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TITLE Who knows the ONE? A COMPARISON OF
SEFER HEKHALOT RABBATI AND THE ENNEADS OF PLOTINUS

TYPE OF THESIS: Ph.D. [] D.H.L. [] Rabbinic [✓]

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Who Knows the One? ... A Comparison of Sefer
Hekhalot Rabbati and the Enneads of Plotinus.

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of
Religion

1988

Referees, Dr. Barry S. Kogan
Dr. Ben Zion Wacholder

The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. That deeply emotional conviction of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.

- Albert Einstein -

To my wife:

After the long hours and hard work,
the endless typing and the noise,
After the struggles over time and the
joy over completion,
Together we have produced a document
born of a search.
I thank you as I dedicate the years
to you.

To my parents:

For the sacrifice you made for me to
seek knowledge.
For the impetus to seek truth and the
moral way of life.
For the guidance that steered me to
this point.

To my advisors:

Who had the faith to guide me in this
search.
Who had the desire to learn with me.
Who know all too well the rabbinic
maxim - "Ha Maskil Y'avin"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	I
Chapter I: Introduction	1
Chapter II: The Essence of the Plotinian Ideal	6
Chapter III: <u>Sefer Hekhalot Rabbati</u> and Mystical Praxis	50
Chapter IV: <u>Unio Mystica</u> or <u>Aspaklaria</u>	112
Bibliography	159

ABSTRACT

The study of God and God's characteristics has been the focus of much theological reflection. Many different routes have been taken to solve this eternal riddle. Some have chosen philosophy, some have chosen religion, some have chosen other means. Each method has its own special nature and practice. Nevertheless, there are some similarities. In this thesis, I have attempted to analyze two methods that may have been used to find, understand, and unify with the Ultimate Being.

There are four chapters. Chapter I is an introduction to the nature of the problem. Chapter II is an explanation and analysis of the Enneads of Plotinus. Plotinus was a neo-platonic philosopher of the third century. Chapter III is an explanation and analysis of Hekhalot Rabbati. Hekhalot Rabbati was organized sometime during the early centuries of the common era. In Chapter IV, I compare the two texts along these points: 1) language, 2) liturgical aspects, 3) practices, 4) the journey to the Ultimate, and 5) the final experience with the One or God.

Ultimately, there can be no absolute proof as to a sharing of ideas. I have shown that there are differences and similarities between these two works. In order to account for the differences and similarities, I have proposed that these two texts developed within the

II

same context and that the factors that effected each society led to the development of these ideas.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

There is a widespread modern interest in religious affairs in the broadest sense, from Cults to Transcendental Meditation, from organized religious movements to fringe fundamentalist groups. Much of this religious fervor does not stop at the traditional borders of religion but penetrates deep into the mysterious, occult, and unfamiliar. Over the past quarter of a century, there has probably been greater varieties of religious experimentation than at any other time in the history of religion.

Experiment and experience are key words. Religious experience rather than stale dogma bring life to a dull routine. Certainly, the new experiment may come with its own dogmatic claims, yet it is new and vital. Experimentation has led people in many directions in search of some form of spirituality. Some have chosen drugs, music, meditation, ritual, ascetic practice, or a combination of any of these to discover a higher level of spiritual consciousness.

The variety of religious experimentation is as vast as "the sands of the sea." Through the sharing of religious tenents, philosophical conceptions, societal problems, and a blending of separate cultural units,

different permutations occurred to support or fulfill the hopes of the practitioners of the separate religious units.

In the history of Man, this sharing was possible through wars, trade, travel, and cultural exchanges that occurred between various peoples. One of the by-products of this sharing can be called "mysticism". "Mysticism" is more properly defined as "the art of union with Reality".¹ This definition will be explained further in Chapter III. I realize that some may make the claim that the works under discussion in this text do not fall under the rubric of "mysticism". I can only say that the texts and their ideas under discussion in this paper do fall under this rubric. Sidney Spencer opens his section on Plotinus by saying,

"Hellenistic mysticism may be said to have reached its culminating point in the work of Plotinus."²

Prior to the rise of the recording of material of mystical lore, there was a strong oral tradition. The teachings which can be subsumed under the topic of mysticism were a part of this oral transmission.

"Long before there was any written literature there already existed among many ancient nations a vast and complex oral literature."³

1 Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, Meridian Books, New York 1957.

2 Sidney Spencer, Mysticism in World Religion, Barnes, NY, 1966. p. 158.

3 Joseph Gaer, The Wisdom of the Living Religions, Cornwall, NY 1956. p. V.

Traditions were handed down from generation to generation. At times it was necessary to modify the received traditions to appeal to, or keep in tune with, those aspects of society which had changed over the years. The passing on of out-dated traditions would insure their demise.

The modifications to existing traditions and the product of that modification is the subject of this thesis. The two works in question, Hekhalot Rabbati and the Enneads of Plotinus, are two examples of the process of transmission and mutation and the ensuing product. One text is Greek and the other Palestinian. Each text describes a journey. They fall under the framework of "ascension literature".⁴ The mystic/philosopher undertakes a journey from a worldly existence to a higher plain of existence either with God or the One.

The topic of this thesis, simply stated, is centered around these two texts and their approaches to the goal of a spiritual experience. The culminating point of the journey is the real heart of the issue. Do these texts replicate each other or do they offer different solutions?

This unitive process whether culminating in unio mystica or a vision from afar, is the topic of much speculation. In fact, Mary Dean-Otting's book, Heavenly

⁴ These are texts that describe a journey to the realm of the Deity from the worldly realm of mankind. Many of these texts speak of stages to the journey.

Journeys, traces this theme through many books of the pseudepigrapha.⁵

Concerning the journey itself and the experience at the culmination of the journey, there is some disagreement. Professor Isaiah Tishby remarked that he feels that the later Kabbalistic notion of devekut, clinging to God, is similar to the Greek notion in the Enneads of unio mystica.⁶ On the other hand, Gershom Scholem feels that the best one could achieve was a vision of the Celestial Throne.⁷ Unfortunately, to connect the later notion of devekut to the time of the writing of Hekhalot Rabbati would be wrong.

