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HISTORICISM AND/OR PHENOMENOLOGY IN THE STUDY OF JEWISH MYSTICISM: IMAGERY TECHNIQUES IN THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI KALONYMUS KALMAN SHAPIRA AS A CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the phenomenological and comparative approaches to the study of Jewish mysticism have come under criticism. This critique has been focused upon the very concept of "mysticism," calling into question whether or not different mystical elements in different religious faith traditions may be compared with one another. This perspective is typified in the latest works of Boaz Huss, who understands all spiritual phenomena as creations anchored in their respective historical, social, and political contexts:

> I believe that the different cultural formations categorized as "Jewish mysticism" should not be studied as expressions of a universal religious phenomenon and as different phases in the development of a Jewish mystical tradition, but rather as cultural products that were created as a result of various political interests, in distinctive historical, economic and social contexts.[1]

Of course, this approach is valuable and quite legitimate. But Huss, who represents a much broader trend in contemporary Jewish Studies, demands that we contextualize all mystical phenomena at the expense, and negation, of the phenomenological and comparative perspectives.[2] According to Huss, phenomenological research has a clear ideological and theological aim.[3]

It seems that the wheel of fortune is turning once more, and Jewish Studies has returned to a position that was once criticized. The tendency toward the historicization of Kabbalah found in the work of Gershom Scholem, and especially the preference for a schema of historical continuity in which each progressive stage grew directly from that which preceded it, was criticized by Scholem's

students, most vociferously by Moshe Idel and Yehuda Liebes. According to Scholem, the expulsion from Spain gave birth to Lurianic Kabbalah, which led to Sabbateanism, culminating in the rise of Hasidism. Historical events were thus expressed through symbolism and kabbalistic mythos, embodied in historical movements. But Liebes has demonstrated that the works of many Kabbalists transcended the historical contexts in which they lived; their creative faculties were not imprisoned within time and place. Idel has further proven that Kabbalists' libraries were not defined exclusively to (confined to/defined by) texts produced in that era. Jewish mystics were influenced by so many different books and traditions that they were to some degree above time.[4] Huss, who is the student of Liebes and Idel, has tried to roll back the clock and return the scholarly focus to examining historical context.

This article will challenge the exclusive quest for historicization in the study of Jewish mysticism. By exploring the writings of a modern mystic of the twentieth century, I hope to demonstrate the advantages of phenomenology. To be clear, I do not in any way seek to invalidate approaches to the study of Kabbalah that focus upon historical, sociological, and political contexts. The contribution of this type of research is great indeed. My goal is to shed some light on the great lacunae that appears when this approach becomes exclusivist. Both phenomenology and historicization can certainly coexist. Indeed, historical research that does not dismiss phenomenology as driven by ideology will be greatly enriched by the wider perspective.

IMAGERY TECHNIQUES IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE PIASECZNO REBBE

The *Rebbe* of Piaseczno, R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (1889–1943),[5] developed a great many guided imagery techniques that are unique in the world of Hasidic literature both in terms of their number and their quality.[6] Imagery exercises, i.e. visualizing an imaginary picture, have been a part of prophetic Kabbalah since the twelfth century. They were originally primarily linguistic in nature, and the name of God in all of its variations and permutations became a focal point for imagery-visionary exercises. Linguistic imagery exercises are found also in the sixteenth century mystical systems of both R. Isaac Luria and R. Moses Cordovero.[7] Later on we find another step in imagery exercises which are found with much greater frequency in Hasidic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These generally consist of envisioning a particular scene, such as leaping into a fire, imagining God, visualizing one's death, gazing upon the

tsaddik, and so forth. Indeed, most of these passages reflect earlier precedents found in Zoharic and kabbalistic literature. I do not intend to argue that there are no linguistic imagery exercises in Hasidic literature, but I am suggesting that in Hasidism we see a transformation from a period in which linguistic imagery was central (alongside a smaller number of other exercises) to an emphasis upon visualization as the primary meditative technique. This trend reached its zenith in the writings of R. Shapira. His imagery exercises, however, combined many different scenes into extended visualizations that were quite long and complicated, like a dream or a film, a phenomenon that has no significant precedent in Jewish literature before his time.[8]

