

Adin Steinsaltz
(Even-Israel)

The Thirteen Petalled Rose

A Discourse on the Essence
of Jewish Existence & Belief

TRANSLATED BY

Yehuda Hanegbi

Maggid Books

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Chapter one</i>	
<i>Worlds</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter two</i>	
<i>Divine Manifestation</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Chapter three</i>	
<i>The Soul of Man</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Chapter four</i>	
<i>Holiness</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Chapter five</i>	
<i>Torah</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Chapter six</i>	
<i>The Way of Choice: An Answer to Ethics</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Chapter seven</i>	
<i>The Human Image</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Chapter eight</i>	
<i>Repentance</i>	<i>69</i>

Chapter nine	
<i>The Search for Oneself</i>	77
Chapter ten	
<i>Mitzvot</i>	85
Chapter eleven	
<i>Prayer</i>	97
Chapter twelve	
<i>An Additional Note on the Kiddush Ritual</i>	115
Chapter thirteen	
<i>Pataḥ Eliyahu – Elijah Began</i>	121
<i>About the Author</i>	151

Chapter one

Worlds

The physical world in which we live, the objectively observed universe around us, is only a part of an inconceivably vast system of worlds. Most of these worlds are spiritual in their essence; they are of a different order from our known world. Which does not necessarily mean that they exist somewhere else, but means rather that they exist in different dimensions of being. What is more, the various worlds interpenetrate and interact in such a way that they can be considered counterparts of one another, each reflecting or projecting itself on the one below or above it, with all the modifications, changes, and even distortions that are the result of such interaction. It is the sum of this infinitely complex exchange of influence back and forth among different domains that comprises the specific world of reality we experience in our everyday life.

In speaking of higher or lower worlds, I do not mean to describe an actual physical relation; for in the realm of the spiritual there is no such division, and the words “high” and “low” refer only to the place of any particular world on the ladder of causality. To call a world higher signifies that it is more primary, more basic in terms of being close to a primal source of influence; while a lower world would be a secondary world – in a sense, a copy. Yet the copy is not just an imitation but rather

a whole system, with a more or less independent life of its own, its own variety of experience, characteristics, and properties.

The world in which we ordinarily live, with all that it embraces, is called the “world of action;” and it includes the world of both our sensual and our nonsensual apprehension. But this world of action itself is not all of the same essence and the same quality. The lower part of the world of action is what is known as the “world of physical nature” and of more or less mechanical processes – that is to say, the world where natural law prevails; while above this world of physical nature is another part of the same world which we may call the “world of spiritual action.” What is common to these two domains of the world of action is man, the human creature so situated between them that he partakes of both. As a part of the physical system of the universe, man is subordinate to the physical, chemical, and biological laws of nature; while from the standpoint of his consciousness, even when this consciousness is totally occupied with matters of a lower order, man belongs to the spiritual world, the world of ideas. To be sure, these ideas of the world of action are almost completely bound up with the material world, growing out of it and reaching farther, but never really getting out of it; and this is as true for the heights of the most far-reaching and encompassing philosophy as it is for the thought processes of the ignorant person, the primitive savage, or the child.

Every aspect of human existence is therefore made up of both matter and spirit. And at the same time, in the world of action the spiritual is subordinate to the material, in keeping with the fact that the laws of nature determine the face and form of all things and serve as focal points for all processes. In this world the spirit can appear and perform its role only on the solid basis of the workings of what we call the “forces of nature.” In other words, no matter how abstract or divorced it is from so-called reality, thought still belongs to the world of action.

The world of action, however, is only one world in a general system of four fundamental dimensions of being, or four different worlds, each with its own cosmos of varying essences. These four worlds have been called, in order from the highest to the lowest, “emanation,” “creation,” “formation,” and “action.” Thus, the world directly above ours is the world of formation. To understand the difference, one must first

understand certain factors common to all four worlds. These factors were traditionally known as “world,” “year,” and “soul;” nowadays we would call them “space,” “time,” and “self” (experience of one’s being). Each world is distinguished from the others by the way these three factors are manifested in it. For example, in our world, physical place is a necessary external element for the existence of things; it is the background against which all objects move and all creatures function. In the higher worlds, and also in the world of spiritual action, that which is analogous to space in the world of physical action is called a “mansion.” It is the framework within which various forms and beings converge and connect. Perhaps one may compare it to those self-contained systems – known in mathematics as “groups” or “fields” – in each of which all the unit parts are related in a definite way to the other parts and to the whole. Such systems may be inhabited or full to capacity, or they may be relatively sparse or empty. Whatever the case, such a system of related existences constitutes a “place” in the abstract – a “mansion” in the higher worlds.

Time also has a different significance in the other worlds. In our domain of experience, time is measured by the movement of physical objects in space. The “year,” as it is called abstractly, constitutes the very process of change; it is the passage from one thing to another, from form to form, and it also includes within itself the concept of causality as that which keeps all transition from form to form within the bounds of law. Indeed, upon ascending the order of worlds, this time system becomes increasingly abstract and less and less representative of anything that we know as time in the physical world; it becomes no more than the purest essence of change, or even of the possibility of potential change.

Finally, what we call “soul” is, in the physical dimension, the totality of living creatures functioning in the time and space dimensions of this world. Although they are an essential part of this world, they are distinguished from the general background by their self-consciousness and knowledge of this world. Similarly, in the higher world, the souls are self-conscious essences acting within the framework of the mansion and the year of their world.

