associated with exorcism; Zacuto was also reported to have had a *maggid*.⁹⁴ This should not be

terribly surprising, given that rabbinic exorcists were as a rule kabbalists—precisely those who would pursue the attainment of a *maggidic* revelation. And a *maggid* could be pursued, unlike Elijah the Prophet, whose revelations were always desired but whose presence was considered impossible to compel. A seventeenth-century purveyor of hagiographic literature, Shlomo ibn Gabbai, discussed the relation between revelations of a *maggid* and those of Elijah in his introduction to his book on the wonders of R. Isaac Luria.

terribly surprising, given that rabbinic exorcists were as a rule kabbalists—precisely those who would pursue the attainment of a *maggidic* revelation. And a *maggid* could be pursued, unlike Elijah the Prophet, whose revelations were always desired but whose presence was considered impossible to compel. A seventeenth-century purveyor of hagiographic literature, Shlomo ibn Gabbai, discussed the relation between revelations of a *maggid* and those of Elijah in his introduction to his book on the wonders of R. Isaac Luria.

The level of a *maggid* is not like the level of Elijah, may his memory be a blessing, not even one one-thousandth part. Perhaps he will apprehend something, for a *maggid* is a spark of one's soul that was already in the world, and one can adjure it, and it will appear in one's own form and image, until one becomes bored with the apparition, since it is a shame that it is unable to reveal more, but only that which is within the power of the spark of one's soul and not more. But Elijah, may his memory be a blessing, reveals himself with the *Shekhina*⁹⁵ and they do not separate from each other. And the wise will intuitively understand that there is nothing higher than this level.⁹⁶

Karo's own status as a clairvoyant mystic suffered by the comparison. Unlike Luria, Karo's positive possession state, his *maggid*, was not sufficiently rarefied to provide him with the most sublime revelations. His achievement thus paled when measured against that of Luria, as ibn Gabbai was quick to point out: "And you, who are interested, look at the book *Maggid Mesharim* of R. Joseph Karo, of blessed memory, to whom the *maggid* revealed himself

Karo's own status as a clairvoyant mystic suffered by the comparison. Unlike Luria, Karo's positive possession state, his *maggid*, was not sufficiently rarefied to provide him with the most sublime revelations. His achievement thus paled when measured against that of Luria, as ibn Gabbai was quick to point out: "And you, who are interested, look at the book *Maggid Mesharim* of R. Joseph Karo, of blessed memory, to whom the *maggid* revealed himself regularly and revealed some [mystical] rationales of the Torah [*ta'amei Torah*]. Yet nevertheless, these were as naught before the secrets of the AR" I [Luria], may his memory be for life everlasting."⁹⁷ Of course, because Elijah's presence could not be forced, few enjoyed his revelations; *maggidic* revelations were far more common among the mystical rabbinic elite, for whom the *maggid* was a regularized, positive form of spirit possession with clear Iberian roots.

A good deal of the theoretical and practical groundwork for the reconstruction of spirit possession in sixteenth-century Jewish culture can therefore be found in literature written in and recalling preexpulsion Spain. The interest in cultivating positively valued possession states, whether *'ibburic* or *maggidic*, is recalled by sixteenth-century kabbalists as having been part of the Spanish milieu of their fathers. How do such recollections of Spanish antecedents accord with the views of spirit possession prevalent in late medieval Christian Spain? Was the Jewish willingness to accept a disembodied soul as a possessor entirely foreign to Christian contemporaries? Although

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulpa#:~:text=A%20tulpa%20is%20a%20materialized,is%20borrowed%20from%20Tibetan%20Buddhism>.

<https://somatosphere.com/2015/varieties-of-tulpa-experiences-sentient-imaginary-friends-embodied-joint-attention-and-hypnotic-sociality-in-a-wired-world.html/>

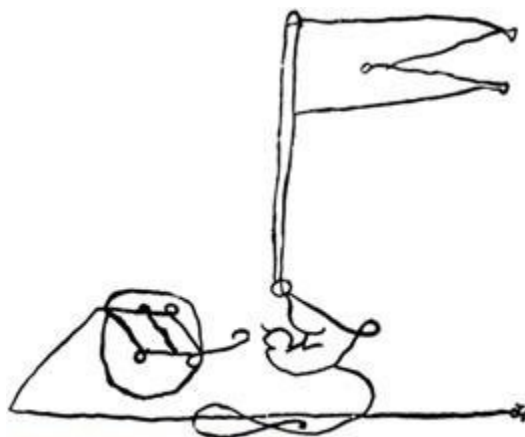
The first person that we have contemporary accounts of their having received revelations through a *maggid*, a heavenly spiritual guide, was Rabbi Joseph Karo, the great halakhic authority and author of the great code the *Shulhan Arukh*.⁵² Karo, Alkabetz, and a group of their disciples gathered to engage in the kabbalistic ritual that became known as Tikkun Leyl Shavuot on the first night of Shavuot, 1534 or 1535 in Adrianople, Turkey.⁵³ This was also the first time there is a record of anyone engaging in this ritual, though it had been described in the *Zohar*. Shortly after beginning the study of the Mishnah, a voice began to emanate from Karo that was not his own, a form of automatic speech. This voice identified itself as the personification of the Mishnah. Alkabetz and the others present heard the voice, which addressed not only Karo, but also all those who were present, and it encouraged them in their mystical devotions. The *maggid* remained in contact with Karo for the rest of his life. He recorded the messages of the *maggid* in a diary that was published as *Maggid Mesharim* (Lublin, 1646).

Our knowledge of this event comes from a letter that Shlomo Alkabetz sent to the sages of Salonika informing them of the events that had transpired regarding the appearance of Karo's *maggid*. The letter was eventually published as a preface to *Maggid Mesharim*, and shortly afterwards in the popular kabbalistic compendium *Shnei Luhot ha-Berit* (Amsterdam, 1649), authored by Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz.⁵⁴

The *maggidim* of both Taitazak and Karo were very personal affairs. In Taitazak's case there is no evidence that his contemporaries were even aware of his *Maggid* or its relation to him. It was only in the twentieth century that these writings and their connection to Taitazak were brought to light. Karo's contemporaries knew about his *Maggid*, and some of them even experienced the visitation of the *maggid*. Alkabetz describes hearing the voice of the *maggid* emanating from Karo's mouth, in his letter. Karo's diary, which recorded the instructions and teachings of the *maggid*, was published less than a century after Karo's death and is a well-known work. Yet, what the *maggidim* of Taitazak and Karo shared was that they were revelations directed to one person and did not have a significant impact on the larger community. They also did not affect or enhance the reputation of either of them in relation to their other works on which their reputations stood. Taitazak was known in his day as an important halakhic authority, biblical commentator, and philosopher.⁵⁷ Karo achieved exceptional fame and influence as the author of the *Beyt Yosef* and *Shulhan Arukh*, two works that remain the most basic and important works of halakhah to the present. To the extent that the *Maggid Mesharim* was the subject of discussion, it was about whether it was indeed an authentic work by Karo. Many questioned how it was possible for the author of the great halakhic code, the *Shulhan Arukh* to also be the author of a work that they found exceedingly strange. For many, the answer was that it was a forgery, and it was inconceivable for it to be the work of Karo. However, we do know that Karo did indeed record the revelations that he received from his *maggid*.⁵⁸