What caused R. Shapira to devote so much energy to developing imagery techniques, both in literary form and as an embodied religious practice? We should note that R. Shapira was aware of his literary and imaginative powers, and he employed them self-consciously and intentionally,[9] just as he called upon others to do: "to bring all of one's emotional intensity, ecstasy and *even the human imagination* into the house of God, transforming them into wings and flying with them like the angels on high."[10] Scholars have examined R. Shapira's development of imagery techniques as a response to the historical phenomenon of secularism and the ensuing crisis in the religious world.[11] This position is made quite clear in his writings,[12] and it seems that one of his goals in creating these imagery techniques was to infuse religious experience with the potential to compete with the type of experiences offered by modern secular culture. According to R. Shapira, it is not enough for teachers to transmit great ideas to their students and excite them intellectually; they must present religious experiences that can serve as an alternative to "wandering in strange fields":

> For even if we return a youth's essential mind by enlightening him … nevertheless … his fiery passions will leave before their time - [he will] become excited and impassioned by the imagined beauty of the vanities of the world, such as theatres and all sorts of frivolities and abandon of the world. If we do not come first and arouse his soul to feel excited by the commandments and become ecstatic from the Torah and the light of God, than we will fail, God forbid.[13]

The historical context certainly represents an important element for understanding R. Shapira's mystical teachings. However, it is my contention that a phenomenological approach has much to offer our analysis of how and why he developed these interesting imagery techniques. More specifically, I believe that the concept of "empowerment," or "intensification," will provide a crucial lens through which we can better understand R. Shapira's mystical imagery praxis.

THE ESSENTIALIST SCHOOL, THE CONSTRUCTIVIST SCHOOL, AND THE PHENOMENON OF EMPOWERMENT IN THE STUDY OF MYSTICISM

There is an ongoing debate among scholars of religion and philosophy regarding the nature of mysticism. Those who follow the "essentialist" approach view mysticism as an essential and universally accessible phenomenon, and therefore identify a common core in mystical teachings from all over the world. However, adherents of the "contextual" or "constructivist" school believe that mystical experiences are necessarily shaped (or even preordained) by the mystic's culture, language, and religious tradition. Scholars who embrace this approach deny the existence of any universal mystical elements.[14]

The essentialist school sees history as irrelevant to the study of mysticism, since they maintain that mysticism reflects the private and temporary experience of individuals in their own religious life, largely unaffected by the broader historical context of their environment and society.[15] In contrast, the constructivist school maintains that historical context is essential for understanding the mystical experience. Thus the Christian mystic, in contrast to the Jewish mystic, is totally unified with the divine object of his contemplation, an experience that flows from the historical process of a Christian worldview that allows for *unio mystica*.[16]

Moshe Idel has raised the possibility that these two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. He argues that although each and every mystical tradition exists with a certain religious and social context, and although it is possible to accept the constructivist claim that sees this context as its very foundation and not just an external expression, it is still possible to identify a common essential element shared by different mystical traditions, namely "intensification" or "empowerment." Each mystical tradition should be analyzed within its context, but all are united by similar processes of intensification. Indeed, each mystical tradition intensifies its own religion, but the common element of empowerment found in different mysticisms allows us to compare them in spite of these important distinctions.[17]

Judaism is a religion characterized by the performance of deeds. Empowerment within this framework means the intensification of the normative religious experiences, defined by these deeds, to such a great degree that they are transformed into mystical experiences—moments of living encounter with God or the experience of the divine Presence.[18] Considering this element of empowerment will help us understand how R. Shapira used the different imagery techniques. Furthermore, it will provide another explanation, in addition to the historical perspective, regarding why he felt the need to invest so much in developing these imagery exercises.

IMAGERY TECHNIQUES AS AN ELEMENT OF EMPOWERMENT IN THE TEACHINGS OF R. SHAPIRA

R. Shapira developed techniques in a great many fields, including song, creative writing, meditation, personal prayer, dance, stomping, self-castigation, automatic speech, drinking liquor, self-denial, and imagery.[19] Studying R. Shapira's writings shows that his imagery techniques were allegedly only one element among a very long list of others. However a close analysis reveals that, in addition, imagery serves as an intensifying element for all other techniques! Imagery does not only arouse new experiences but also intensifies the wealth of experiences that already exist within the religious structure. In contrast to all of the other techniques imagery functions as a strong spice; when combined with the other techniques it intensifies them and transforms normative religious experiences into mystical experiences. In several places, R. Shapira reiterates the point that the analytic mind and informational knowledge cannot inspire a person's soul without the imagination: "only intense imagination (*mahshavah hazakah*) can aid the performance of ____during divine service and prayer, and not analytical thought (*ha Iyyun ba Sekhel*)."[20] He also extends this notion to *anomian* practices such as dance, song, and many others. The goal of the visualization is to intensify these activities, effectively transforming them into mystical experiences. The following are but a small number of examples.