The world of formation may be said to be, in its essence, a world of feeling. It is a world whose main substance, or type of experience, is emotion of

one kind or another, and in which such emotions are the elements that determine its patterns. The living beings in it are conscious manifestations of particular impulses – impulses to perform one or another act or responding one or another way – or of the power to carry through an incentive, to realize, to fulfill the tendency of an inclination or an inspiration. The living creatures of the world of formation, the beings who function in it as we function in the world of action, are called, in a general way, “angels.”

An angel is a spiritual reality with its own unique content, qualities, and character. What distinguishes one angel from another is not the physical quality of spatial apartness, but difference of level – one being above or below another – with respect to fundamental causality in terms of some difference in essence. Now as we have said, angels are beings in the world that is the domain of emotion and feeling; and since this is the case, the substantial quality of an angel may be an impulse or a drive – say, an inclination in the direction of love or a seizure of fear, or pity, or the like. To express a larger totality of being, something more comprehensive, we may refer to “a camp of angels.” In the general camp of love, for example, there are many subdivisions, virtually innumerable shades and gradations of tender feeling. No two loves are alike in emotion, just as no two ideas are alike. Thus, any general and inclusive drive or impulse is a whole camp, perhaps even a mansion, and is not consistently the same at every level. Whereas among human beings emotions change and vary either as persons change or according to the circumstances of time and place, an angel is totally the manifestation of a single emotional essence. The essence of an angel, therefore, is defined by the limits of a particular emotion, in terms of itself, just as personality and inwardness define the self of each person in our world. An angel, however, is not merely a fragment of existence doing nothing more than just manifesting an emotion; it is a whole and integral being, conscious of itself and its surroundings and able to act and create and do things within the framework of the world of formation. The nature of the angel is to be, to a degree, as its name in Hebrew signifies, a messenger, to constitute a permanent contact between our world of action and the higher worlds. The angel is the one who effects transfers of the vital plenty between worlds. An angel’s missions go in two direc-

tions: it may serve as an emissary of God downward, to other angels and to worlds and creatures below the world of formation; and it may also serve as the one who carries things upward from below, from our world to the higher worlds.

The real difference between man and angel is not the fact that man has a body, because the essential comparison is between the human *soul* and the angel. The soul of man is most complex and includes a whole world of different existential elements of all kinds, while the angel is a being of single essence and therefore in a sense one-dimensional. In addition, man – because of his many-sidedness, his capacity to contain contradictions, and his gift of an inner power of soul, that divine spark that makes him man – has the capacity to distinguish between one thing and another, especially between good and evil. It is this capacity which makes it possible for him to rise to great heights, and by the same token creates the possibility for his failure and backsliding, neither of which is true for the angel. From the point of view of its essence, the angel is eternally the same; it is static, an unchanging existence, whether temporary or eternal, fixed within the rigid limits of quality given at its very creation.

Among the many thousands of angels to be found in the various worlds are those that have existed from the very beginning of time, for they are an unaltering part of the Eternal Being and the fixed order of the universe. These angels in a sense constitute the channels of plenty through which the divine grace rises and descends in the worlds.

But there are also angels that are continuously being created anew, in all the worlds, and especially in the world of action where thoughts, deeds, and experiences give rise to angels of different kinds. Every mitzva that a man does is not only an act of transformation in the material world; it is also a spiritual act, sacred in itself. And this aspect of concentrated spirituality and holiness in the mitzva is the chief component of that which becomes an angel. In other words, the emotion, the intention, the essential holiness of the act combine to become the essence of the mitzva as an existence in itself, as something that has objective reality. And this separate existence of the mitzva, by being unique and holy, creates the angel, a new spiritual reality that belongs to the world of formation. So it is that the act of performing a mitzva extends beyond its effect in the material world and, by the power of the spiritual holiness within

it – holiness in direct communion with all the upper worlds – causes a primary and significant transformation.

More precisely, the person who performs a mitzva, who prays or directs his mind toward the Divine, in so doing creates an angel, which is a sort of reaching out on the part of man to the higher worlds. Such an angel, however, connected in its essence to the man who created it, still lives, on the whole, in a different dimension of being, namely in the world of formation. And it is in this world of formation that the mitzva acquires substance. This is the process by which the specific message or offering to God that is intrinsic in the mitzva rises upward and introduces changes in the system of the higher worlds – foremost in the world of formation. From here, in turn, they influence the worlds above them. So we see that a supreme act is performed when what is done below becomes detached from particular physical place, time, and person and becomes an angel.

Conversely, an angel is sometimes sent downward from a higher world to a lower. For what we call the mission of the angel can be manifested in many different ways. The angel cannot reveal its true form to man, whose being, senses, and instruments of perception belong only to the world of action: in the world of action there are no means of grasping the angel. It continues to belong to a different dimension even when apprehended in one form or another. This may be compared with those frequencies of an electromagnetic field that are beyond the limited range ordinarily perceived by our senses. We know that human vision assimilates only a small fragment of the spectrum; as far as our senses are concerned, the rest of it does not exist. That which is ordinarily invisible is “seen” only through appropriate instruments of transmutation or interpretation, when, in the language of the Kabbala, they are dressed in clothes or vessels that make it possible for us to apprehend them – as, for example, radio or television waves have to be transmitted through appropriate vessels to be revealed to our senses. In the same way, there are aspects of the reality of the spiritual world of which we are only vaguely conscious. Even animals can sometimes be sensitive, if to a limited degree, to the presence of such a spiritual essence. The ass of Balaam, for instance, who “saw” an angel, did not of course actually see an angel: probably the animal had some obscure sensation of being confronted or threatened by something.