In Chapters II and III, we shall look at each text individually. Certain aspects shall be identified. We are interested in the ascent, the events leading up to the mystical experience, the description of the mystical experience, and the return. Further, we are interested in when the text came into existence. Besides the specific information contained in each text, we are interested in certain points of general information. What historical conditions may have given rise to the material? What relevance does it hold for readers today? After an analysis of each work, we shall compare and contrast the material.

⁵ Mary Dean-Otting, Heavenly Journeys, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 1984.

⁶ I received a letter from Professor Tishbi to this effect.

⁷ Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Schocken, Jerusalem, 1941.

In Chapter IV, we shall compare and contrast the two texts. We shall see that there are marked differences in the approaches these two works take. One is inherently philosophical and possesses the characteristics of Greek rational philosophy. The other is religious and possesses the characteristics of classical Jewish law and lore. They are separate literary works. Each one stands in its own right as a masterful work of spiritual and religious literature.

We shall also see that there are some similarities between these two texts. We shall be concerned with the sources for the comparisons. Keep in mind that the two texts originated in the first few centuries of the common era. They originated in much the same environs. There were many cultural and societal tensions that needed to be addressed. There was a vast amount of sharing of ideas at this time. Why do these two texts have so much in common?

We are dealing with a deep and multi-faceted subject. We take two different works and hold them up side by side. At times it becomes necessary to rely upon the jargon of the subject. I have made an attempt to be clear and succinct. And with the utmost hope, we begin the task with the words of the biblical commentator as he responded on the hardest passages of the Tanach: "ha-maskil yavin" ... may the wise surely understand.

Chapter II

The Essence of the Plotinian System

I. INTRODUCTION

Plotinus (205-270 C.E.) is, according to scholarly consensus, the founder of Neo-Platonic thought. While many of the ideas and concepts represented in his system are not new, the approach and the telos he proposes show him to be a great and original philosopher.

What we know of the life of Plotinus is told to us through the writing of Porphyry, his student. In the Vita Plotini, Porphyry tells us that that Plotinus was a private man. If there is little evidence concerning his life, it is due to the character of Plotinus and not to a lack of interest in his work.

Plotinus is thought to have been born in Egypt.¹ Even though he came from this area, he was almost certainly of Greek or Hellenized ancestry. He belonged to a fairly wealthy and leisured family for he studied and could afford the financial burdens of his life of study.² He studied under many different philosophers looking for the one that suited his inclinations. He

¹ Vita Plotini, 3. As it appears in the translation of Plotinus' work by Stephen MacKenna (see note 14). Further citations will be noted with the abbreviation V.P.

² John Rist, Plotinus, The Road to Reality, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967. p. 4.

eventually came under the influence of Ammonius Saccas with whom he studied for eleven years. During his years under the tutelage of Saccus it was not unusual for Saccus to bring in philosophical ideas from the East in order to explore the questions they addressed and the answers they proposed. Under Saccas he made great strides in his own philosophy which then led him into investigations of Eastern philosophies. ³ Alexandria had become the principal seat of Greek wisdom during this period.

It was at Alexandria that the school of Philo represented Hellenizing Judaism; it was at Alexandria that the Gnosis synthesized all the traditions of Syria, of Chaldaea, of Persia, blended with Judaism, with Christianity, and even with Greek Philosophy. ⁴

The knowledge of these traditions led Plotinus to search other cultures for the answers to the many questions that he attempted to answer through his philosophy. By the year 243 C.E. Plotinus became even more interested in exploring other philosophic systems, most notably the systems of the East. He joined the expeditionary army of Emperor Gordianus III that was to march against Persia, hoping that he would have contact with Persian and Indian philosophers. In 244 C.E. Gordianus was killed by some of his own officers. Porphyry tells us that Plotinus was forced to abandon his search and flee to Rome.

³ V.P. 3.

⁴ G.R.S. Mead, Plotinus, The Alexandrian Press, 1983.
p. 6-7

In Rome he began to conduct classes in philosophy. He committed little to writing until the arrival of Porphyry. ⁵ Porphyry relates that Plotinus was reluctant to record his lectures. The lectures once recorded, were disseminated grudgingly and secretly. ⁶ It was within the context of the "speeches" he delivered in the school in Rome that the Enneads of Plotinus developed. From 253 C.E. to 270 C.E. Plotinus, or his disciples, set down the teachings as expounded in the school. Porphyry records that there were a total of fifty-four treatises which Porphyry then divided up into six chapters with nine treatises per chapter. The First Ennead presents his moral philosophy; the Second his physics; the Third his cosmology; the Fourth his psychology; the Fifth his philosophy of mind; and the Sixth his doctrine of reality.

In time, Plotinus gained the confidence of the new emperor, Gallienus. Plotinus then applied for a permit to found a city based on the philosophy of Plato's Republic called Platonopolis. The scheme failed, but it nevertheless shows us something about the nature of the man. He felt that he had the plans for the reconstruction of society and he was willing to carry them to their logical conclusion. Porphyry notes that this "felt purpose" of Plotinus was evident throughout

5 W.R. Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1923 p.118.

6 V.P., 4

his life. Plotinus must have possessed a high degree of charisma. Porphyry relates, "when he was speaking, his intellect visibly illuminated his face: always of winning presence, he became at these times still more engaging."

⁷ Porphyry also relates an opinion that Plotinus "possessed by birth something more than is accorded to other men." ⁸ He relates the story of an Egyptian priest who had approached Plotinus wishing to display his powers. The priest evoked a visible manifestation of Plotinus' spirit and a divine manifestation appeared. The Egyptian exclaimed: 'You are singularly graced; the guiding spirit within you is not of the lower degree but a God.' Thus, according to Porphyry, Plotinus had for an indwelling spirit a Being of the more divine degree, and he kept his own divine spirit unceasingly intent upon that inner presence. ⁹

The period of time encompassing the second and third centuries was full of tension. The realization that the Roman Empire was crumbling along with the decline in morality and spiritual fulfillment gave rise to many philosophies that longed for a new and more satisfying form of spirituality. During this decline of scientific and moral speculation, a religious consciousness, seizing both the imagination and the mind, developed with a vigor which was without precedent in the West.