As mentioned above, the first *dybbuk* text from Safed is from Rabbi Judah Halliwah's work, "Zofnat Pa'aneah," which remains in manuscript. R. Judah was a kabbalist active in Safed in the middle of the sixteenth century.² This story of an exorcism by Rabbi Joseph **Karo** that took place in Safed in 1545 was first published in an article by Moshe Idel.³

Karo was not known as an exorcist or miracle worker from other sources, and more research is needed before conclusions can be reached about this event. While some of the details of this story are compared to those found in Hayyim Vital's *Sefer Hezyonot*, there are significant differences. Two unusual elements in this story are that **Karo** threatened the Spirit with torture and that the Spirit was seeking revenge against the person who was being possessed for prior acts against the Spirit. The motif of physical coercion is reminiscent of the pre-Safed discussions of the exorcism of demons and evil spirits. It is also a motif



In company with **David Reubeni**, his mentor, he went in 1532 to **Regensburg**, where the emperor **Charles V** was holding a *diet*. On this occasion, Molcho carried a flag with the Hebrew word *Maccabi*, the four letters מִכְּבִי that also signify an abbreviation for Exodus 15:11 "Who among the mighty is like unto God?".^[8] The three met for two hours. While the exact content of the meeting was not recorded, letters written from the court at the time indicate Molcho proposed the establishment of a joint Jewish-Christian army^[9] to fend off the emperor's foreign enemies and, possibly, to reconquer the Holy Land. The emperor had Molcho and Reubeni arrested and took them back to Italy. In **Mantua**, an ecclesiastical court sentenced Molcho to death by fire. Molcho was taken to the stake in November or December 1532 (a Jewish tradition lists the date as the 5th of Tevet 5293, but no records confirm the date). It is claimed that the emperor offered to **pardon** him on condition that he return to the **Catholic Church**, but Molcho refused, asking for a **martyr's** death.^[10] His mentor, David Reubeni, was exiled to Spain, where later he died.

Reubeni's striking appearance—a swarthy dwarf in Oriental costume—and messianic claims attracted the attention of Diego Pires, a descendant of conversos and a secretary to the High Court of Appeals of Portugal. Despite Reubeni's opposition, Pires returned to his Jewish roots, circumcised himself and took the name of Solomon Molcho.^{[9][3]} Jewish ambassadors from the Barbary States visited Reubeni at the Portuguese court. Some conversos were so excited by this activity that they rose in arms near Badajoz, where they freed a converso woman from the Inquisition. Portuguese authorities became worried about Reubeni's mission and the dangers of popular unrest.

Reubeni then went to Avignon to take his cause to the papal court, and afterward to Milan. There he again met Molcho, who had traveled to the East and made messianic claims. In Milan the two adventurers quarreled. Reubeni went to Venice, where the Senate appointed a commission to review his plans for obtaining assistance from the Jews in the East.

David Reubeni's diary was written in a Hebrew that, we can assume, was intended to represent the native Hebrew spoken in his invented Jewish kingdom in Arabia. It is indeed a fresh Hebrew, quite unlike the flowery prose that usually characterizes Jewish literary writings of the Renaissance. It is also a Hebrew like no other. Hebrew writings of this period can often be mined for clues regarding the language that their authors spoke in their daily lives. Reubeni's grammar and usage, however, is so idiosyncratic and anarchic that philologists have come to no consensus as to what language he and his authorial collaborators might have originally spoken, and guesses range from Yiddish to Arabic, from Slavic languages to Romance ones.

To add to the difficulty of translation, the original manuscript of the

“I am not the Messiah,” said David Reubeni, “I am a greater sinner before God than any one of you. I have killed many people. In a single day, I once killed forty enemies. I am not a sage or a kabbalist, neither am I *a prophet nor the son of a prophet*. I am merely an army commander.”¹ Short and thin, with skin “as black as a Nubian”² and a body covered in scars, Reubeni claimed to be the commander of a powerful Jewish army and the brother of a Jewish king who ruled over three hundred thousand Jews in the Arabian desert of Habor, all descendants of the lost Israelite tribes of Gad, Manasseh, and Reuben (hence his name).³ Despite speaking only Hebrew and Arabic, he successfully forged relationships with Christian rulers, including the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, the King of Portugal, João III, and Pope Clement VII, by dangling the possibility of an alliance against the Ottomans in exchange for weapons and experts in their manufacture. He gained Jewish followers, including many forced converts to Christianity (*conversos*), who practiced Judaism in secret to avoid persecution, with the promise that his army would liberate them from oppression by force, deliver them to the Holy Land, and restore their pride and autonomy. Many Jews embraced him as the Messiah, despite his denials, and he attracted the patronage and support of some of Europe’s wealthiest Jews and rabbinic elites. A mysterious figure who guarded his secrets closely, he traveled through Africa, the Middle East, and Europe before being halted by the Inquisition and burned at the stake in 1538 for preaching Judaism to Christians. He left us his diary, detailing the hustle and daily grind of a charismatic showman—a showman whose promise of a reunion between far-flung peoples, of allyship, conquest, and power, appealed to the giddy optimism, credulity, and fear that gripped the Mediterranean world in the age of exploration.