Angels have been revealed to human beings in either of two ways: one is through the vision of the prophet, the seer, or the holy man – that is, an experience by a person on the highest level; the other is through an isolated act of apprehension by an ordinary person suddenly privileged to receive a revelation of things from higher levels. And even so, when such a person or prophet does in some way experience the reality of an angel, his perception, limited by his senses, remains bound to material structures, and his language inevitably tends to expressions of actual or imagined physical forms. Thus, when the prophet tries to describe or to explain to others his experience of seeing an angel, the description verges on the eerie and fantastic. Terms like “winged creature of heaven” or “eyes of the supreme chariot” can be only a pale and inadequate representation of the experience because this experience belongs to another realm with another system of imagery. The description will of necessity tend to be anthropomorphic. Or when, as we know, the angel whom the prophet describes as having the face of an ox does not have any face at all – and certainly not that of an ox – its inner essence, seeking elucidation and reflection within material reality, may express itself in a way that shows a certain likeness between the face of an angel and the face of an ox as the expression of a known spiritual quality.

Thus, all the articulated visions of prophecy are nothing more than ways of representing an abstract, formless, spiritual reality in the vocabulary of human language; although, to be sure, there may also be a revelation of an angel in quite ordinary form, clothed in some familiar vessel and manifested as a “normal” phenomenon in nature. The difficulty is that the one who sees an angel in this way does not always know that it is an apparition, that the pillar of fire or the image of a man does not belong entirely to the realm of natural cause and effect. And at the same time, the angel – that is to say, the force sent from a higher world – makes its appearance and to a certain extent acts in the material world, being either entirely subject to the laws of our world or operating in a sort of vacuum between the worlds in which physical nature is no more than a kind of garment for some higher substance. In the Bible, Manoah, the father of Samson, sees the angel in the image of a prophet; yet he senses in some inexplicable way that it is not a man he sees, that he is witnessing a phenomenon of a different order. Only when the angel changes form

completely and becomes a pillar of fire does Manoah recognize that this being, this marvel which he has seen and with whom he has conversed, was not a man, not a prophet, but a being from another dimension of reality – that is to say, an angel.

The creation of an angel in our world and the immediate relegation of this angel to another world is, in itself, not at all a supernatural phenomenon; it is a part of a familiar realm of experience, an integral piece of life, which may even seem ordinary and commonplace because of its traditional rootedness in the system of mitzvot, or the order of sanctity. When we are in the act of creating the angel, we have no perception of the angel being created, and this act seems to be a part of the whole structure of the practical material world in which we live. Similarly, the angel who is sent to us from another world does not always have a significance or impact beyond the normal laws of physical nature. Indeed, it often happens that the angel precisely reveals itself in nature, in the ordinary common-sense world of causality, and only a prophetic insight or divination can show when, and to what extent, it is the work of higher forces. For man by his very nature is bound to the system of higher worlds, even though ordinarily this system is not revealed and known to him. As a result, the system of higher worlds seems to him to be natural, just as the whole of his two-sided existence, including both matter and spirit, seems self-evident to him. Man does not wonder at all about those passages he goes through all the time in the world of action, from the realm of material existence to the realm of spiritual existence. What is more, the rest of the other worlds that also penetrate our world may appear to us as part of something quite natural. It may be said that the realities of the angel and of the world of formation are part of a system of “natural” being which is as bound by law as that aspect of existence we are able to observe directly. Therefore, neither the existence of the angel nor his “mission,” taking him from world to world, need break through the reality of nature in the broadest sense of the word.

The domain of angels, the world of formation, is a general system of nonphysical essences, most of them quite simple and consistent in their being. Each angel has a well-defined character which is manifested in the way it functions in our world. This is why it is said that an angel can carry out only one mission, for the essence of an angel is beyond

the existing many-sidedness of man. The particular essence of an angel can be evinced in terms of different things and separate forms, but it remains a single thing in itself, like a simple force of nature. Because even though the angel is a being that possesses divine consciousness, its specific essence and function are not altered by it, just as physical forces in the world are specific and single in their mode of functioning and do not keep changing their essences. It follows, then, that just as there are holy angels, built into and created by the sacred system, there are also destructive angels, called “devils” or “demons,” who are emanations of the connection of man with those aspects of reality which are the opposite of holiness. Here, too, the actions of man and his modes of existence, in all their forms, create angels, but angels of another sort, from another level and a different reality. These are hostile angels that may be part of a lower world or even of a higher, more spiritual world – this last because even though they do not belong to the realm of holiness, as in all worlds and systems of being, there is a mutual interpenetration and influence between the holy and the not-holy.

Immediately above the world of formation is the world called the “world of creation,” which, like the others, includes many different realms, levels, and mansions. And just as the world of formation is comprised of a multitude of spiritual beings whose essence is pure feeling and emotion, the world of creation is a world of pure mind. This mind quality of the world of creation is not a merely intellectual essence but rather expresses itself as the power and capacity to grasp things with a genuine, inner understanding; it is, in other words, the mind as creator as well as that which registers and absorbs knowledge.