7 V.P., 13.

8 V.P., 10.

9 ibid.

Neoplatonism exhibits, in its own distinctive form, the growing otherworldliness that affected all contemporary philosophies and religious movements. The period has been characterized as an age of anxiety or of insecurity, whose fruits manifested on the one hand in the proliferation of savior cults, like those of Isis and Mithras, and of alleged divine revelations containing the knowledge needed for salvation. ¹⁰

Plotinus, espousing his own form of Platonism, flourished during this time. The thought system of Neoplatonism was certainly familiar with the accepted religious systems of Judaism and Christianity. ¹¹

Since Neoplatonism originated in Alexandria, where oriental modes of worship were accessible to everyone, and since the Jewish philosophy (of Philo) had also taken its place in the literary circles of Alexandria, we may assume that even the earliest of the Neoplatonists possessed an acquaintance with Judaism and Christianity. ¹²

The sharing of ideas through war-related contacts and commercial trade between the West and the East, is evident. This takes on further significance given Plotinus' role in the expeditionary army of Emperor Gordianus III. Eusebius, the principal historian of early Christianity relates concerning the approach of Plotinus:

It must be that he who treats of the Good, and who has affirmed his doctrine with the witness of Plato, should go even further back and take hold of the doctrines of Pythagoras. It must be that he should appeal to the most renowned of the nations, and that he should present the rituals, dogmas and institutions which -

10 R.T. Wallis, Neoplatonism, Duckworth, London, 1972, p. 6-7

11 Mead, op. cit. p. 13.

12 ibid.

originally established by the Brahmins, Jews, Magians, and Egyptians - are in agreement with the doctrines of Plato. ¹³

When Eusebius refers to the centrality of Plato for Plotinus, he does this confidently. Plotinus was a Platonist because Plato enabled him to arrive at his philosophy in the most direct manner. In other words, his philosophy was Plato centered. He took the ideas as presented in Plato's writings and integrated them and expanded them into his view of Plato's ideal. Taken as a whole, the Enneads affirm the same themes common to the Platonic tradition, namely, (1) belief in the immateriality of ultimate reality, (2) the conviction that the visible and sensible refer to a still higher level of being than the level on which they occur, (3) preference for intuition over empirical forms of knowing, (4) the affirmation of the immortality of the soul, (5) belief that the universe in its most real state is good, and can be known as good, and (6) the tendency to identify the beautiful, the good, and the true as one and the same.

Plotinus does not act merely as an exegete nor feel that Plato has a monopoly on the truth. On the one hand, he uses Plato like he uses other philosophers, as a tool to develop his own views. But, on the other hand, he places Plato above and beyond the others. Philosophers at this time were always anxious to be connected with a

13 ibid p.18

tradition and to present their thoughts largely as the exegesis of the works of the old masters. Plotinus was no exception:

We must believe that some of the ancient and blessed philosophers discovered the truth; and it is only natural to inquire who of them found it and how we may obtain a knowledge of it. Our theories contain nothing new and are not of the present. They were expressed long ago but without being developed, and we are only the interpreters of these old doctrines, whose antiquity is attested by the writings of Plato.
14

Plato set Plotinus on the path to truth. It is reported by Porphyry that Plotinus felt he was so indebted to Plato that he carried out sacrifices on the traditional birthday of Plato and, that at such events, every member of the school was to deliver an address. 15

In tracing the roots of Plotinus' teachings we see many references to Platonic ideas. There are three main elements of Plotinus' philosophy which have undoubtedly come from what he thought Plato said clearly: the distinction between sensibles and intelligibles; the immateriality and immortality of the soul; the transcendence of the One or the Good. The system that Plato establishes using the realm of the intelligibles as a level referring to 'all that really is' is carried over

14 Stephen MacKenna, Enneads of Plotinus, Charles T. Branford Co., Boston, Mass. 1916, V,1,9. All references to the Enneads are listed in this fashion - Enneads, V,1,9. This notes that we are dealing in Book V, Tractate 1, Chapter 9.

15 V.P. 2.

in the teachings of Plotinus. Here Plotinus tries to unite two of his predecessors, Plato and Aristotle.

Although he mentions Aristotle by name only four times, he shows a great familiarity with his writings and borrows a number of his fundamental notions from him, notably those of power and energy. The Platonism of the Enneads is actually a hybrid resulting from the blending of Platonism and Aristotelianism, and at times it is difficult to determine which one is dominant.¹⁶ Dean Inge suggests that Plotinus knew more about Aristotle's philosophy than Plato's, and Ernst Hoffman thinks that Neoplatonism would better be called "Neo-Aristotelianism," especially in view of the fact that the majority of the Neoplatonic systems after Plotinus have been nearer to the dialectic of Aristotle than to Plato's dialectic.¹⁷ Vacherot sees in Plotinus chiefly the eclectic who more or less successfully combined the various traditions. The early historians of philosophy, Brucker and Tenneman, considered the system of Plotinus as resulting from an influx of Oriental ideas foreign to the Greek mind. On the other hand, Richter and H.F. Muller, consider him a faithful adherent to Hellenic rationalism.¹⁸

16 W.R. Inge, op. cit. p. 110-111.

17 R. Baine Harris, The Significance of Neoplatonism, International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, Old Dominion Univ, Norfolk, 1976. p. 3

18 ibid p. 19

At the level of intelligibles, Plato marks one of the ideas as separate from the others. That idea is the 'Good'. The Good is said to be "beyond being." In other words, it is above the level of that which 'is'. This idea is developed by Plato in the Republic and then in the Parmenides but then is shelved as being unknowable and ineffable. For Plotinus, the development of the concept of the Good or 'The One' is the climax of the system. He divides the intelligibles of Plato into three levels: the One, Intelligence, and the Soul.¹⁹ After an explanation of the Platonic theory of Forms, we shall turn to a discussion of the "Three Primal Hypostases".