II

First of all you must take care never to allow your thoughts to dwell on anything other than the Mishnah, the Torah and the precepts. If any other thought enters your heart, cast it away. 2. Take care to have no other thought in mind during your prayers except the actual words of the prayers, not even thoughts of the Torah and the precepts. 3. Take care never to speak an unnecessary word, whether by day or by night. 4. Take care never to speak anything that leads to laughter and if you hear such,

RABBI JOSEPH KARO 105

never laugh. This includes the admonition never to scoff at all. 5. Never lose your temper¹ over merely material things. 6. Take care to eat no meat at all for forty days. On the Sabbath you can eat a little. Do not eat horseradish. 7. Drink no wine during these days except one drink at the end of the meal. 8. Be gentle in your replies to all men. 9. Never be proud. Be exceedingly low in spirit. 10. Sleep in your own bed. When you have to have marital relations in order to fulfill the precept to be fruitful and multiply, rise up from her bed a half an hour after you have completed the act and return to your own bed. 11. Take care not to enjoy your eating and drinking and your marital relations. It should be as if demons were compelling you to eat that food or perform that act² so that if it were at all possible for you to exist without food and drink or to fulfill the duty of procreation without having intercourse you would prefer it. 12. Have your sins always in mind and be anxious because of them. 13. Do not eat

without having intercourse you would prefer it. 12. Have your sins always in mind and be anxious because of them. 13. Do not eat for dessert more than one measure and no more than twenty of melons, grapes and raisins. Except on Sabbaths and festivals do not eat of more than one type of fruit. At the beginning of the meal cut three measures of bread and during that meal eat no more. Never drink your fill of water. 14. Train yourself to keep your eyes downcast so that you will never have cause to gaze at a woman forbidden to you. 15. Have the Mishnah in mind during the meal and study a chapter of the Mishnah before Grace. 16. Do not allow your mind to wander away from Me even for a single moment and have as little pleasure as possible. When you are at meals and experience a special longing for some food or drink, desist from it. If you do this, it will be as if you offered a sacrifice at each meal and your table will be a veritable altar upon which you slaughter the evil inclination. 17. Do not drink the wine at meals in one gulp and take care with regard to how you measure it. Be not afraid that this may affect your eyesight. On the contrary, both your eyesight and your strength will increase. 18. Have little further to do with the pleasures of eating and drinking. Do not make a habit of eating a particular food that you enjoy especially. Substitute for it, rather, another type of food from which you do not derive such enjoyment, as Al-Constantin did. . . .³

did. . . ."

One who understands the mystery of *oneg* ("pleasure") and *nega'* ("plague"), namely, that the letters of one word are the same

106 JEWISH MYSTICAL TESTIMONIES

as those of the other, albeit in a different order, will understand that if a thing is in any way good, even when it reads backwards, it is good always, since the left hand must conform to the right.⁴ For those who know "grace" this is a mystery.⁵ How careful must one be regarding thoughts about women! You must burn out all such thoughts which enter your mind during prayer, especially during the *Amidah*. You know full well who it is that brings them into your heart. Take exceedingly great care in this matter and keep your eyes always open to it. If this you will do, you will be greatly exalted. Take great heed of the plague of leprosy, namely, never to soil too much the sign of the covenant of circumcision, even when it is permitted to you, unless it is absolutely necessary. Never touch it with your hand and never touch any part of your body below the navel. Of this take the greatest care for you have no idea of the harm it causes.

causes.

Know that if you see your garments torn in a dream it means that there is something wrong with our deeds. It is a dream that Gabriel brings about. He extends throughout the world, even among the nations. If you will ask: Why is it that a man grieves over a calamity seen in a dream more than over one which befalls him while he is awake? It is because in man's waking life the soul is clothed by the body. No sense of urgency is experienced because the body acts as a shield. But the harm seen in a dream oppresses the naked soul so that it experiences far greater anguish. This
41:8 will help you to understand the verse: "And his spirit was troubled."⁶ Keep yourself from eating too much meat for this flaws the soul. As for drinking wine, you have no idea how much harm it does and how great the flaw in the soul it causes. Be far, therefore, from these and be very careful. The masses imagine that this world is all it appears to be so that there is no one to see when they eat and drink in order to satisfy their evil inclination. Woe to them. For they are fooled by the world. The hand writes it all down up above and they are obliged to pay for it severely. Therefore, it is written: "What will you do on the day
10:3 of visitation?" Happy are you in that you have been warned. Reveal it to your friends and they, too, will wake up. Was it a good thing that you failed to read the Mishnah yesterday? Was it good that you have been so careless lately about thinking on the Torah? You have seen what happened to the business in which you were

engaged. Note how the Holy One, blessed be He, punishes measure for measure, and take greater care in the future.

How can you wish me to converse with you when you eat horseradish? Be careful, therefore, to eat only a little. I have already hinted to you the mystery of the good smell and the bad smell.

You did well to write to that sage regarding the Torah scroll you are about to purchase. Observe how the Lord your God is with you always. Note that for this past year and a half you have had no nocturnal emissions. Be strong and of good courage. Be not afraid and dread naught.

Do not speak to so-and-so. He is under the ban on high because of the sins he committed in private, his mind not being on God. You see how he is like the pig who declares: "I am pure." Know his secret. He cannot deny it.⁷

If you will improve your behavior I shall reveal to you the mysteries of reincarnation. I shall show you the previous incarnations of all your friends and relatives and you will witness wondrous things and be astonished. Be strong, therefore at all times in the fear of God. Mortify your flesh with all your might and burn out all the thoughts that enter your mind during prayer and when you study the Mishnah. Burn them out with the straw of reading the *Shema*, with the breath of your mouth.⁸

Is it good that you fail to go early to the synagogue and is it so bad for you to be among the first ten there? Consequently, from now onwards be exceedingly careful in your deeds and also in your words and do not fly into a rage as you often do. Remember the saying of the rabbis that when a man flies into a rage he is led into error. Bad temper derives from Samael and the serpent and it is not right for you to listen to them. Pay them no heed when they try to seduce you.

Do not eat of the meat they brought you this day for it is *terefah*. Therefore examine the slaughterers. Although they have committed no sin, for it was done unwittingly, you stay here with me and if you are a man of soul put a knife to your throat.⁹

The eve of the Sabbath, 22nd Adar. The Lord be with you but only if you cleave to Me and do not separate your thoughts even

108 JEWISH MYSTICAL TESTIMONIES

for a single moment from My Mishnah. Eat not and drink not for your own enjoyment at all. What profit is there in the pleasures of this world? Rather your thought should be: If it were possible to keep body and soul together without having any pleasure, you would greatly desire such a state. In this way you will cleave always to God and miracles will be performed on your behalf just as they were performed on behalf of the ancient saints and people will know that there is a God in Israel. For at this time the name of heaven is not sanctified. Take heed, therefore, against Samael and the serpent and the evil inclination who pursue you in order to disturb your thoughts and interfere with your prayers. Unify your heart in My service and come unto Me. I have already told you how essential it is for you to behave in a humble manner and never to lose your temper over anything at all. Go out and learn from Moses, teacher of all the prophets, who fell into error whenever he lost his temper. Do not lose your temper, therefore, over anything in the world. Even in religious matters, where you are obliged to pretend to anger, be careful never to allow your thoughts to be separated from Me and from My Mishnah and from the fear of Me and from My Torah. For if only you knew how many worlds go to waste whenever you fail to think on the Torah you would not cease from this for even a moment. For when you go out into the street with your thoughts on My Mishnah, My young ones proclaim before you: "Pay homage to the image of the King" and innumerable angelic beings accompany you. Above them worlds without number tremble at this proclamation and ask: "Who is this man whom