One of the other names for the world of creation is “world of the throne,” taken from Ezekiel’s vision of the divine “throne of glory.” On the whole, however, that aspect of the Divine that is revealed to the prophets is the world directly above the world of creation known as the “world of emanation.” This is the source from which God is made known to a few, while the world of creation is His seat or His throne, from which, as it is written, “the earth is His footstool.” Moreover, the Divine Throne or Chariot is the means through which the divine plenty

descends to the creatures and things of our world and makes contact with the many complex systems of all the worlds. So that the world of creation is also the crossroads of existence. It is the focal point at which the plenty rising from the lower worlds and the plenty descending from the higher worlds meet and enter into some sort of reaction with each other. Hence an understanding of the “way of the Chariot” – that is, an understanding of the way the Divine Throne of Glory operates – is the highest secret of the esoteric doctrine. And beyond this secret a human being, even a man of vision or one who has a revelation, can receive only uncertain impressions of such essences as are structurally beyond human comprehension. For the world of creation is a world which man has been able to reach only at the very highest point of his development, demonstrating in this way that part of his soul belongs to the special realm. So it is that for someone to comprehend the secret of the Chariot means that he is standing at the very focal point of the intersection of different worlds. At this intersection he is given knowledge of all existence and transformation, past, present, and future, and is aware of the Divine as prime cause and mover of all the forces acting from every direction. Obviously, it is impossible for man as man to achieve such comprehension completely; nevertheless, even partial insight into the Chariot provides one with a sense of what is happening in all the worlds.

In the world of creation, too, there are mansions – that is to say, places in the metaphysical sense, spheres of being within which there is a certain measured rhythm of time, in one form or another, with a relation between past, present, and future, between cause and effect, and in which there are souls and creatures who belong specifically to this world. These creatures of the world of creation, the living souls in it, are the higher angels called “seraphs.” Like the angels of the world of formation, the seraphs are singular abstract essences, not given to change. But whereas the angels of the world of formation are embodiments of pure emotion, those of the world of creation are essences of pure intelligence. The seraphs are angels who manifest the higher levels of mind. They also reflect the differences among various planes of consciousness and comprehension, in itself a particular aspect of mind. Finally, every such creature of the world of creation also serves as an angel-messenger, receiving the plenty from the angelic beings and the souls of the world

of formation, and raising them up to a higher level in the world of creation and further, to endless heights.

The ascendancy of the world of creation over the world of formation is not only a matter of the superiority of mind and consciousness over the emotions; it also lies in the fact that the world of creation itself is a “higher” world: in the sense that the various worlds are characterized as higher or lower in relation to the degree of their transparency to the divine light, which is their very light and substance. As one descends in the system of worlds, materiality becomes ever greater: in other words, the beings of the lower worlds feel their independent existence with greater intensity than the beings of the higher; they are more aware of being separate individual selves. And this consciousness of their separate selfhood blocks the divine plenty and at the same time obscures the truly unchanging essence that lurks beneath the individual personality. In short, the lower the world, the more it is pervaded by a sense of the “I,” and consequently the more it is subject to the obscuring of the divine essence. It can be said, however, that all of the worlds – and, indeed, any separate realms of being – exist only by virtue of the fact that God makes Himself hidden. For when the divine plenty is manifested in its complete fullness there is no room for the existence of anything else. A world can exist only as a result of the concealment of its Creator. As one descends from higher worlds to lower, with each new level of descent the separateness, the independence of the world from it becomes more pronounced and emphatic, while the divine plenty becomes more hidden. Hence the creatures in the world of action may reach (as men often do) a condition in which they are not only unaware of the life-giving divine plenty, but may even repudiate its existence altogether. On the other hand, as one ascends the scale of being, the worlds become ever more clear and transparent to the divine plenty.

If in our world one needs prophetic insight or an opening of faith to distinguish the divine plenty in all its variety of form and on all its levels, in the higher worlds everything is more lucid and offers less resistance to the divine plenty. So that in being above the other two worlds – of action and formation – the world of creation is also more translucently clear, its creatures are more fully cognizant of the manner in which their world is constantly being created as one or another manifestation of

the divine plenty. At the same time, since the world of creation is still a separate world, its creatures and souls have their own individual selves. They may indeed perceive the divine light, and they may fully accept its dominance in everything. Nevertheless, in feeling themselves separate from this light, they recognize their independent existence. Which is to say that even the seraph yearns mightily to approach the Divine, for despite his being so far above anything man can grasp, and despite his being the embodiment of understanding and higher intelligence, he is aware that his is a reality still disconnected from the Divine.

In fact, only beyond the world of creation, in the world of emanation, the highest of worlds, which is in a sense no longer really a world, can one speak of such absolute clarity and transparency that no concealment of any essence whatsoever is possible, and that consequently essences do not exhibit any particular separate self at all. Only in the world of emanation is there no hiding of the revealed divinity by every fence or screen that sets things apart. This is why one may say that the world of emanations is no longer a world, but is itself the Godhead. The world of creation is, for all its excellences and purity, still an independent existence with its own personality, its "I" as distinct from the divine being. The difference between the world of emanation and the world of creation is thus greater than that between any other two levels. It is the edge of the whole system of independent existences, each one divided from the other by "screens," and beyond it is the source of all being, where there are no such screens anymore.

An archetypal representation of a "screen" is the curtain dividing the humanly sacred from the Holy of Holies in the Holy Temple. For the Holy Temple is, in a sense, a symbolic model of the whole system of the worlds. A screen is thus something that acts as a barrier to the free flow of the divine plenty in all its purity; it is that which brings about a certain obscuring and modification of its light. For so long as the divine light passes through levels and planes that are transparent, there may be an alteration of color, or of form, or of the quality of the revelation, but the light itself remains essentially light. But what happens when the light strikes against a screen? Even though the light may be discerned on the dark side of the screen as a result of some "enlightenment," on the other side, the light itself does not penetrate.