DANCE AND IMAGERY

In Hasidic tradition, one can find complicated dances combined with creative acrobatics referred to as *hithapkhuyot* ("inversions" or "reversals"), or in Yiddish, *kulien zih*; to wit, somersaults, cartwheels, and handstands.[21] These dances have deep significance, and are considered a practice for experiencing the Hasidic ideal of self-nullification (*bittul ha yesh*).[22] Somersaults are also a method for achieving, and an embodied symbol for, the inversion of poles: the feet represent the lowest *sefirah malkhut*,[23] and the head represents the upper *sefirot* of *hokhmah*, *binah*, and *da'at*. The somersault inverts one's legs upwards, just as *malkhut* returns to its source on high.[24] In a moving personal testimony, R. Shapira recalls his personal desire to somersault at a ceremony celebrating a new Torah scroll, and his deep ambivalence in considering whether or not to perform this action:

> Many times the desire of a Jewish person that burns within him is much greater than his state, his learning or his service. He says, "who will give me some great, fiery act, and I will do it for the sake of

> God...and for at least this moment I will uproot my heart from itself, my body from itself, my very self from myself, directly to God." When I began to prepare myself for the *siyyum*[25] and the dedication [of the Torah], my desire ignited within me with great power, becoming like a fire within. Surely this is a moment of holy and awesome joy, perhaps unique in all my life, but what can I do in my physical body for God? I will rejoice in trembling and dance with all my power! This is good, but my soul is still not satisfied! Is there no other great act that is fitting for this singularly elevated and holy moment? I said, "I will turn in circles like those lowly fools who abandon themselves in joy for the glory of their masters." But the Satan confronted me and rebuked me, saying, "What is this service to you? What reason is there for it? What does the blessed Holy One care if you turn in circles or not? Perhaps your health will be damaged and you will be hurt. Won't you seem the crazy fool in the eyes of all the others?" Then my heart roared within me, "'God will rebuke you, O Satan.' This is no time for calculations! The moment is great, unique and pressing. I long to perform some great act of devotion for my Rock and Maker.[26]

In this remarkable confession R. Shapira is describing his desire to unite with God. The somersaults are a radical act of self-nullification and devotion in order to become one with the Creator. He writes that he wishes to "uproot my heart from itself, my body from itself, my very self from myself, directly to God." We must underscore that this experience includes an element of intense imagery contemplation:

> As the thought of my body had only just begun to work, considering the simple action of somersaults that had occurred to me, suddenly my soul came before and a thought of utter devotion began to burn within me. Not only simple somersaults did I see in my imagination, but a sort of altar appeared before my eyes, the very place we would cross while dedicating the Torah scroll. Everything was sanctified, consumed by fire, and my blood bubbled up and my eyes welled with tears.[27].

Imagining the place in which the Torah scroll passed as an altar, and the vision of the blazing fire, allowed R. Shapira to fulfill the deed of "sacrificing his own blood," offered for the sake of God, an act in which he was totally committed to giving up himself and his very flesh, expressed in the form of somersaults. His visualization adds a new dimension to the somersaults, but more fundamentally, it allows for them to take place. It is his imagination that enables a different, intensified experience that has important psychological elements ("and my blood bubbled up and my eyes welled with tears") not found in normative religious experiences. R. Shapira's vision intensifies the emotive and fiery passion expressed in the somersaults into an ecstatic experience in which R. Shapira sought to experience total self-nullification and touch the realm of the Divine.

SONG AND IMAGERY

The Hasidic movement elevated music to one of central elements of its spiritual world. As was true of dance, music was not reserved only for holy occasions and religious ceremonies and rituals; it was brought into the full range of experiences of daily life.[28] Furthermore, Hasidic music was not only verbal, grounded in liturgy and biblical verses, but included a great many poignant melodies without any linguistic element. In many cases these wordless melodies were even preferred above their verbal counterparts.