PLATO'S THEORY OF FORMS

Plato, in the Theory of Forms, takes the attempts by Socrates to define certain philosophical virtues and expands them into a new theory. Socrates was looking for ultimate definitions of the moral virtues. Knowledge of this type must come about through extensive inquiry and insight into the nature of these virtues. Plato, enamored with this approach, pursued it further. He was intent on defining, in real terms, the virtues that Socrates inquires about. When we speak descriptively of things we encounter in day to day activity, we often

19 Philip Merlan, The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Macmillan Co. and the Free Press, New York, 1967. p. 353.

characterize them in abstract terms like the 'Largeness' or 'Smallness', 'Goodness' or 'Badness', 'Truth' or 'Falsity'. These terms are by nature vague. In the thought of Plato, these terms become substantive entities in their own right. Concepts are described as they appear to the person describing them. A 'real' concept is explained or described in terms of size and shape, mass and color. All of these terms are vague especially where such descriptive terms as "blueness" or "smallness" are used. These types of phrases, although hard to comprehend in the few pages we have in which to explain them, form the core of our everyday speech. In describing things we encounter day to day, we return to these concepts. A person "X" may partake of many of these concepts. In other words, he may be described in such terms. If person "Y" partakes of some of these "Forms", then X and Y share that certain Form. What does it mean to partake of a Form? Plato speaks of imitating that Idea or Form. The World of Forms is removed from the changing world of sensible particulars, including mankind. They are eternal and incorruptible. In order to be unchanging and incorruptible, they must also be immaterial entities. For Plato, this would also make them inherently simple. By simple, he means 'non-complex'. One additional point worth mentioning is that all Forms compose the real world. The world of everyday experience is a copy of the purely real world that exists

above and beyond the limits of the lower realm. There is no Form that is not replicated in the lower realm. In order for a Form to exist, there must be a corresponding copy of that Form in the sensible world. It is no doubt compromised in the sense-world, but it still exists. The true Form though, exists and is simple, prior to and separate from the copy that exists in the sensible world.

The World of Forms groups all Forms into several categories. They are: (a) Ethical and Aesthetic Forms; (b) Forms of General Motion; (c) Mathematical Forms; (d) Forms of Natural Species; (e) Forms of Artifacts. One is knowledgeable about the World of Forms when one can see specific Forms in the 'mind's eye' and see how they interrelate to each other. Plato returns to the Socratic method of questioning or dialectic to determine their relationships. Through the insight of the mind and the dialectical method of questioning (Socrates), one can enter this realm and move from Form to Form.

Plotinus accepts this view of the world of the Forms and then goes beyond Plato's description of the Form of the One to his own conception of the One as the base unity of all multiplicities. As R. Baine Harris describes "It is no-one-thing, non-existent, and non-being, because any sense of thingness, or existence, or its being would be a prostitution of its genuine nature. It is even much more than "the ground of being." It is the point where all themes merge, the one "principle"

that contains the fundamentals of all principles, the one line into which all lines merge. It is responsible for being in the only level that being can occur." ²⁰ Knowledge of the One is the goal of Plotinian thought. It is to Plotinus that we now turn.

THE THREE HYPOSTASES

Plotinus' Vision of the Whole

ONE

INTELLIGENCE

SOUL

Plotinus speaks of the three initial hypostases in Book V of the Enneads. He writes:

There exists a Principle which transcends Being; this is the One, whose nature we have sought to establish in so far as such matters lend themselves to proof. Upon the One follows immediately the Principle which is at once Being and the Intellectual-Principle. Third comes the Principle, Soul. Now just as these three exist for the system of Nature, so, we must hold, they exist for ourselves." ²¹

On that point we now turn to a further explication of each of the three primal hypostases.

²⁰ R. Baine Harris, op. cit. p. 5ff.

²¹ Enneads V, 1, 10

The One

The One is the center of Plotinus' system. In the Neoplatonic hierarchy it occupies the pinnacle. Plotinus comes to the concept of the One as a goal beyond the level of Nous or Intelligence. Why does Plotinus need this goal? He seems dissatisfied with the Platonic and the Aristotelian conceptions of an Ultimate Being. They seemed to stop short of giving humanity some higher goal to aspire to. So, for Plotinus, each level of the system must have some ultimate purpose. As we will see, the goal for the level of Soul is to come or contemplate the level of the Intelligence. The goal then, for the level of Intellegence, is to contemplate the level of the One. In Book III of the Enneads, Plotinus finishes the discussion of the Nous (or Intelligence) and then moves on to discuss the purpose of the One. He writes:

"Clearly a being of this nature (the Intelligence) is not the primal existent; there must exist that which transcends it, that Being, to which our discussion has been leading (we shall return to a discussion of the lower hypostases later). In the first place, Plurality is later than Unity. The Intellectual-Principle is a number (Plurality); and number derives from unity: the source of a number such as this must be the authentically One." ²²

For Plotinus, this is the "proof" for the existence of the One. Any multiple is inherently more complex than a unity. There must be some unity at the top that is wholly simple and completely knowledgeable of all that is

22 Enneads III, 8, 9

secondary to it. All that is in it is also in all that is 'below' it. That which is the core of all things, must know all that sprouts from its roots.

In an earlier passage, Plotinus argues that since the Nous needs to see and act, which is its nature, it relates to a higher principle that has these abilities; this principle is the Good.²³ It is the Good because all things lower than it require it, desire it, act towards it, and act because of it. The Good is termed the One due to the simplicity of the concept. If there is only "one" there can be no other.

The nature of the One is described in the Enneads. Plotinus states:

When we speak of the One and when we speak of the Good we must recognize an ideal nature; we must affirm that they are the same ... even calling it The First we mean no more than to express that it is the most absolutely simplex ... this, the One and the Good, is our First, next to it follows the Intellectual Principle, the Primal Thinker, and upon this follows Soul. Such is the order in nature."²⁴

Having established that the One sits at the top of this system, let us look further into the nature and interaction of the One with the other hypostases. It must be mentioned that by virtue of the One, all beings are beings.²⁵ Without the unity of the One, all things lose their reality because they would lose the internal unity which flows from the One. If their

²³ Enneads III, 8, 8

²⁴ Enneads II, 9, 1

²⁵ Elmer O'Brien, The Essential Plotinus, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1975. p. 73.

internal unity is lost, they fragment into separate entities. So, to prevent this fragmentation, all things can and must trace their unity to the One.