This idea of a screen is only an image to explain the essence of the differences among all things. In the world of emanation, in the Godhead, there are no such barriers and the unity is complete. In order for a world to exist separate from the Godhead, there has to be a contraction of the highest essence. This contraction of infinite wisdom, or withdrawal of divine plenty, is therefore the basis for the creation of the universe; and the screen – representing the hiddenness of the Divine – is the basis for making the worlds manifest as separate worlds. This is the central imagery of Genesis: in the beginning was concealment and withdrawal – “darkness on the face of the deep.” And out of this darkness, which follows from the existence of the screen, the mold of a world, which will be the world itself, can be imprinted.

As for our world, the world of action, besides a physical world, it also contains a spiritual world – in fact, a rather large number of spiritual worlds. These worlds and their various mansions vary greatly – indeed, so greatly that it is extremely difficult to see any unity in their spiritual significance. On the one hand, those domains of the spirit that issue from wisdom and creativity – such as philosophy, mathematics, art, poetry, and the like, which are morally or qualitatively neutral in their ideas of truth or beauty – are readily recognizable. On the other hand, there are domains of the spirit that have a certain Gnostic significance, with a different value system, and that thus lend themselves to either a positive or a negative spirituality. For just as there is room for both physical and spiritual functioning of all kinds that raise the world and man to higher levels of holiness in the world of action, so there is also that which makes contact between the world of human beings and those worlds lower than ours. These worlds are called the “realms of evil,” the worlds of the *Kelipa*, the outer shell.

The domains of the *Kelipa* constitute mansions, and in them, too, there are hierarchical systems, one above the other (actually one beneath the other), with the evil becoming more emphatic and more obvious with each distinct level. And, as may be surmised, there is a strong interrelation with the world of action. For although in itself the world of action is neutral, in terms of its Gnostic implication it belongs to the worlds of evil, to one of the levels of the outer shell called *Kelipa Noga*.

This is a level of being containing all that is not in its essence directed either toward or against holiness. In terms of holiness, then, it holds a neutral position. Nevertheless, when man sinks into this neutral position entirely, without disentangling himself at all from it, he fails to realize his specific human destiny and is found wanting in the very core of his being.

Beneath the domain of *Kelipa Noga* are the thoroughly evil worlds. Each one of them has its own aspect of evil and, as is the case with the worlds of holiness, is dynamically connected to the others, by the bonds of transformation between worlds and planes, in a process that continues down to the very lowest depth of evil. As in all the worlds, so in the realms of evil, manifestation take three forms: worlds, year, and soul. In other words, there is a general background of existence, acting as place in the spiritual sense (world); there is an aspect connected with the relation to time and causality (year); and likewise they have a soul aspect – that is, spiritual creatures inhabiting the worlds of evil. Those beings inhabiting the worlds of evil are also called “angels,” but they are rather subversive angels, angels of destruction. And like the angels of the higher worlds, they are also spiritual beings and are limited each to a well-defined essence and each to its own purpose. Just as there is in the domain of holiness the quality (or angel) of love-in-holiness, of awe-in-holiness, and the like, so there are contrasting emanations and impulses in the domain of evil, angels of destruction expressing love-in-wickedness, fear-in-corruption, and the like.

Some of these pernicious angels are self-sufficient beings with clearly defined and specific characters, whose existence is, in a certain sense, eternal – at least until such time as evil will vanish from the face of the earth. In addition, there are the subversive angels created by the actions of men, by the objectification of malevolence: the evil thought, the hate-inspired wish, the wicked deed. For beside its visibly destructive consequences, every act of malice or evil creates an abstract Gnostic being, who is a bad angel, an angel belonging to the plane of evil corresponding to the state of mind that brought it into being. In their inner essence, however, the creatures of realms of evil are not independent entities living by their own forces; their existence is contingent on our world. That is to say, they receive their vital power from our world, their source which they can do no more than copy in various ways on progres-

sively lower planes. Just as it is true for the higher worlds that it is man and only man who is able to choose and perform good, so it is only man who can do evil. Whatever man does in turn creates and gives forth an abundance of life; his whole spiritual being is involved in each act, and the angel formed thereby accompanies him as his handiwork, as a part of the existence encircling him. Like the angels of holiness, the angels of destruction are, to a degree, channels to transfer the plenty that, as it is transmuted from our world, descends the stairs of corruption, level after level, to the lowest depths of the worlds of abomination.

It follows that these worlds of evil act in conjunction with, and directly upon, man, whether in natural, concrete forms or in abstract spiritual forms. The subversive angels are thus also tempters and the inciters to evil, because they bring the knowledge of evil from their world to our world. And at the same time, the more evil a human being does, the more life-force do these angels draw from him for their world.

On the other hand, these same subversive angels also serve as an instrument for punishing the sinner. For the sinner is punished by the inevitable consequences of his deeds, just as the *tzaddik* or saint receives his reward in the consequences of his benevolent deeds. In short, the sinner is punished by the closing of the circle, by being brought into contact with the domain of evil he creates. The subversive angels are revealed in a variety of forms, in both material and spiritual ways, and in their revelation they punish man for his sins in this world of ours, making him suffer torment and pain, defeat and anguish, physically as well as spiritually. The subversive angels act in one sense as manifestations and messengers of evil, and yet in another sense they constitute a necessary part of the totality of existence. For although, like the worlds of evil in general, the subversive angels are not ideal beings, they nevertheless have a role in the world, enabling it to function as it does. To be sure, were the world to root out all evil completely, then as a matter of course the subversive angels would disappear, since they exist as permanent parasites living on man. But as long as man chooses evil, he supports and nurtures whole worlds and mansions of evil, all of them drawing upon the same human sickness of soul. In fact, these worlds and mansions of evil even stir up these sicknesses and are integral to the pain and sufferings they cause. In this sense, the very origin of the

demons is conditioned by the factors they influence – like a police force whose existence is useful and necessary only because of the existence of crime. The spiritual implication of the subversive angels constitutes, in addition to their negative function, a framework intended to keep the world from sliding into evil.