R. Shapira's conception of music, which has not yet been fully treated by scholars, is composed of three primary elements: expansion of music into the secular realm;[29] divestment from holy texts;[30] and an understanding of music as a practice, a method for achieving ecstasy and prophecy.[31] However, R. Shapira did not simply represent a continuation of the classical Hasidic relationship to music. He created something new by adding the element of imagination. As was the case with dance, he felt visualization intensified and transformed the experience of music: "take for yourself some part of a song, turn your face to the wall, or just close your eyes and *imagine yourself once more standing in front of the Throne of Glory*. With a broken heart you have come to pour out your soul to God in song and melody which come forth from the depths of your heart."[32] R. Shapira combined song with an imagery exercise to intensify the musical experience. Imagining God (or the Throne of Glory) during the song strengthens the sense of connection with the Divine: "your voice will blaze a path to on high for your soul."[33]

TORAH STUDY AND IMAGERY

Thus far we have been examining the intensification of primarily *anomian* practices. However, Jewish mystical literature transformed many religious rituals, such as Torah study, prayer, and other commandments, activities that are by their very nature *nomian*, into practices aimed at achieving the presence of God and touching the realm of the Divine. The fact that the very nature of Judaism emphasizes physically performing the commandments, invites a type of mysticism that intensifies and empowers these deeds.[34]

R. Shapira frequently wrote that the study of Torah is not only an intellectual activity for the sake of accruing knowledge. Torah study, he argues, should facilitate a living encounter between God and a person immersed in religious texts.[35] This type of experience, which emphasizes the importance of the teacher and the place of study, is

further intensified by the practice of imagery. This transforms sacred learning into a meeting between man and God:

> God is the one who teaches you Torah. The voice of God is garbed in the voice and the words of your teacher when he speaks words of Torah, divine service, or even ethical matters (*derekh erets*) in keeping with the Torah. The awe and joy, fear and dread of Israel when they stood on Mt. Sinai and heard the voice of God from the burning fire—you attain a portion of this when you sit in a *yeshivah*, and when you imagine (*mazkirim*)[36] that the room in which you are presently sitting is full of angels and seraphim. From amongst them the voice of God comes forth, clothed in the voice of your teacher and entering into your ears and hearts. Fear and joy, awe and love overtake your bodies and terrify your heart, and the very essence of your being is subdued before the Torah of our God that you heard in your teacher's words.[37]

This passage describes the teacher not as an instructor who simply imparts knowledge, but as a veritable messenger of God whose words are the very voice of the Divine. The intensification of study is bound together with an experience of holiness: "the room in which you are presently sitting is full of angels and seraphim. From amongst them the voice of God comes forth." This image is rooted in the Zohar.[38] Learning Torah is not to study for the sake of information, but a way of approaching the Divine: "and so it is with the books of the commentators, whether they engage the plain-sense meaning of Torah, Hasidic thought, or *mussar*. When you come to delve into a certain book and study it, *imagine* an angel of God stretching out his head from heaven and speaking these divine words to you in the name of God."[39]

PRAYER AND IMAGERY

The establishment of fixed prayer brought along many problems commonly associated with institutionalization: performance by rote, lack of intention, habitual observance. Kabbalistic and Hasidic sources often refer to "strange thoughts" (*mahshavot zarot*), which are a particular type of difficulty in concentrating.[40] Of course, difficulty in concentrating for a long period of time is not limited to the act of prayer. The mind naturally drifts and is drawn after other things, and can even shift directly from the holy of holies to the most profane and mundane realm.[41] R. Shapira was quite aware of the problem of "strange thoughts" and combatted it with imagery techniques:

> And if . . . it is difficult for you to overcome the many things that confuse you and concentrate in prayer, then *picture in your*

imagination (*tsayer be dimeyonekhah*) that you wish to spurn the way of
the vulgar masses and go to the place in which God is found. It
should be thus physically as well, like a person who pushes himself,
you must strengthen your body, your limbs and your sinews, and
even wrinkle your face and imagine this: "I must go through the
crowd to reach God; I [must pass] with strength in order to reach
God."[42]

But if you have been striving to stand against your profane thoughts
and are unable, or if you tried to focus your thoughts on holy things
and could not, *envision* in this moment a part of your soul on high as
it runs from the angels of destruction and terrible wild beasts toward
the gate to the Garden of Eden. It flees and they chase after it, with
one biting and another breaking its bones. This one casts it down,
and this other bars its way. Out of great fear and amidst quivering,
the soul cries a great and bitter cry, "O Y-H-V-H, save us and bring us
near." Heaven and earth shake, the gates of the Garden of Eden
quake, and even the savage masses are frightened by its wail and
stand still. It then flees to the Garden of Eden. Just as it is with
part above, so too is it with the part in you. You should be afraid
of the multitude of vicious thoughts, and your soul will let loose a
great and hidden cry unto Y-H-V-H in the depths of your heart. They
will be frozen, and you may then draw near to holy prayer.
Understand this.[43]