Mishnah and from the fear of Me and from My Torah. For if only you knew how many worlds go to waste whenever you fail to think on the Torah you would not cease from this for even a moment. For when you go out into the street with your thoughts on My Mishnah, My young ones proclaim before you: "Pay homage to the image of the King" and innumerable angelic beings accompany you. Above them worlds without number tremble at this proclamation and ask: "Who is this man whom the King delighteth to honor? He is the head of the College in the land of Israel. He is the great author of the land of Israel."¹ If you behave as I instruct you, I will give you the merit of completing your books without error or mistake, your books, commentaries and works in which you decide the law. I shall allow you to print them and publish them in all the borders of Israel as you have requested of the Lord your God. And I shall give you and your sons the merit of having fulfilled for you the verse:

Josh. 1: 8

"This book of the Torah shall not depart out of thy mouth."

And I shall give you from this modest and worthy wife a saintly and wise son, for she deserves it because of all she has suffered. As for you, if you will do as I have taught you to separate yourself from all worldly pleasure and if you will sanctify yourself in

purity during the marital act, behaving as it was said of Rabbi Eliezer, that he engaged in the act as if a demon were compelling him to do it, then you will be worthy of bringing down into the world a pure, holy soul from the Garden of Eden and he will become a great sage and saint. And when she will have departed this life you will marry, one after the other, two women who had had been previously married and that is what I told you: "The virgins—her companions that follow her—shall be brought unto her." From these you will have sons gifted with discernment, knowing His name and studying His Torah for its own sake.² I shall increase the fame of your college in both quality and quantity, etc. And after all this I shall give you the merit of being burned for the sanctification of My name. All your sins and faults will be purged by fire so that you will rise from there like pure wool. All the saints in the Garden of Eden, the *Shekhinah* at their head, will come out to meet you, welcoming you with many songs and praises. They will lead you like a groom who walks in front and they will accompany you to your canopy. I have prepared for you seven canopies, one within the other, and seven canopies, one higher than the other. Within the innermost and highest of the canopies there will be seven rivers of fragrant balsam. It is all there ready for you. And there will be a golden throne with seven steps, embedded with numerous pearls and precious stones. All the saints will accompany you and sing before you until you arrive at the first canopy. There they will clothe you with a precious robe and so on at each canopy so that by the time you arrive at the final canopy you will be clothed with fourteen precious robes. Afterwards, two of the saints who accompany you will stand, one to the right and one to the left, like groomsmen for a groom, and they will help you to ascend the throne. As you ascend the throne they will put

Ps. 45: 15

throne with seven steps, embedded with numerous pearls and precious stones. All the saints will accompany you and sing before you until you arrive at the first canopy. There they will clothe you with a precious robe and so on at each canopy so that by the time you arrive at the final canopy you will be clothed with fourteen precious robes. Afterwards, two of the saints who accompany you will stand, one to the right and one to the left, like groomsmen for a groom, and they will help you to ascend the throne. As you ascend the throne they will put another robe on you in addition to the fourteen so that as you sit on the throne you will be wearing fifteen precious robes. They will take a crown hanging there and place it upon your head. There you will sit with one to the right of you and one to the left. All the saints will sit around you and you will discourse on the Torah. This will continue for one hundred and eighty days, after the pattern of: "When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty, many days, even a hundred and fourscore days." Afterwards, all the saints will

Esth. 1: 4

110 JEWISH MYSTICAL TESTIMONIES

arise to accompany you, with you in the front like a groom. They will walk behind you but some of them will go before you, proclaiming: "Pay homage to the son of the Holy, Supernal King. Pay homage to the image of the King." Thus they will sing until you arrive at the place where there are thirteen rivers of balsam. A garment will be removed from you as you immerse yourself in the first river and so on until thirteen garments will have been removed when you immerse yourself in the thirteenth river. Afterwards a river of fire will gush forth and as you immerse yourself in it the fourteenth robe will be removed. As you emerge a precious white robe will be made ready for you to wear and Michael the high priest will be ready to bring up your soul to the Holy One, blessed be He. From this stage onwards permission has not been granted to describe what will transpire. Eye has seen

it not . . .³

The Holy One, blessed be He, and His Academy have sent me to tell you these mysteries in order that you might see yourself occupying such a stage. Sin not, therefore, not even in thought. Let not the evil inclination get the better of you and if he endeavors to do so rebuke him, saying: "Shall a man like me, destined for all this glory, sin in thought?" Concealed within these mysteries there are numerous higher ones. Open your eyes. Behold, all the sages of Israel plead for you to the Holy One, blessed be He, namely, Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon and Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel, because you are engaged in explaining their words and deciding in accordance with their opinions and you explain these and frequently decide in accordance with their opinions. For from the days of Moses, teacher of all the prophets, the Oral Torah was not recorded in writing until the days of Rabbi Judah the Prince. And from his day the whole Mishnah had not been explained until Rav Ashi came, collecting all the teachings and rendering decisions. And from his day there were only a few collections of decisions such as the *Halakhot Pesukot* etc., until Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon and Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel came to render decisions in the whole of talmudic law. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, especially, wrought great things in expounding the whole Torah. And from that time until the present no one bestirred himself to gather together all the material of the teachers as you have done.⁴

The eve of the Sabbath, 29th of Iyyar, portion *Be-Midbar Sinai*. I ate but little and drank the same and I studied the Mishnah at the beginning of the night. I then slept until daybreak so that when I awoke the sun was shining. I was very upset, saying to myself: "Why did I not arise during the night so that the word should come to me as beforetimes?" Nevertheless, I began to rehearse the Mishnah and I studied five chapters. As I was reading the Mishnah the voice of my beloved knocked in my mouth and the lyre sang of itself. It began by saying: "The Lord is with you wherever you go, and the Lord will prosper whatever you have done and will do, but you must cleave to Me and to My Torah and to My Mishnah at all times, not as you have done this night. For, although you did sanctify yourself in your food and drink, yet you slept like a sluggard, for the door revolves upon its hinges but the sluggard is on his bed, and you did not follow your good habit of rising to study the Mishnah. For this you deserve that I should leave and forsake you since you gave strength to Samael, the serpent and the evil inclination by sleeping until daybreak. But in the merit of the Six Orders of the Mishnah that you know by heart and in the merit of the self-tortures and torments you engaged in in years past, and which you still practise, it was agreed in the Heavenly Academy that I should return to converse with you as in former times and that I should neither leave you nor forsake you. And so have I done as you can see. I speak to you as a man speaks to his neighbor. Your eyes can see that for many generations no one, with the exception of a few chosen ones, attained to such a degree. Therefore, My son, hearken to My voice and to that which I command you, to busy yourself with My Torah, unceasingly by day and night. Have nothing else in the world in your thoughts than words of Torah, the fear of Me and My Mishnah."