The second characteristic of the One is its ineffability. The One "can neither be spoken or written about." ²⁶ As Plotinus relates in Book V:

Hence It cannot be truly designated; any name employed makes It some thing; but that which is above all things-above that most august of Existents, the Intellectual Principle-This alone of all is authentic; It is no thing among things; It is nameless, for It falls under no class; we can attempt no more than to use words which will in some helpful way indicate It for the purposes of discussion. ²⁷

It seems that Plotinus, by making the One 'nameless' and 'classless', makes it difficult for man, who operates within the limits of names and concepts, to know, except by some mystical event, anything about the One. In fact this is not the case. Plotinus says that all Beings exhibit a trace of the One. If all Beings exhibit a trace of the One, then all Beings must have some knowledge of what that trace represents. Further, there must be some source for the 'trace element'. This is an additional 'proof' for the existence of the One.

The One is also infinite. If the One is "beyond Being" and "Being" is finite existence, then "beyond Being" must connote something beyond finite existence, hence infinity. The One is also powerful. It has the

26 Parminides 142A
 27 Enneads V, 3, 13

power of producing all things. ²⁸ The nature of this power is that the 'Creator' does not need the 'creations'. It is unchanging. The creations do not change the nature of the creator. By creation we mean 'emanation'. The One overflows and yet, remains a complete and perfect Unity by not dispersing itself when it overflows.

As John Rist observes, the position of Plotinus can be summed up as follows:

The One is infinite, the others finite; the One is creator, the others creatures; the One is entirely itself, entirely infinite, the others are both finite and infinite; the one has no otherness, the others are other than the One. It is not the case that while the Forms exist, the One does not. Rather the One exists in an infinite way, the others finitely. There is no excuse for saying that the One does not exist and for thus confusing it with absolutely unqualified matter and absolute evil. To make such a confusion is to cast away the most important metaphysical position of Plotinus. ²⁹

This is a synopsis of the concept of the One in Plotinus. We shall now move into an investigation of the 'Nous' of the Plotinian system.

The Nous

The Nous or Intelligence is the second stage in Plotinus' system. The Intelligence holds a central

²⁸ John Deck, Nature, Contemplation and the One, University of Toronto, 1967, p. 12

²⁹ John Rist, op. cit. p. 37

position in the journey towards "unio mystica". The Intelligence is responsible for contemplation. Without contemplation to move us from point A to point B, there is no unity that can be achieved. If the One is 'beyond being', then the Intelligence exemplifies 'being'. If the One is completely simple and infinite, then the Intelligence, being lower in the system, is more complex and finite. With the Nous begins the existence of Plurality or Complexity. The Intellectual or Intelligible Universe contains the totality of Divine thoughts, known through the Platonic system as The Ideas. All things, from the lowest matter to the highest moral virtue, are represented here and are partaken from here. The Intelligence, although lower in stature than the One, is higher than the Soul. It is more powerful than the Soul. The nature of its power lies in the fact that it is prior to the Soul. It also resides outside this world and is incorporeal and non-material. Without such a caveat, the Intelligence would be neither eternal nor possessive of an identity. ³⁰

There are many aspects of the Intelligences which need to be discussed. The first thing we must look at is Plotinus' system in light of Platos' system. Emile Brehier writes that, for Plato, the 'virtue' of beauty represents all that is in everything. ³¹ Beauty holds the same position in the Theory of Forms as Intelligence

30 Enneads V, 9, 4 p. 92

31 Emile Breheir The Philosophy of Plotinus p. 86

holds in the Plotinian system. Plotinus merges these two Ideas (Beauty as represented by Plato and Intelligence from Plotinus) and goes beyond the limits of the Platonic idea of Beauty, and makes "Beauty", a virtue of the Intelligence, leaving room for the unlimited One. Intelligence is the real theme of a level of transition from the level of Soul to the level of the One. Virtues move beyond the outward superficiality of Beauty to the inward, contemplative level of the Intelligences. Hence, all virtues become merely aspects of Intelligence.³² The pinnacle must always remain the One. All that is seen in the lower levels of relationship are mere limitations of that which is prior.

Through this reasoning concerning the virtues Plotinus arrives at a characterization of this level (the Nous), yet it is not the only way for him to do so. He also looks to the philosophy of Plato in the Timaeus for proof. In the Timaeus, the Intelligence appears as the "Form of Forms". Plotinus writes in the Enneads explaining this.

"We see that what is called a being is a compound. No being is simple, whether it is a work of art or a product of nature. Artificial things contain brass, wood, or stone, and they do not acquire their full reality until art forms a statue, a bed, or a house out of them in introducing form which proceeds from it. Among the natural compounds some are very complex. We call them combinations and they may be broken down into compartments ... for example, man into soul and body, and the body into the four elements. But each of the

32 *ibid* p. 88

elements is composed of a material and of that which imparts form to it ... and we ask from where form comes to matter. We also ask whether the soul, in its turn, is a simple being or whether matter and form exist in it ... Applying the same principles to the universe, we shall thus also reach an Intelligence which we shall deem the actual creator and demiurge.³³

At this level there are a multiplicity of beings. Each of the beings is ultimately perfect in every respect. It is important for this interpretation to remember that Plotinus is a realist and rebels against any overly idealistic interpretations. Plotinus insists that the flow towards "unio mystica" be from being to thought and not the reverse. Using his categories, the journey would be upward from Soul to Intelligence and then to the One. Brehier sums up in these words: "Thus the Aristotelian analysis leads Plotinus gradually from Form to essence and from essence to Intelligence."³⁴

This is the nature of the Intelligence. Now let us look at the next level in the triad ... the Soul.