R. Shapira does not just employ imagery techniques as a way of deal-
ing with strange thoughts. More importantly, these imagery exercises
are elements of empowerment. They intensify prayer and transform it
from the simple experience of a religious ritual into a visceral and
direct encounter with the Divine. "At the moment of prayer one
must imagine in his mind that he is truly in the land of Israel and
within the Temple . . . this thought verily lifts up his soul, which is a
type of soul ascent. His soul rises up on high and sees what it sees."[44]
R. Shapira considers prayer to be one level of Holy Spirit (*ruah ha
kodesh*). Therefore it depends on the power of the imagination, which
is the key to achieving the Holy Spirit:[45]

This is the matter of prayer: song is one level of Holy Spirit, and
prayer and song are one, a smaller and lesser illumination, so that
one must work very hard to recite a song, gazing and becoming
impassioned by it . . . . Prayer is the service of body and soul, and to
make a great effort and awaken the spirit of song, which is a spark of
the Holy Spirit within . . . when a Jewish person comes to prayer, he
must strengthen his mind *and imagine in his mind that the world and all
its fullness, all is the light of divinity. His glory fills the world, and I stand
amidst this blessed divinity.*[46]

R. Shapira used imagery techniques to intensify many more activ-
ities than the scope of the present study allows.[47] In conclusion, let us
quote a short passage from his imagery exercise for the Exodus from
Egypt. This exercise is one of the longest in his oeuvre, representing a

chapter of its own that extends over some ten lengthy pages.[48] This practice is a striking example of how the holiday of Passover may be intensified; a normative religious experience becomes a visionary encounter with God:

> Imagine for yourself according to your knowledge something of this sort: "They made their lives bitter with hard work of bricks and mortar, and all work of the field; all the difficult labors they made them perform (Ex. 1:14). The cruel Egyptians did not need the buildings, and wanted only to afflict Israel and strove to make their lives bitter . . . they sought out and searched for all types of difficult work for Israel (b. Sotah 11) . . . Israel were debased, downcast in their eyes, and they decried their pure religion that they had inherited from their holy forefathers (Zohar 2:15a) . . . and from amidst these sufferings our teacher Moses and Aaron the Priest came to them, and the voice of God called forth from them, "I have surely remembered you" . . . Even a person cold of spirit and callous of faith would find it impossible to doubt such holy words, because they truly *saw* that it was not Moses who spoke, but rather God speaking through him . . . they relate this to one another, and all are joyful. Each comes home and tells his wife and children the great wonders about which he heard and saw with his eyes. They speak, imagining before them what leaving this place would look like, and what they must do to prepare for the way. It is possible that an innocent child might ask out of fear, "Father, mother! How can we leave when the enemy will strike us? . . . I am afraid . . . ." The innocent child cries and continues to ask . . . . [But] all *see* the wonders of our God . . . and all of them bow, acknowledging and prostrating to God . . . He is before us; how can we not *see*?[49]

This long exercise weaves together various elements: speaking directly to the reader and giving instruction ("imagine for yourself"); different sources of inspiration are integrated into a single textual fabric (*peshat*, *aggadah*, Talmud, Zohar); the metaphor of seeing and even imagining within the exercise ("imagine before them what leaving this place would look like"); that is, the imaginary figures—imagine.[50] This sustained praxis represents an example of how one may prepare himself for the immanent revelation of the divine Presence. It is by means of the imagery technique that one can ready himself to touch the divine realm and even see God.

CONCLUSIONS

This article began with a description of two academic schools that disagree quite fundamentally regarding how mysticism should be understood: the essentialist and the constructivist approaches. However, I have pointed out that the notion of empowerment, or

intensification, can serve as a bridge between these two opposing camps. The lens of empowerment has allowed scholars such as Moshe Idel to redefine mystical techniques as those methods that intensify the normative religious life and transform it into encounter with God.