Afterwards, I slept for about half an hour and I awoke in great distress, saying, the word has ceased because I fell asleep. I read in the Mishnah and the voice of my beloved knocked in my mouth, saying: "Know, that the Holy One, blessed be He, and the whole of the Heavenly Academy send you greetings. I have been sent to inform you that all the acts of God are part of His providential care. Behold, you have taught the Torah in

two of My communities and I saw that you left a great and holy community to dwell among those who pray in the ruin. It was agreed in the Heavenly Academy that all will be well with you. Let not your thoughts be separated for even a single moment from My Torah and the fear of Me and I shall give you the merit of ascending to the highest stages.”¹

Then slumber fell upon me and I slept for about half an hour. I awoke in distress in that He did not converse with me at length as in former times. I began again to rehearse the Mishnah and before I had completed two chapters, the voice of my beloved began to knock in my mouth, saying: “Although you imagined that I had forsaken you and left you, do not think I really will leave you before I have fulfilled My promise not to withhold good from your mouth. But you must cleave to Me and to the fear of Me, as I have said, and then you will be elevated, lifted up, and made high before all the members of the Heavenly Academy, all of whom send you greetings because you busy yourself all the time with the Talmud and the codes and combine the two. As I have said, you should also mortify your flesh in order to have the merit of seeing Elijah face to face while you are still awake. He will speak to you mouth to mouth and will greet you for he will become your teacher to teach you all the mysteries of the Torah. Open your eyes, therefore, and dedicate all your thoughts to My worship and the fear of Me. Eat little and drink no wine, except for one, thoroughly diluted cup each night. Eat no meat, except once or twice during the week and then only a little. If you leave off soup it will be considered as if you had rejected an abominable thing. Let your thoughts be in My Torah. Even while eating, think on My Mishnah and your meals will then be considered as if they were sacrifices and offerings to the Holy One, blessed be He. Do not grieve that you left the Great Assembly.² It is for your own good that you have gone forth from there. For the Holy One, blessed be He, has decreed that the community be destroyed and it is good for you not to be there when it happens. Even though you will suffer greatly the sufferings will purge your soul so that you will be cleansed of your sins. The members of the Great Assembly will also be visited with great sufferings. The secret of the matter is . . . The secret of the matter is . . . The secret of the matter is. . . .”³

(Thus he repeated for more than a hour, as if reluctant to tell me,

until eventually he said:) "The secret of the matter is that the members of the Great Assembly have sinned by blasphemy, God forbid, in that they scoff at those who pray in the ruin. The Holy One, blessed be He, was exceedingly wrath, as it were, and He decreed, measure for measure, that you should not be among them until many days have passed. You see that I have given you another community in their stead and they will raise your college to a position of great fame. Grieve not, therefore, for all you lack is from the Holy One, blessed be He. You will witness how He arranges all things. He will order it so that the members of the Great Assembly will come to offer you their entreaties that you return to them to spread the Torah among them even if for only one day each week. Wait until the days I have mentioned have passed and you will witness the things of the Holy One, blessed be He, and you will be astonished. Grieve not at all, therefore, for the Holy One, blessed be He, will arrange your affairs while you study the Torah unceasingly. Know that very soon a large sum of money will arrive for you from the Diaspora so that you will be able to provide for your students. Your students will increase and will become great sages, rendering decisions in law. No student who has not studied in your college will have any reputation for learning at all. You will become elevated and lifted up on high for I will make you great, I will raise you up. I will exalt you. I will make you a Prince over My people Israel. Your college will be greater than that of My chosen one, Isaac Aboab.⁴ You will learn and teach and your children will be members of the Sanhedrin in the Chamber of Hewn Stone. You will yet see them teaching the laws of *kemizah*.⁵ This son of yours will become a rabbi and a great man, a great sage in the Talmud and the Kabbalah. During his life-time no

This son of yours will become a rabbi and a great man, a great sage in the Talmud and the Kabbalah. During his life-time no greater kabbalist will be found, for he will attain to a knowledge of the Kabbalah greater than that of any other man these past five hundred years, ten times more than My beloved Solomon.⁶ He will compose a commentary to the Zohar and will compose strictures on your book for his soul derives from the Quality of Wisdom. He will, therefore, comprehend the secrets of Wisdom and will render decisions in law in Israel. Therefore, My son, busy yourself constantly and unceasingly in My Torah and devote all your thoughts to My worship. All your needs will be attended to by Me and I shall look after all your affairs. Only

In My Drive

114 JEWISH MYSTICAL TESTIMONIES

cleave to Me and to My Mishnah and let not your thoughts be separated from them for even one moment. Then you will become most elevated. Grieve not at all. Whatever the Holy One, blessed be He, does is for your benefit and for your own good. Open your eyes to My Torah and to My fear. Let your heart be a nest and sanctuary for My Torah. Sanctify yourself and all your limbs to My service by day and night. Let your limbs form a camp within which the *Shekhinah* can rest. And so peace to you. Peace to you, Peace to your teaching. Peace to your book. Peace to your learning. Peace to your life. Peace to your soul. Peace to your spirit. And to all that is yours, peace!"

Thus has it been decided in the Heavenly Academy and the Holy One, blessed be He, together with the members of the Academy, has sent Me to tell you new things hitherto unrevealed. All the sages of the generation, when they hear these things coming from your mouth, will praise you. Gaze at all the great love and goodness the Holy One, blessed be He, has wrought for you. He created you out of nothing to bring you into this world. Even though you have sinned He caused you to be reincarnated again and again until he brought you into this age. And He held your right hand even when you sinned. You returned to Him in those days but then you became lax in repenting. But now that you have drawn near to the fear of Him I have come to take delight with you, to speak in your mouth, not in a dream but as a man speaks to his neighbor.¹ Hold fast to Me, therefore, and give up bodily pleasures. Drink no wine during the day and eat no meat. At night drink only one cup of wine and eat meat but not a great deal, only enough to keep you in good health. You are permitted to drink wine on the Sabbath and on festivals but yield not to your evil inclination to drink, as you wish to do, a great deal, except for the festival of Purim when you may drink limitless quantities. If you will do this, forsaking bodily pleasures so that your heart and mind become a constant nest for the Torah and if you never cease from thinking on the Torah, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will take delight in you. Busy yourself constantly with rendering decisions in Jewish law and with the Talmud, the Kabbalah, the Mishnah, the