The Soul

The Soul is the lowest of the three primal hypostases in the Plotinian system. Soul becomes the intermediary between the Intelligence and the sensible universe. The soul is the most complex and infinite. Because of the infinite nature of the Soul, there is no

33 Enneads V, 9, 3

34 Brehier, op. cit. p.91

end to the multiplicity of attributes. It represents both high and low relationships to the Intelligible realm. There are thought to be many different souls. Some souls are incorporeal; others "descend" into bodies. There is also a Cosmic Soul. This Soul is that which belongs to the entirety of living organisms. This makes the entire world one living organism. In other words, there are many individual souls and one World Soul. The individual soul is that which belongs to the philosopher. To combat the claims of pagan dualism, Plotinus writes of one overarching Soul, and this unity implies that all souls can communicate. ³⁵

Plotinus even goes so far as to say that part of the Soul resides in the Intelligibles. ³⁶ This signifies that the Soul merely depends on the strength of the Higher realm. In certain places (III, 8, 6, 26; V, 1, 3, 7; and V, 1, 7, 39) the Soul is described as inferior to the Nous. "The soul is not full, but falls short of that which is before it". ³⁷ Throughout the Plotinian system, that which is lower on the ladder is depends upon what preceeds it. Each level interacts with and reacts to the prior one.

The nature of the Soul is discussed in the fifth Ennead. It says:

The material body is made up of parts, each holding its own place, some in mutual

35 Enneads IV, 9, 8

36 Enneads IV, 3, 9

37 Enneads III, 8, 6 and 26

opposition and others variously independent; the soul is in no such condition; it is not whittled down so that life tells of a part of the soul and springs where some such separate portion impinges; each separate life lives by the soul entire, omnipresent in the likeness of the engendering father, entire in unity and entire in diffused variety. By the power of the soul the manifold and diverse heavenly system is a unit: through soul this universe is a God: and the sun is a God because it is ensouled; so too the stars: and whatsoever we ourselves may be, it is all in virtue of soul.
38

MOVEMENT AND GROWTH IN PLOTINUS

The Virtues

In the school in Alexandria, Plotinus learned from Ammonius Saccas a method of teaching whereby many different theories were introduced into discussion and then a reconcilliation of the many opinions reached. In the treatise on "Virtue", Plotinus seems to merge many different ideas into one theory. He merges a Stoic doctrine, which says that virtue makes one like God, with an Aristotelian doctrine which says that virtue makes one truly oneself and not like anyone else. Plotinus merges the two by creating two classes of virtues: the Civic Virtues - by which one becomes truly oneself, and the Higher Virtues - by which one becomes divine.³⁹

38 Enneads V, 1, 2

39 O'Brien, op. cit. p. 109

We begin by defining what exactly are the virtues. The civic virtues are those traits that genuinely order our lives in society for the better. They limit and moderate our desires and all our passions. They deliver us from erroneous opinions. They possess a trace of perfection from above. Conversely, the higher virtues render us like divinity. The Soul, when practicing these virtues, withdraws into itself, above passion and affection. It no longer knows suffering or it bears suffering without bitterness. It suppresses violent feelings or it at least makes such feeling subservient to rational thought. It becomes fearless, unselfish, and rational. When the Soul begins to practice the higher virtues, there is no internal struggle. The difference between the two classes of virtues is that the civic virtues are a moderating force and the higher virtues eliminate the issues of conflict altogether.

These virtues also exist in the Intelligence. There they take the form of the basic acts and essence of the Intelligence. As one moves higher up the ladder to the One, tasks that required great effort and involved intense concentration become second nature. All one has to do in order to reap the benefits of the virtues, is to contemplate their essence.

All men possess both types of virtues. Still one may ask: if someone possesses the higher virtue of prudence, and prudence becomes second nature, does the

same man possess the civic virtue of prudence? The answer is yes, for at one time the man had the civic virtue and acted upon it, developing it into a higher virtue. The qualities that formed the civic virtue remain within the man, and in times of weakness he may resort to them. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain a high level of virtue in one's life in order to begin the journey to unio mystica. It does seem evident that all virtues have two levels but one may not possess both types (higher and lower) at the same time. ⁴⁰

Dialectic

If the purpose of Virtue is to show, in the intellectual sense, how to prepare oneself for the mystical union with the One, then Dialectic is to be the roadmap for the journey. There are two steps to the journey as Plotinus describes it. The first step carries the person from the "here" to the "intelligible realm". The second step carries the person, after he is firmly grounded in the intelligible realm to the "peak" -- The One. As Plotinus relates:

For all there are two stages of the path, as they are making upwards or have already gained the upper sphere. The first degree is the conversion from the lower life; the second - held by those that have already made their way to the sphere of the Intelligibles, have set as it were a footprint there but must still advance within the realm - lasts until they

40 O'Brien, op. cit. p. 117

reach the extreme hold of the place, the Term attained when the topmost peak if the Intellectual realm is won.⁴¹

Plotinus offers three illustrations of this movement: The musician - who easily moved and charmed by beauty must learn how to separate Beauty from that which surrounds him; The born lover - who is enthralled by Beauty and must be carried beyond the realm of corporeal beings to a view of the essence of Beauty; The philosopher - who is predisposed to reside in the intelligible realm must be taught of the oneness of the One through mathematics. Through these three character types Plotinus demonstrates the path to the One.

The training in Dialectic begins with training in the art of reasoning. This enables us to determine exactly what every object is, how it differs from others, and how it resembles others. The art of reasoning leads the person down a road of "what X is and is not". By defining all existing matter in this way, one can arrive at the true essence of everything. As one moves down this road, one enters the intelligible realm. Through synthesis, the reception and categorization of all data that is experienced during this process, and analysis, the interpretation of that data, one arrives at truth and understanding. Once one has arrived at truth and understanding, the principles that one has encountered

41 Enneads I, 3, 1

(such as the virtues discussed above) stand reduced to their essence, and one is able to stop and contemplate the unity one sees. According to Plato, dialectic is "the purest part of intelligence and wisdom."⁴²

Dialectic involves working with the raw material exactly as it appears in nature. It is liable to error only in so far as objects are subservient to inner falsehoods (we only have the changing world to work within). In other words, man can be misled, but then the once thought of truth is no longer true and the dialectical process begins anew. Once a truth is no longer valid, the person undergoing a dialectical exercise must return to the invalid truth and find a new truth for the object or Idea. Dialectic is the way from the Soul to the Intelligence by using the rational thought process to define and redefine the essence of all that is around us. Once defined we move to a higher level of activity -- that of contemplation.