The fact remains, however, that these angels grow in strength and power, constantly reinforced by the growing evil in the world. Their existence is thus two-sided and ambiguous: on one hand, the main reason for their creation is to serve as a deterrent and as a limit (and in this sense they are a necessary part of the overall system of worlds); on the other hand, as the evil flourishes and spreads over the world because of the deeds of men, these destructive angels become increasingly independent existences, making up a whole realm that feeds on and fattens on evil. Whereupon the very reason for this realm is forgotten, and it appears to have become evil for its own sake, an end in itself. At which point in the paradox the vastness and magnificent scope of the purpose and meaning of man become evident. We see that man can liberate himself from the accumulating temptation of evil, by which act he compels the worlds of evil to shrink to their original mold; what is more, he is able to change these worlds completely so that they can be included in the system of the worlds of the holy, which occurs when that part of them which had become corrupt disappears completely, and that part of them which had served as a support and a deterrent assumes an entirely different character.

Nevertheless, so long as the world remains as it is, the subversive angels continue to exist within the very substance of the world of action, and even in domains above it, finding a place for themselves wherever there is any inclination toward the evil. But this happens because they themselves instigate and evoke the production of evil. They thus receive their life and power as the result of something they have aroused; and then finally, by their very existence, they constitute a punishment for the things they have helped to bring about. The worlds and the mansions of evil belong, in this sense, to the general framework of the world of action, and one of their most extreme aspects is that mansion called “Hell,” in all its forms. For when the soul of man leaves the body and can relate directly to spiritual essences, thus becoming altogether spiritual,

with no more than fragmented memories of having been connected with the body, then in the course of things, all that this soul had done in life casts it into its right form on the level appropriate to it in the life after death. And therefore, the soul of the sinner descends, as it is symbolically expressed, to Hell. In other words, the soul now finds itself wholly within the world-domain of these subversive angels whom it, as a sinner, created; and there is no refuge from them, for these creatures encompass the soul completely and keep punishing it with full, exacting punishment for having produced them, for having caused the existence of those same angels. And as long as the just measure of anguish is not exhausted, this soul remains in Hell. Which is to say, the soul is punished not by something extraneous but by that manifestation of evil it itself created according to its level and according to its essence. Only after the soul passes through the sickness, torment, and pain of the spiritual existence of its own self-produced evil, only then can it reach a higher level of being in accordance with its correct state and in accordance with the essence of the good it created.

Since even this domain of the worlds of evil is fundamentally inward and spiritual, it is revealed only by way of vision of one kind or another. And therefore, the many anthropomorphic descriptions of the subversive angels are not unlike the description of the holy angels in their crudity and their clumsy approximations. For it is not given to transmit something that does not lend itself to material description, and the imagery used is invariably inadequate.

Chapter two

Divine Manifestation

The Holy One, blessed be He, has any number of names. All of these names, however, designate only various aspects of divine manifestation in the world, in particular as these are made known to human beings. Above and beyond this variety of designations is the divine essence itself, which has not, and cannot have, a name. We call this essence, or God-in-Himself, by a name that is itself a paradox: “the Infinite, blessed be He.”

This term, then, is meant to apply to the divine essence in itself, which cannot be called by any other name since the only name that can be applied to the very essence of God must include both the distant and the near – indeed everything. Now as we know, in the realms of abstract thought, such as mathematics and philosophy, infinity is that which is beyond measure and beyond grasp, while at the same time the term is limited by its very definition to being a quality of something finite. Thus, for example, there are many things in the world, such as numbers, that may have infinity as one of their attributes and yet also be limited either in function or purpose or in their very nature. But when we speak of the Infinite, blessed be He, we mean the utmost of perfection and abstraction, that which encompasses everything and is beyond all possible limits.

The only thing we are permitted to say about the Infinite then,

Divine Manifestation

would involve the negative of all qualities. For the Infinite is beyond anything that can be grasped in *any* terms – either positive or negative. Not only is it impossible to say of the Infinite that He is in any way limited or that He is bad, one cannot even say the opposite, that He is vast or He is good. Just as He is not matter, He is not spirit, nor can He be said to exist in any dimension meaningful to us. The dilemma posed by this meaning of infinity is more than a consequence of the inadequacy of the human mind. It represents a simply unbridgeable gap, a gap that cannot be crossed by anything definable.

There would, therefore, seem to be an abyss stretching between God and the world – and not only the physical world of time, space, and gravity, but also the spiritual worlds, no matter how sublime, confined as each one is within the boundaries of its own definition. Creation itself becomes a divine paradox.

To bridge the abyss, the Infinite keeps creating the world; His creation is not the act of forming something out of nothing, but the act of revelation. Creation is an emanation from the divine light; its secret is not the coming into existence of something new but the transmutation of the divine reality into something defined and limited – into a world. This transmutation involves a process, or a mystery, of contraction. God hides Himself, putting aside His essential infiniteness and withholding His endless light to the extent necessary in order that the world may exist. Within the actual divine light nothing can maintain its own existence; the world becomes possible only through the special act of divine withdrawal or contraction. Such divine non-being, or concealment, is thus the elementary condition for the existence of that which is finite.