Tosafot and Rashi, as you are doing. For you combine them and fit one to the other bringing the hooks into the loops. Because you do this, the Holy One, blessed be He, loves you and at the time when you arise to offer your prayers and to study, the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, delights with the saints in the Garden of Eden, namely, at midnight, He takes delight in you, too, and extends over you a thread of mercy which kisses you with loving kisses and embraces you. And the *Shekhinah* converses with you and you become attached in such a way never achieved by even one in a generation, nay, by one in many generations. From it you can see how great is the love the Holy One, blessed be He, bears for you. He has stretched out His right hand to receive you as you repent. These days in which you have repented now shine for you. Your glory is upon them and theirs upon you. You will be worthy of being burned for the sanctification of the name. Then will your sins be completely erased, all the dross and rust being purged by fire. You will be clothed in a robe of light when you ascend to Heaven. There you will be among the saints of the highest degree. You will no longer be obliged to return to earth in a new incarnation for here you will rest, as it was said to Daniel, until the resurrection of the dead, when you will rise again together with the saints. Be strong, therefore, in separating yourself from bodily pleasures. For Samael and the serpent try to prevent you, their desire is to overcome you but you will prevail over them to reject them and subdue them and the Lord will be at your right hand. If they entice you to eat more meat and drink more wine than you should, whether on week-days or on the Sabbath and festivals, pay them no heed. Also when they entice you with base thoughts, as they do, rebuke them and subdue them. Busy yourself constantly in the study of the Torah for when you casuistically examined the opinions of the Rambam [Rabbi Moses ben Maimon] yesterday, the two views you expressed are correct and the Rambam is pleased that you have succeeded in uncovering his full meaning and he is pleased that you always quote his opinions and discuss his views casuistically. Your words are right except in the few instances I shall show you. When you die, the Rambam will come out to meet you because you have defended his decisions and, even now, he pleads on your behalf. And he is among the

come out to meet you because you have defended his decisions and, even now, he pleads on your behalf. And he is among the saints, not as those sages who say that he has been reincarnated etc.

116 JEWISH MYSTICAL TESTIMONIES

For let it be that so it was decreed because of certain heretical views he expressed but the Torah he had studied protected him as well as his good deeds, for he was a master of good deeds, so he was not reincarnated etc. but he was reincarnated and then he died and he is now among the saints.²

VI

The eve of the Sabbath, 14th of Elul. The Lord be with you, only cleave constantly to Me, the fear of Me, and My Mishnah. Cease not for a single moment from your thoughts. At all times let the chambers of your heart be filled with Torah and the fear of God and leave no room for those thoughts and images that Samael and the serpent and the evil inclination bring into your heart. Burn them out with the straw of the reading of the *Shema* and the fire of the Torah. Take care, as I have taught you, to the best of your ability, never to enjoy anything or have any longings for anything. I shall not forsake you until I have fulfilled My promise and will satisfy all your needs, only cleave to Me.

Deut. 21: 10 Now the verse: "When thou goest forth to battle [against thine enemy and the Lord thy God delivereth them unto thy hands, and thou carriest them away captive]" hints at the Community of Israel. She wages war against your evil inclination and were it not for Her help man would be incapable of overcoming the evil inclination. As the Rabbis of blessed memory say: "The evil inclination of man seeks to slay him each day and if it were not that the Holy One, blessed be He, helps him, man could never prevail, as it is said: 'The wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him'." If you will ask: In that case there should be no reward. For if the Holy One, blessed be He, did not help, the evil inclination would prevail? Therefore, the verse continues: "The Lord will not leave him in his hand, nor suffer him to be condemned." The Holy One, blessed be He, considers it as if man had achieved the victory by his own efforts without the assistance of the Community of Israel. Consequently, the verse says: "When [= *ki* = *Keneset Yisrael*]" goes forth to battle against your enemies, and *Tiferet* helps Her. Therefore it says: "And the Lord" = *Tiferet*, "your God" = *Binah* or *Pa-had*. Or the meaning may be that He will conduct Himself according to His quality of mercy to deliver the evil inclina-

tion into your hands, as it is said: "and the Lord thy God delivereth into thy hands, and thou carriest them away captive," the evil inclination will be held captive by you. "And seest among the captives a woman of goodly form". This means that even when you have conquered the evil inclination he will not give in but will try to make worldly things attractive to you. As the holy Zohar says: The evil inclination resembles a beautiful woman.¹

The eve of the Sabbath, 11th of Elul. Be strong, etc. "When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemies," namely, the evil inclination. "And the Lord thy God delivereth them into thy hands" etc. But beforetimes you saw among the captives "a woman of goodly form." This refers to the evil inclination, compared, as the holy Zohar says, to a beautiful woman. "And thou hast a desire unto her," as one who desires a loose woman. And at that time you took her to wife and at that time you brought her home to your house and shaved her head—in order to adorn her—and she remained in your house. But now that you have repented she weeps for her father and mother for a full month. This means that you must weep for a full month, a complete cycle, over the sins of your youth. "And after that thou mayest go in unto her." That is to say, you are bound to have recourse to the pleasures of the evil inclination in order to keep body and soul together, but do not bring her into your house for if you do she will become the dominant partner. Rather cast her out of your house and when you need her "thou mayest go in unto her, and be her husband." This means: Do not stay with her but behave like a man who cohabits with a woman in stealth. As soon as he has completed the act he departs from her. So, too, you should not take pleasure in the evil inclination except when it becomes absolutely necessary for the body to survive. But since stolen waters are sweet, it follows that by having only occasional recourse to the evil inclination its blandishments become even sweeter. Therefore, the verse says: "and she shall be thy wife." This means, in connection with this matter, the relationship should be that of a man with his wife where familiarity has blunted the edge of pleasure. And peace to you.²

Deut. 21:11

Deut. 21:13

Deut. 21:13

Deut. 21:13

essentially continues a pre-expulsion Spanish kabbalistic tradition.”