Contemplation

Throughout the Enneads, Plotinus stresses that his goal is: a form of contemplative union with the One. The way to finally reach this level of relationship is through contemplation. "By contemplation the mystic constructs his real self, achieves his authentic

42 Enneads I, 3, 5

existence, quite as the contemplation of The Intelligence is The Intelligence and the contemplation of The Soul is The Soul." ⁴³ Contemplation is a type of poiesis - production. Things that produce, contemplate what they will produce in order to produce it. We normally associate production with corporeal beings. A woodcarver produces carvings but he must contemplate what will be carved before he begins to do it. Contemplation can also be associated with non-corporeal things. Nature contemplates. Things happen in nature because Nature contemplates their production. ⁴⁴ Nature also remains an object of contemplation. Contemplation in and about Nature lead the person to the level of the Soul and from the Soul to the Intelligence. And just as supreme realities (eg: The One) devote themselves to contemplation, all other beings must aspire to it. Contemplation takes the Form of complete and total inwardness. One becomes wholly engrossed with one's own nature and then by contemplating that nature, becomes part of that nature and one with that nature.

THE JOURNEY

The journey to the One is the central focus of the Plotinian system. Porphyry, in his Vita Plotini, relates that Plotinus made such a journey at least four times

⁴³ O. Brien, op. cit. p. 162

⁴⁴ Enneads III, 8, 3

during Porphyry's stay with him. In order to make the journey, the mystic must prepare himself to react and to think in certain ways. Plotinus, in devising his method for unio mystica, looked to Plato's "divided line" and the "Parable of The Cave" for the correct path.

"Divided Line Theory"		"The Cave"
<u>Object of Cognition</u>	<u>Level of Cognition</u>	
Forms and Form of the Good	Noesis	The Forms
Disconnected Forms	Dianoia	Dazed View of the Forms
Sensible World	Pistis	First Freedoms
World of Images	Eikasia	Bondage

Eikasia

The journey consists of a number of stages, the lowest or most 'natural' is eikasia. In this stage, the objects of cognition that the person can comprehend are mere images. The person relies totally on these images along with the shadows and any hearsay evidence that can be mustered. Plotinus refers to this stage as Sensation. Sensation is an activity; a kind of force. It is the active power of the Soul. Sensation is a reception of Form, for the nature of Form must be an activity, which creates by being present.⁴⁵ Things are taken at face value. The virtues such as Justice and Health are understood as whatever the espouser of the virtues says they are. There is no independent thought at this level. There is no challenge to the generally accepted concepts. In the Platonian "Divided Line", there is alongside the object of cognition a level of cognition. The lowest level is indeed eikasia. At this level the cognitive abilities involve imagination and conjecture. It is inevitable for the person to entertain all illusions and all possibilities for he has no basis for doubt. Plotinus speaks of this activity of the Soul as a synthesis of all sense-material, as an interpretation and combination of existing elements.

45 Enneads I, 1, 2

Paralleling this vision in the divided line is the scene as related in the Cave. 46 This is a parable of a group of prisoners who are chained in a cave. They are allowed to face only directly forward. In the parable, shadows are cast on the cave walls and the prisoners view these shadows as their reality. At the level of eikasia, this is the image. The prisoners are gazing at their only measure of what is real and true only to find out later that this was not the case. The reality unknown to the prisoners is that others in the cave are holding up mock images in the sunlight in order to cast shadows on the walls of the cave. Reality is skewed.

Connected to this image is a reference by W.R. Inge in his lectures to Berkeley's doctrine. Berkely wrote an essay entitled "Siris" on some of the points in Plotinus.

Sense supplies images to memory. These become subjects for fancy to work upon. Reason considers and judges of the imaginations. And these acts of reason become new objects to the understanding. Each lower faculty as a step that leads to the one above it. And the uppermost naturally leads to the Deity. There runs a chain through the whole system of beings. In this chain one link drags another.

47

Berkely demonstrates that there is a hierarchy of relationships to the Deity. This opinion mirrors that of Plotinus. If indeed, each step leads to a subsequent

46 See Enneads IV, 3, 27ff for further allusions to this process.

47 Berkely "Siris" number 303 Quoted in Inge, op. cit. p. 222

step, and eikasias is the lowest rung on the ladder, then we must ascend to the second stage of our journey.

Pistis

This is the second stage of the journey. Here the mystic begins to gain some reality through first-hand experience. The realm of reality in the first level are the shadows on the wall. Here the mystic begins to physically grasp the objects of only prior hearsay reality. Data is drawn from direct experience and the original items of the level of eikasias are seen directly. The level of cognition here is pistis. Here the mystic engages in a common sense approach to the perceived state of affairs. The objects of cognition are still viewed from afar, yet they are viewed directly, not through a reflection on the wall. The term pistis connotes a belief based in some level of direct knowledge whether concrete or not. It is totally separate from the movement of the community. What is perceived directly is now to be consumed under the belief or truth system.

The relevant passage concerning the concept of pistis is found in Book V in the Enneads of Plotinus.

Sense sees a man and transmits the impression to the understanding. What does the understanding say? It has nothing to say as yet; it accepts and waits; unless, rather, it questions within itself "Who is this?" - someone it has met before - and then, drawing on memory, says. "Socrates." If it should go on to develop the impression received, it

distinguishes various elements in what the representative faculty has set before it; supposing to say: Socrates, if the man is good," then, while it has spoken upon information from the senses, its total pronouncement is its own; it contains within itself a standard of good. But how does it thus contain the good within itself? It is, itself, of the nature of the good and it has been strengthened still towards the perception of all that is good by the irradiation of the Intellectual-Principle upon it; for this pure phase of the soul welcomes to itself the images implanted from its prior ... We are not the Intellectual-Principle; we represent it in virtue of that highest reasoning faculty which draws upon it. Still; we perceive by means of the perceptive faculty and are, ourselves, the percipients: may we not say the same of the intellectual act? No: our reasoning is our own; we ourselves think the thoughts that occupy the understanding - for this is actually the We - but the operation of the Intellectual-Principle enters from above us as that of the sensitive faculty from below; the We is the soul at its highest, the mid-point between two powers, between the sensitive principle, inferior to us, and the intellectual principle superior. We think of the perceptive act as integral to ourselves because our sense-perception is uninterrupted; we hesitate as to the Intellectual-Principle both because we are not always occupied with it and because it exists apart, not a principle inclining to us but one to which we incline when we choose to look upwards. The sensitive principle is our scout; the Intellectual-Principle our King. ⁴⁸