With this element in mind, I have offered a new perspective on R. Shapira of Piaseczno's practice of imagery. I have attempted to show that R. Shapira used imagery techniques as methods of intensification and empowerment. This included *anomian* practices like dance and song, as well as legal rituals like prayer and Torah study. Now we are prepared to answer a central question undergirding this entire study: in what way did R. Shapira use imagery techniques, and why were they so essential to his spiritual path? Regarding the former, I argue that R. Shapira employed imagery as a catalyst for empowerment. Imagery practices intensify a variety of religious activities and transform them into mystical experiences. Why? Use of imagery techniques originates in a deeply internal, even personal need for mystical spirituality that extends forth across history. In Judaism, this tendency has been embodied in a great many spiritual thinkers, including R. Shapira.

R. Shapira of Piaseczno's imagery techniques should be appreciated from a broad perspective. In addition to taking note of his historical, social, and political context, we must consider internal factors as well. I do not mean to negate the role of secularism as a factor in his development of imagery practices. However, I seek to nuance our understanding of his thought by recognizing the importance of the internal longing for contact with the Divine. The academic preference for historicization, in terms of both direct continuity and reaction, leaves little room for phenomenological study. The attempt to explain the centrality of imagery techniques in R. Shapira's writings simply as a response to the rise of secularism in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries does not fully address the question at hand, and it prevents us from seeing the relationship between imagery techniques and the other practices which appear in his writings. For R. Shapira, Imagery is not simply one technique among many that function as alternatives to the experiences made possible by secularism, as has been claimed in studies based on historical readings of his works. Imagery techniques are in addition a powerful tool that intensifies all other practices. They are unique precisely because they may be combined with other techniques in order to strengthen and transform them into mystical experiences.

This case study is only one of many that demonstrate the importance of phenomenological research and its potential to widen the spectrum of the study of Jewish mysticism. Dismissing many such

approaches for the sake of academic objectivity only constrains the scholar's view of spiritual phenomena and prevents the development of new understandings of Jewish mysticism, in addition to historical, sociological, and political explanations. We should ask ourselves, is constricting our perspective in the name of objectivity, truly objective?

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NOTES

1. Boaz Huss, "The Mystification of Kabbalah and the Myth of Jewish Mysticism," *Pe'amim*, Vol. 110 (2007), p. 13 [Hebrew]; and see a translation in English, Boaz Huss, "The Mystification of the Kabbalah and the Modern Construction of Jewish Mysticism," *Ben Gurion University Review* (Be'er Sheva, 2008). http://in.bgu.ac.il/en/heksherim/2008/Boaz-Huss.pdf

2. Boaz Huss, "The Theologies of Kabbalah Research," *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2014), p. 6: "The assumption that phenomenological and comparative research can reveal the common universal traits of the mystical experience which, according to scholars, underlie Kabbalah and Hasidism, enhances the theological propensity of the research field." See Huss's approach to the theological study of Jewish mysticism, ibid., pp. 16–17: "Theology, queen of the Middle Age sciences, was pushed aside in modern academia and in modern theological claims, and the claim that God is a causal factor that explains physical, biological, historical, or social phenomena, is not accepted in academic disciplines today. However, as we saw in the above, theological assumptions are still accepted in the study of Jewish mysticism ....Non theological study of the Kabbalah and Hasidism that interprets and explains these as part of the historical, social and political fabric, and not as an expression of a metaphysical phenomenon that defines a category of its own, requires demystification of the Kabbalah and Hasidism and relinquishment of the category 'Jewish mysticism' as the founding category of this field of study."

3. Boaz Huss, "The Theologies of Kabbalah Research," in *Jewish Thought and Jewish Belief*, ed. Daniel J. Lasker (Be'er Sheva, 2012), pp. 41–42 [Hebrew]; B. Huss, "The Theologies of Kabbalah Research," p. 7.

4. Yehuda Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar: On R. Simeon bar Yohai as a Messianic Figure," Chap. 1 in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. by Arnold Schwartz et al. (Albany, 1993), pp. 1–84; Moshe Idel, "The History of Kabbalah and the History of the Jews," [Hebrew] *Theory and Criticism*, Vol. 6 (1995), pp. 137–48.