There can be no doubt that an analysis of the extant parts of Karo's *Maggid Meisharim*, a diary based on Karo's revelations, which he first experienced while an inhabitant of the Ottoman Empire, will disclose that his revelations are closer in kind to those of the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* than to those of Abulafia. This is recognizable, first and foremost, in his use of language and recurring imagery, as well as by his basic kabbalistic perceptions. For example, the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* as far as it could, closely followed the Zoharic literary style and adopted its characteristic mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. This admixture of languages is non-existent in Abulafia's writings but does play an important role in the *Sefer Maggid Meisharim*. In addition, the magical tendencies, so characteristic of the *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, primarily its information concerning techniques used to inspire visions, reverberated in Karo's work.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Karo's choice of techniques for attaining revelations of the Mishnah is different from those advanced by either of the schools of revelatory Kabbalah, at least in one respect.²⁰ While both Abulafia and the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* utilize Holy Names in order to achieve their visions, what I have called anomian techniques, Karo in contradistinction mostly uses nomian techniques – techniques that are appropriate within the framework of Jewish law or *Halakhah* – in his case the repetitious recitation of chapters of the Mishnah. This constitutes a fundamental distinction, and we can assume that it reflects important socio-cultural differences between these Kabbalists. Abulafia belonged to the strata of society that could be deemed the secondary-elite, someone who was a cultured Jew but who did not occupy any formal position within the Jewish community. He was not an important legalist, nor a communal leader, nor was he a functionary within a royal court, namely a court Jew. This seems also to be the case concerning the anonymous authors of the circle of the *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.

In contrast, there can be no doubt that such a personage as R. Joseph Karo belonged to the first-elite of Jewish society. During his lifetime Karo enjoyed the status of a major religious figure in the Greek areas of the Ottoman empire and then in Safed, as well as throughout the Diaspora toward the end of his life, and even posthumously he retains special status in the annals of

Jewish law, his authoritative rulings having sustained generations of observant Jews. Karo's adherence to the recitation of the Mishnah as a mystical technique reflects, in my opinion, the fact that he functioned within a wide consensus of Jewish society. Beyond this fundamental distinction we must stress the element common to these diverse techniques: they are all special types of inducements for attaining divine revelations. They are all short triggers, designed to work quickly and have an almost perfect success rate – if the conditions needed to perform the technique have been perfectly met. From this vantage point, the recitation of the Mishnah, albeit a nomian technique, is to be distinguished from the daily practice of Jewish law, because one's performance of the Jewish ritual are not meant to achieve an immediate revelatory result. As such, we can include Karo within the category of revelatory-visionary kabbalistic authors, since he used some few techniques meant to induce these experiences and they were of the quick and "easy" type. Moreover, in his diary, the impact of the view of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi as to the ascent and descent of all beings on the cosmic ladder is evident, a view that is known – beside his writings - in the Byzantine Kabbalah²¹ and on the other side, the interest in views concerning cosmic cycles and metempsychosis, are combined in a manner reminiscent of Byzantine Kabbalah.²² In short, Karo was both a Spanish Kabbalist and a Byzantine one, and this fact is reflected also in the feminine imagery that he put in the mouth of the feminine power revealing to him for many decades.²³ Such a phenomenon of mixture of two types of Kabbalah is obvious also in the Kabbalah of R. David ibn Avi Zimra, another major Spanish expellee, who was also a Kabbalist and a Halakhic authority. Also R. Shlomo Alqabetz, is well acquainted with both Spanish and Byzantine forms of Kabbalah, as it is the case with another major Spanish Kabbalist, R. Meir ibn Gabbai. This is the case also of an anonymous Spanish Kabbalist who arrived to the Ottoman Empire, after been acquainted with, or even part of the circle of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.²⁴ Though hardly a social group those Kabbalists testify to the existence of a more complex phenomenon, of interaction between the Spanish Kabbalah, formative for their systems, and new ideas marginal or absent in that Kabbalah, they found in the Kabbalah of the former Byzantine Empire. Karo's Kabbalah should, at least in principle, understood also in this complex context.

3. *The Motherly-Revelations and Their Source*

Revelations of feminine powers in the context of Kabbalistic topics are known since late 13th century. This is the case in the book of the *Zohar*,²⁵ in *Sefer ha-Qanah*²⁶, and later on in R. Asher Lemlein of Reutlingen's vision of the hypostatic prayer.²⁷ This is also the case in Karo's diary, though he is much more insistent on this issue and the revelations stemming from feminine powers lasted for some decades. In several instances, the power revealing itself to Karo identifies itself as an "admonishing Mother."²⁸ So, for example, we read in one case:

Indeed I am the *Mishnah* speaking from your mouth, I am the mother that admonishes her sons, I am embracing you and you should adhere to me always, so that my splendor will be upon you and your splendor upon me etc. I shall elevate you to be a minister and chancellor on the entire diaspora of Israel in the kingdom of Arabistan, since you have dedicate yourself to cause the return of the ordination [*semikhah*] to its former glory, you will merit to be ordained by all the sages of the land of Israel and by the sages abroad, and by you I shall return ordination to its former glory and I shall cause that you will finish your book.²⁹

concentration on the power revealing to Karo, almost a form of jealousy:

My son, cleave to me and do not separate from me even for one minute, since I, the mother, return to you etc., and you should direct [your thought] as if the Tetragrammaton is written with black ink as against your eyes on a parchment and you should think as if your modest father stands in front of you, and you should be ashamed to separate your thought from me even for one minute, and to enjoy this world etc., and you should be in peace^{33, 34}

This technique of concentrating on the Tetragrammaton recurs in Karo's diary³⁵ and it constitutes a practical recommendation how to achieve a permanent consciousness of the divine, which is depicted as constituted by both a masculine and feminine powers, again a form of nomian technique:

Regard yourself as standing before the King, King of kings, the Holy One blessed be He, whose Shekhinah hovers over you and continuously accompanies you. Accordingly, be wary of taking pleasure in eating, drinking, or sexual relations, as I have taught you; such pleasures should be repugnant to you and you should not crave them.³⁶

4. *Mishnah-Study and Mishnah-Appearance*

The Mishnah is not only a canonical book but also which has been intensely studied and commented in the Middle Ages. However, in the 16th century, we witness a new mode of approach to this classical text: it was recited not only studied, and in the cases of some major figures in Jewish culture, like Karo and Hayyim Vital, it turned into a technique for acquiring a revelation, stemming from an entity some Kabbalists called *maggid*, while Karo describes it much more as stemming, as is my claim here, from the *Shekhinah* or the Mishnah. Since this topic has been studied by scholars, let me adduce only some few passages to this effect. Let me emphasize the obvious: those recitations of the Mishnah were scarcely done for the sake of memorizing the canonical texts: the authors doing it were accomplished masters in interpretive literatures on this text which much more complex and at least Karo contributed vast literary texts which demonstrate mastering the content of the Mishnah. Thus, recurrent recitations were not intended to keep fresh in memory its content. They are coming closer to a sacramental praxis, though this type of explanation does not, in my opinion, exhaust its aims. This is a praxis intended to induce an automatic type of speech. To what extent such an approach to revelation either in public or in private did not disturb Jewish authorities we learn from an interesting document. In a text found in the approbation of the Jerusalem rabbinate to the printing of Karo's *Maggid Meisharim* it is said:

by the melody of your voice with which you recite and study the Mishnah.