Still, even though it appears as an entity in itself, the world is formed and sustained by the divine power manifested in this primal essence. The manifestation takes the form of ten *Sefirot*, fundamental forces or channels of divine flow. And these *Sefirot*, which are the means of divine revelation, are related to the primary divine light as a body is related to the soul; they are in the nature of an instrument or a vehicle of expression, as though a mode of creation in another dimension of existence. Or, the ten *Sefirot* can also be seen as an arrangement or con-

figuration resembling an upright human figure, each of whose main limbs corresponds to one of the *Sefirot*. The world does not, therefore, relate directly to the hidden Godhead, which in this imagery is like the soul in relation to the human semblance of the *Sefirot*; rather, it relates to the divine manifestation, when and how this manifestation occurs, in the ten *Sefirot*. Just as man's true soul, his inapprehensible self, is never revealed to others but manifests itself through his mind, emotions, and body, so is the Self of God not revealed in His original essence except through the ten *Sefirot*.

The ten *Sefirot* taken together constitute a fundamental and all-inclusive Reality; moreover, the pattern of this Reality is organic – each of the *Sefirot* has a unique function, complements each of the others, and is essential for the realization or fulfillment of the others and of the whole.

Because of their profound many-sidedness, the ten *Sefirot* seem to be shrouded in mystery. And there are indeed so many apparently unconnected levels of meaning to each – the levels, moreover, appearing to be unconnected – that a mere listing of their names does not adequately convey their essence. To say that the first *Sefira*, *Keter* (“crown”), is the basic divine will and also the source of all delight and pleasure, only touches the surface. As is true with *Hokhma* (“wisdom”), which is intuitive, instantaneous knowledge, while *Bina* (“understanding”) tends more to logical analysis. *Da'at* (“knowledge”) is different from both, being not only the accumulation or the summation of that which is known, but a sort of eleventh *Sefira* – belonging and yet not belonging to the ten. *Hesed* (“grace”) is thus the fourth *Sefira* and is the irrepressibly expanding impulse, or *Gedula* (“greatness”), of love and growth. *Gevura* (“power”) is restraint and concentration, control as well as fear and awe; while *Tiferet* (“beauty”) is the combination of harmony, truth, compassion. *Netzah* (“eternity”) is conquest or the capacity for overcoming; *Hod* (“splendor”) can also be seen as persistence or holding on; and *Yesod* (“foundation”) is, among other things, the vehicle, the carrier from one thing or condition to another. *Malkhut* (“kingdom”), the tenth and last *Sefira* is, besides sovereignty or rule, the word and the ultimate receptacle.

Divine Manifestation

Keter
Bina Hokhma
(Da'at)
Gevura Hesed
Tiferet
Hod Netzah
Yesod
Malkhut

All these *Sefirot* are infinite in their potency, even though they are finite in their essence. They never appear separately, each in a pure state, but always in some sort of combination, in a variety of forms. And every single combination, or detail of such a combination, expresses a different revelation.

The great sum of all these *Sefirot* in their relatedness constitutes the permanent connection between God and His world. This connection actually operates two ways; for the world can respond and even act on its own. On the one hand, the ten *Sefirot* are responsible for the universal law and order, what we might call the workings of nature in the worlds. As such they mix and descend, contracting and changing forms as they go from one world to another, until they reach our physical world which is the final station of the manifestation of divine power.

On the other hand, the events that occur in our world continuously influence the ten *Sefirot*, affecting the nature and quality of the relations between the downpouring light and power and the recipients of this light and power.

An old allegory illustrates this influence by depicting the world as a small island in the middle of the sea, inhabited by birds. To provide them with sustenance, the king has arranged an intricate network of channels through which the necessary food and water flow. So long as the birds behave as they are endowed by nature to behave, singing and soaring through the air, the flow of plenty proceeds without interruption. But when the birds begin to play in the dirt and peck at the channels, the channels get blocked or broken and cease to function properly, and the flow from above is disrupted. So, too, does the island that is our world depend on the proper functioning of the *Sefirot*; and when they

are interfered with, the system is disrupted, and the disrupting factors themselves suffer the consequences.

In this sense, the entire order of the *Sefirot*, with its laws of action and reaction, is in many ways mechanical. Nevertheless, man, who is the only creature capable of free action in the system, can cause alterations of varying degrees in the pattern and the operation. For everything man does has significance. An evil act will generally cause some disruption or negative reaction in the vast system of the *Sefirot*; and a good act, correct or raise things to a higher level. Each of the reactions extends out into all of the worlds and comes back into our own, back upon ourselves, in one form or another.

In this vast sublime order, the mitzvot – study and practice of the Torah, prayer, love, repentance – constitute only details or guidelines. The mitzvot teach us how certain acts, thoughts, and ways of doing things affect the *Sefirot* and bring about a desirable combination of blessedness and plenty, making the world better. In fact, before the performance of every mitzva there are certain words to be said aloud – words intended to cause a great abundance to flow in from the higher worlds in order to illuminate our souls. Which means that every mitzva has a specific essence through which it influences the system of the worlds and creates a certain kind of connection between the worlds and man. Thus, even though from many points of view our world is small, it can be seen as the point of intersection of all the other worlds, principally because of this power of human beings, creatures possessed of free will, to change the fixed order of things. It is as though our world were a kind of control room from which the ten *Sefirot* in their various possible combinations can be made to operate.

A transgression – that is, a disruption of the order in the system – has two results. First, it causes a kind of short circuit and skews or distorts the descent of divine plenty. Second, the shock set off by this short circuit stimulates the world of the *kelipot*, the outer shells, and causes them in turn to set off a negative charge within the particular system that belongs to the life of the transgressor.