5. For his biography, see Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Northvale, NJ, 1994), pp. 1–14.

6. This element of his teachings has been noted by a number of scholars. See Zvi Leshem, "Between Messianism and Prophecy: Hasidism According to the Piazecner *Rebbe*," PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2007, pp. 223–38 [Hebrew]; Ron Wacks, *The Flame of the Holy Fire: Perspectives on the Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymous Kalmish Shapiro of Piaczna* [!] (Alon Shvut, 2010), pp. 123–66 [Hebrew]; Daniel Reiser, *Vision as a Mirror: Imagery Techniques in Twentieth Century Jewish Mysticism*, (Los Angeles, 2014), pp. 105–224 [Hebrew].

7. Imagery in Kabbalistic and Zoharic literature was extensively researched and in depth by Elliot R. Wolfson. See a selection of his works: *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ, 1994); *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleaning from the Zoharic Literature* (Oxford, 2007); *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York, 2005); "Phantasmagoria: The Image of the Image in Jewish Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2001), pp. 78–120.

8. D. Reiser, *Vision as a Mirror*, pp. 113–18.

9. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Tsav ve Zeruz* (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 38 [Hebrew].

10. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Mevo ha She'arim* (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 59a [Hebrew]; emphasis mine. See also his call to use imagery techniques in *Hakhsharat ha Avrekhim* (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 43a.

11. See N. Polen, *The Holy Fire*, p. 2; Z. Leshem, "Between Messianism and Prophecy," pp. 15–32; R. Wacks, *Flame of the Holy Fire*, pp. 53–63.

12. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Hovat ha Talmidim* (Warsaw, 1932), pp. 4a–4b; *Mavo ha She'arim*, pp. 41a, 46a.

13. *Hovat ha Talmidim*, p. 6b.

14. For examples of the essentialist conception of mysticism, see William James, *Varieties of the Religious Experience* (London, New York, Toronto, 1928), pp. 379–429; Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Mineola, New York, 2012), pp. 3–25, 70–94. For the contextual approach, see the articles published by Steven T. Katz: "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York, 1978), p. 26; idem, "The Conservative Character of Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Religious Tradition* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 4–6; and see his recent introduction to *Comparative Mysticism: an Anthology of Original Sources*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York, 2013), pp. 5–22. Overviews of the disagreement between these two scholarly approaches to mysticism may be found in Jess Byron Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment* (University Park, PA, 1996), pp. 1–27; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 52–58.

15. J. B. Hollenback, *Mysticism*, p. 5 note 9.

16. Ibid., p. 7; see also Gershom Scholem, "Devekut, or Communion with God," *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1971), pp. 203–27.

17. Moshe Idel, ''Performance, Intensification and Experience in Jewish Mysticism,'' *ARCHAEVS* Vol. XIII (2009), pp. 96–97. In a conversation I had with Prof. Steven Katz, he made it clear that he agrees that empowerment and intensification serve as a common feature for various mystical phenomena and even considers them to be the main characteristic of the mystical phenomenon. However, he does not see these as a bridge between the different approaches. Ultimately, he believes, every mystical empowerment should be researched in the context of its own mysticism.

18. This definition of mysticism is shared by scholars in both of the schools; see Rufus Matthew Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion* (London 1909), p. xv; S. Katz, ''Language, Epistemology and Mysticism,'' p. 27; Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles, 2015), p. 3.

19. Regarding these techniques see Z. Leshem, ''Between Messianism and Prophecy,'' pp. 167–71, 188–95, 222–38.

20. *Hovat ha Talmidim*, p. 63b. On the phrase ''intense thought'' as an expression for imagination, see Daniel Reiser, ''To Fly Like Angels: Imagery or Waking Dream Techniques in Hassidic Mysticism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,'' PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012 [Hebrew], pp. 85–92. This sentence, in which R. Shapira distinguishes between ''intense thought'' and analytic thought, demonstrates clearly that ''thought'' (*mahshavah*) does not refer to discursive thought.

21. See Tov Levinsky, ''Dance, Story-telling and Song in Hasidism,'' *Mahanayim*, Vol. 46 (1960), p. 99 [Hebrew].

22. Avish A. Shur, ''Rabbi Aaron the Great and the Fellowship of Hasidim in Karlin,'' *Beit Aharon ve-Yisra'el*, Vol. 51 (1984), pp. 153–60 [Hebrew].

23. Josef Yinon Fenton, ''Dance as a Sacred Act in Hasidism,'' in *Yahadut: Sugiyot, Ketta'im, Panim, Zehuyot*, eds. H. Pedaya and A. Meir (Be'er Sheva, 2007), p. 284.