No doubt this technique may be described as a short trigger, as the revelation may take place after the recitation of two, or five chapters, namely relatively short recitations. This affinity between the technique and the identity of the power, which appears as continuous with the technique is quite evident in many other instances in Karo's book. What seems to be interesting is the feeling that the recited Mishnayot possess some form of ontological status, and the reciter may adhere to them.⁴³ On the other hand, the Mishnah is speaking through the mouth of Karo.⁴⁴ In psychological terms we may assume a mechanism by which the oral activity overtakes the consciousness of the recitator, possesses it, and communicate by its means. It should be mentioned that the emphasis in several cases is not on the mental absorptions of the content but on recitation, thus giving to human voice a special status, both as part of the technique and part of the process of revelation. In the case of Karo, this achievement was due less to magical recipes - resort to divine names - but to quite nomian techniques, the recitation of the Mishnah. To be sure: I do not assume that Karo did not use

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.* 242.

important epistle describing this mystical event.⁵⁰ Sometimes the revealing power is described by Alqabetz as Maggid though in other ones, when quotations from the speech of Karo are quoted, it is the *Shekhinah* who is described as speaking from Karo's mouth. The tension between the assumption that a Maggid revealed itself to Karo, a term which can be described as grammatically speaking masculine, and the repeated feminine depictions that accompany those revelations have been solved by scholars in basically two different ways. Werblowsky opted for the assumption that "Occasionally the genders and the sexes were mixed up."⁵¹ In fact, he straightforwardly identified the revelation of the *Shekhinah* with maggidism⁵² though such an identification is not supported by any texts in *Maggid Meisharim*.⁵³ On the other hand, Elior and then Altshuler opted for a more complex solution, namely that Karo's view is that an "androgynous angel" was revealing itself to Karo.⁵⁴ Other authors dealing with Karo, do not refer at all to the feminine dimension of these revelations.⁵⁵

I find both solutions unsatisfying, since they operate with an assumption that is not explicated, namely that Karo operated with a unified entity underlying all the revelations, whose gender could and should be determined, as either male or female or androgynous. This assumption, however, is not evident in his texts neither is it necessary. Scholars tended to assume that the Maggid and maggidic revelations are the fundamental type of mystical experiences that characterize Karo's inner life. This is obvious from the very choice of Werblowsky's titles of the chapters in his book dealing with Karo's revelations: "The Maggid of Karo"⁵⁶, "The Halakhah and the Maggid"⁵⁷ and finally "The Maggid."⁵⁸ Though explicitly acknowledging the recurrence of feminine gender-themes, they have been explained by scholars as the result of a mix up, or of a mixture, while the assumption is that the authentic nature of the revealing entity reflected by the term Maggid, and is therefore masculine, or at least androgynous.⁵⁹

“

remnants that reached us.⁶⁰

Surprisingly enough, checking the extent parts of his diary, we encounter only four occurrences of the lexical form *maggid*, one of which have nothing to do with revelations or a supernal power, as it is just a quote of a verse from Isaiah 46:10, which contains the verbal form *maggid*, which means there: to say.⁶¹ The other occurrence is an interpretation of the term *maggid* in the Passover Seder, again no connection to revelation.⁶² What remain are two explicit references to a *maggid*.⁶³ In one of the two, the significance of the blessing over the new moon in a certain day of the month is explained, and the *maggid* is mentioned as writing the Kabbalistic solution for the question,⁶⁴ in the other, we have the only extant occurrence of the *maggid* as speaking, in the context of a discussion, that is not quoted, concerning the meaning of the secret of the supernal roots of evil, within the divinity.⁶⁵ This means that in the available parts of Karo's diary, the term *maggid* is not described as part of a revelation as the feminine power is, it does not introduce itself, it does not say good bye when it leaves, and what is even more important, it does not address Karo personally, neither instructs him or admonish him concerning his behavior. In the two instances what we have are interpretations of theosophical issues, not different from what may be found in Kabbalistic books where revelations are not even mentioned. However, being the marginality of the term in Karo's book, there is something more essential that distinguish the source of Karo's revelations from the manner in which many Kabbalists understood the term *maggid*. As pointed out by Shlomo Pines, this term – which appears earlier in Jewish literature – was fraught with astro-magical overtones.⁶⁶ However, such a conceptual framework is absent for the powers that revealed to Karo, though some forms of magic of a different nature are indeed found in some of the extant discussions in *MM*.⁶⁷

“On that occasion, as they were engaged in a merry ceremony or the mystical wedding known as *tiqqun leil shavu'ot* in the Zoharic tradition, that will be explained below, they received the bitter news that their colleague, the messianic kabbalist Solomon Malkho (1500-1532), had been burned alive at the stake. Malkho was born a *converso* in 1500, after the enforced baptism on all the Jews of Portugal in 1497, and lived as a Catholic Christian unaware of his Jewish origins until his early twenties, attaining a prominent position in the Portuguese court. When he was 24 he met a Jew from Ethiopia, David HaReuveni, who told him on an unknown Jewish community on the shores of the red Sea. The young converso publicly returned to Judaism, choosing the name Malkho (“his king”) on the basis of 2 Sam. 22:51—“[God is a] tower of victory to His king [malko] [and] deals graciously with His anointed [meshiho; His messiah]”—and sought to advance a political messianic movement on account of the help of the Ethiopian Jews, who lived in Christian Ethiopia, to the Habsburg Catholic ruler, Carl the fifth, against the Othman empire. In return he had asked that the Jews will be permitted to settle in the Land of Israel when the Habsburgs will conquer it from the Othman ruler. His religious conversion to Judaism was condemned as a deadly sin by the Catholic Inquisition and he was burned as a heretic at the stake

in Mantua in November 1532. Malkho's attempt to work for redemption through international political means engendered hope and inspired confidence in the generation that had been expelled from Spain and Portugal and generated messianic hopes in the hearts of the thousands of Jews that were left in Portugal as Maranos (enforced converts to Catholicism)—he had been, after all, an officer in the Portuguese court—and the news of his death, which did not reach Adrianopolis until Shavu'ot night, 1533, embodied the loss of that messianic hope. The tragic news produced an extreme disparity between the intense joy of the festival of renewing the covenant and receiving the Torah—a joy felt by those participating in the tiqqun leil shavu'ot—and the no less intense mourning over the terrible death of the last messianic kabbalist, the only man who embodied a realistic hope for redemption during the first third of the sixteenth century.”

-”Chag HaShavuot HaNe’elam”, Rachel Elior