This is what is meant by the reward and punishment that are said to follow on every action of a human being. Nor is it only a deed that so affects the system of the *Sefirot*; it is also a thought, an intention, or

any of the various stirrings of the human soul. For instance, whenever a person prays – whether he prays in the prescribed manner which is oriented toward the higher worlds, or whether he engages in private prayer, uttered aloud or merely contemplated in the heart – he is able to influence the order of events. In fact, a man's spontaneous inward motions, those that have nothing to do with either his overt actions or his conscious thoughts, frequently reach up to and act on higher levels. When a man prays to be cured of sickness, for example, he is asking for grace, for a change in a vast network of systems: from the fixed system that apportions good and evil as a whole to those secondary and fluctuating systems from which descends the physical realm with its own portion of pains and miseries. He is, in other words, requesting a rearrangement within a huge complex of interlocking orders, both in the higher worlds and in the world of nature.

This pattern of divine manifestation and human relation to it may seem to be mechanical in its determinism, but it is depicted with far more personal and symbolic imagery in the scriptural sources. That is to say, in the various religious and philosophical works of the Jewish tradition, a variety of allegorical signs and figures of speech are used to signify the same thing; so that we may read of the eye of God scanning the face of the earth, the ears of God hearing all sounds, of the Holy One, blessed be He, being pleased or angry, smiling or weeping. All these, of course, relate to the pattern of His manifestation through the ten *Sefirot* in their various configurations, analogous as the *Sefirot* are in their parts to the organs and limbs of the human body (man being made in the image of God in his body as well as in his soul). We thus have a paradigm of the essential relationships in the universe, if not of the essences themselves; and we may speak of the right hand of God as the force or power that gives, that pours out the abundance, that helps and loves; and we may speak of the left hand as the force that restrains and protects, reduces and inflicts, recognizing the harmony, or the living connection, between everything and every other in the system of the *Sefirot*.

Thus, too, when the prophets describe their sublime vision of God, His revealing Himself in the *Sefirot*, they have to present the vision in a human context in order to be true to its emotional significance for men. Their descriptions may be considered as allegorical frameworks,

using man as a metaphor for the Supreme: both in the human details they employ and in the use of the idea of man as a complete entity, a microcosm. The human hand then becomes analogous to *Hesed* (“grace”), which in another configuration can be represented as water, or light; or any other variation of a symbolic metamorphosis. Therefore, too, when someone who prays or performs a mitzva relates to the higher system, he may impose images upon that system, metamorphoses of the same higher force, to the point of regarding God as a humanlike figure sitting on a throne, every feature of which expresses a revelation within the *Sefirot*, in different worlds, one above the other.

Even though the order of forces is almost infinite in its immensity and complexity and seems mechanical and automatic – and even though what seems mechanical includes not only matter and the laws of nature but also the operations of laws beyond nature, of good and evil, intention and prayer, thought and feeling – this order is nevertheless transfused with the flow of divine plenty. And in this order man, though only a tiniest part of the whole, is also an effectual and meaningful actor in it.

The fact that man is only a very small detail, a dot and less than a dot as against the Infinite, is balanced by the fact that it is precisely he in his smallness who gives each of the parts its significance. Since there is an order of causes and influences, and a prime mover of all the worlds, every single person can, in his deeds, thoughts, and aspirations, reach to every one of these points of existence. Not only is man free to act on the system, each of his deeds has – in all the worlds, in terms of space and time and of the Supreme or Ultimate Reality – immeasurable significance. In contrast to all the automatic patterns of forces functioning in the cosmos, man alone moves independently within the system. He alone is important to the manifestations because he can change them, cause them to move from one level to another. Furthermore, man – dwelling as he does in two different worlds and undergoing profound inner struggles – is given the chance to rise far beyond the level of our existence and the place in which he spiritually finds himself, and to act on higher worlds without end.

Precisely because the Divine is apprehended as an infinite, not a finite, force, everything in the cosmos, whether small or large, is only a small part of the pattern so that there is no difference in weight or

gravity between any one part and another. The movement of a man's finger is as important or unimportant as the most terrible catastrophe, for as against the Infinite both are of the same dimension. Just as the Infinite can be defined as unlimited in the sense of being *beyond* everything, so He can be defined as being close to and touching everything. Here is the point of the personal human contact, for in spite of the vastness and order of all those systems, the independent acts of man – his mitzvot and his transgressions – cannot be explained in terms either of mechanics or, on the other hand, of magic.

When one relates only to the *Sefirot*, one is not relating to anything real. For deeds or thoughts do not operate by themselves separate from the Infinite, He who is the very life of the worlds. All the systems of the ten *Sefirot*, even though they carry out the laws of nature and beyond nature, have nothing real in themselves. In relation to the Infinite Light Himself they are less than a nothingness clothed or covered by an appearance of something real; they are only names, designations, points of departure for establishing a relationship, having nothing substantial in themselves. So that prayer, repentance, the cry of man to God, even though they are dependent upon and cut across a limited, deterministic system, neither work upon nor even address that system.

When man reaches certain heights, he learns more about God, the order and arrangement of things, relationships between one action and another, and the power and significance of law. Nevertheless, in the last resort the relationship to the Divine is individual. It is a completely private affair, the relationship of the single man in all his uniqueness of self and personality, oblivious of the infinite distance between himself and God, precisely because God in His being infinitely distant, beyond any possible contact, is Himself the One who creates the ways, the means of contact, in which every thought, every tremor of anticipation and desire on the part of man work their way until they reach the Holy One Himself, the Infinite, blessed be He.