24. Michael A. Fishbane, ''To Jump for Joy: The Rites of Dance According to R. Nahman of Bratzlav,'' *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1997), pp. 371–87; Eliezer Shore, ''Letters of Desire: Language, Mysticism, and Sexuality in the Writings of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav,'' PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University 2005, pp. 103–8.

25. A *siyyum* is a celebration traditionally held at the conclusion of studying a tractate of the Talmud. However, the term is also used to refer to the custom in which the last few letters of a Torah scroll are written, often by important people in the community, immediately before it is dedicated. It seems likely that R. Shapira is using *siyyum* in the latter sense.

26. *Tsav ve Zeruz*, p. 19.

27. Ibid.

28. Isaiah Tishby and Joseph Dan, ''The Teachings of Hasidism and its Literature,'' *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*, Vol. 17 (1966), pp. 810–11

[Hebrew]; Yaakov Mazor, "The Power of Song in Hasidic Thought and its Role in Religious and Social Life," *Yuval,* Vol. 7 (2002), p. 37 [Hebrew].

29. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Benei Mahashavah Tovah* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 56; *Hakhsharat ha Avrekhim*, p. 61b.

30. *Benei Mahashavah Tovah*, p. 42.

31. On the prophetic component of music in R. Shapira's thought, and on his belief in music as a way of achieving prophecy, see Z. Leshem, "Between Messianism and Prophecy," pp. 188–92.

32. *Benei Mahashavah Tovah*, p. 42. Emphasis mine.

33. Ibid.

34. On the connection between mysticism and *halakha* and the commandments, or the place of the *nomian* in Judaism, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 186–87; Jonathan Garb, *Shamanic Trance in Modern Kabbalah* (Chicago and London, 2011), pp. 119–41.

35. See *Hakhsharat ha Avrekhim*, pp. 30b-32a; *Mevo ha She'arim*, p. 17a.

36. The root *z.kh.r.* is often explained in R. Shapira's writings as an act of Imagery. See his interpretation of the rabbinic advice to fight the Evil Inclination by "remembering (*yizkor*) the day of one's death" (b. Berakhot 5a): "one must remember the day of his death, but not just intellectually or generally . . . [rather] he should imagine (*yetsayer*) the matter" (*Benei Mahashavah Tovah*, p. 22).

37. *Hovat ha Talmidim*, p. 19b.

38. Zohar 2:40b.

39. *Hovat ha Talmidim*, p. 41a. On study and mystical experiences in Hasidism, see J. Garb, *Shamanic Trance*, pp. 128–31.

40. On "strange thoughts," see Yoram Jacobson, *The Hasidic Thought* (Tel Aviv, 1985), pp. 102–7 [Hebrew]; Norman Lamm, *The Religious Thought of Hasidism* (New York, 1999), pp. 371–75.

41. Adin Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose* (Jerusalem, 1996), p. 106.

42. *Hovat ha Talmidim*, 51a. Emphasis mine.

43. Ibid. See the longer, more complicated exercises given in *Hakhsharat ha Avrekhim*, p. 51a.

44. *Derekh ha Melekh*, p. 136. For other imagery exercises specifically to intensify prayer, see *Hakhsharat ha Avrekhim*, pp. 23a, 29b. Several Hasidic masters, such as R. Elimelekh of Lyzhensk and R. Aaron of Karlin, developed similar imagery techniques many years before R. Shapira. However, there is no comparison between the dozens of complex, mature exercises developed by R. Shapira and the simple exercises that came before him, which in almost all cases involve a single scene.

45. The relationship between imagination and prophecy in medieval Jewish thought is a broad subject indeed. See Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht, 2001), esp. pp. 241–46, 279–84.

46. *Hovat ha Talmidim*, pp. 73b-84a. Descriptions of mystical experiences in terms of being surrounded by light are typical of ecstatic

Kabbalah; see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany, 1995), pp. 278–79 note 74. For a similar contemplative exercise from an earlier Hasidic master, see. Aaron ha Kohen of Apta's *Or ha Ganuz la Tsaddikim* (Warsaw, 1887), pp. 35, 10.

47. See D. Reiser, *Vision as a Mirror*, pp. 107–84.

48. *Hakhsharat ha Avrekhim*, ch. 7.

49. Ibid., pp. 34a, 36a.

50. Ibid., p. 35b. On dreams within a dream, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted Within a Dream*: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination (New York, 2011).