In this passage Plotinus gives us the stages of the journey. As we have seen in the section on eikasias, the Soul is the aspect making the journey. It begins at the level of Sensation - where images are relied upon to determine truth. In the second stage, eikasias leads into pistis. Pistis is the refining of sense-perception into a more trustworthy representation of reality. The

48 Enneads V, 3, 3

Sensation evident in stage one is in need of a balance. Pistis gives Sensation that balance. At the third stage, dianoia, the Soul acquires some of the aspects of discursive reasoning, which is the "proper activity of the Soul."⁴⁹ There is a merging of the Soul and the Intellectual-Principle during this stage. The final stage, the pure operation of the Intellectual-Principle, Noesis, brings all the aspects together and brings the Soul to the verge of unio mystica with the One.

In returning to the parable of Plato, in the cave, the prisoner breaks free of his constraints and turns to gaze upon the reality that is now before him. For the first time he sees the direct cause of the shadows on the walls. When he breaks the bonds, he shifts perspectives and begins to see reality through direct experience. This is the level where the prisoner begins to formulate opinions as to what is real and what is an image.

It should be evident that Plotinus views the universe as a living chain of being, an unbroken series of ascending or descending values and existents. The whole constitutes a harmony;⁵⁰ each inferior grade is in the next above;⁵¹ each existence is vitally connected with all others. It is with this understanding that we now turn to the third stage of the journey - dianoia.

49 W. R. Inge, op. cit. p. 236

50 Enneads IV, 3, 12

51 Enneads V, 5, 9

Dianoia

The third stage of the journey consists of further comprehension of the objects of which one has cognizance. In the second stage, the mystic had first-hand cognition of the images that were mere shadows in the first stage. Here, the images are seen in their inner-connected state with the shadows that they cast. In other words, the shadows were turned into a more focused vision and then, in turn, viewed as a part of a larger whole in the third stage. This type of exercise, called discursive reasoning, is the proper function of the Soul.⁵² Also in this stage the mystic, the mystic turns to mathematical study to find the inner logic of his surroundings. The Good can only be apprehended through and understanding of this inner logic. Mathematics also enable the mystic to perfect his ability to extract the pure from the impure. This is necessary for complete contemplation required of all movement.

As these objects (surroundings, physical world, philosophical concepts) are recognized, the level of cognition changes to meet the new needs of the mystic. The level is called dianoia. The mystic becomes adept in discursive reasoning and mathematical reasoning (logic) in order to increase his cognitive skills. Plotinus

52 Inge, op. cit. p. 236

refers to this ability in Book I of the Enneads. He writes

(Through Dialectic - the science which can speak about everything in a reasoned and ordered way) It can speak about good and not good, and the things that are classed under good and its opposite, and what is the eternal and what not eternal, with certain knowledge about everthing and not mere opinion. ⁵³

From this point in Plotinus' philosophy we move into a discussion of the Nous. Here, the mystic arrives at conclusions through the use of premises (logical progression).

Using Plato's imagery, the prisoner ascends to the mouth of the cave. Once there, he can only see imperfectly, but what he is looking at is real. Direct evidence is overpowering. The potential is there but the prisoner must be referred to other means of understanding in order to prepare for the end. The prisoner emerges after being "a long time in the dark". The light is so overpowering at first that he must shade his eyes from the direct vision. He must rely on other resources to guide him out of the cave. Only after his eyes have adjusted to the new situation can he begin to focus in on the objects that surround him. Once focused he can begin to walk out of the cave and into the world.

53 Enneads I, 3, 4

Noesis

The next stage of the journey rests in the World of the Intelligibles. Here the mystic understands through his experience in the lower stages the interaction of vision and reality and their relation to actuality. The Forms in their pure sense are understood and comprehended. The Forms are then connected to the highest of all possibilities - The Good or The One. In the realm of the Intelligibles, the mystic knows the true nature of his surroundings and can distinguish between the different natures that exist. All the Forms that exist are traced to The Good and all Forms stem from The Good.

In the fourth stage the mystic relies on his own intellectual understanding to guide him. Plotinus relates in Book I, the transition from Dianoia to Noesis. He writes

(The Soul) stops wandering about and there is occupies itself, casting off falsehood and feeding the method of division to distinguish the Forms, and to determine the essential nature of each thing, and to find the primary kinds, and weaving by the intellect all that issues from these primary kinds, till it has traversed the whole intelligible world: then it resolves again the structure of that world into its parts, and comes back to its starting point, and busies itself no more, but contemplates having arrived at unity. ⁵⁴

This intellect is the result of knowledge acquired at the lower three stages. The mystic turns totally into

54 Enneads I, 3, 5

himself to gaze out of what is called "the mind's eye".

⁵⁵ Through this inner-vision, the mystic comes to know what is and what will be in the truest sense. As the mystic becomes closer to the unitive experience, he shares more of the Intellectual-Principle. This gives him greater insight into reality. He, in effect, becomes part of all there is or ever will be.

Returning to Plato's metaphor, the prisoner, free of his bonds and free of the darkness that permeates the cave, gazes out at "The Just City" (the Forms). The prisoner looks at the objects directly that cause all that he has experienced before this point. He sees the celestial bodies that have caused the shadows (all physical changes). He sees how these bodies cause the same effects outside as well as inside the cave. This experience shows the causal relationship between The World of the Forms and the Sense World. By the action and reaction between the Forms and the Sense World, the prisoner then knows that there must be some Ultimate Cause for the World of the Forms - The Good or the One. The prisoner upon this discovery has arrived at the highest of all possibilities. He has become a participant in the World of Forms. Once he has become a participant in the World of Forms, Plotinus says he can then partake of the highest of forms, the One. The man is truly free.

⁵⁵ This idea is prevalent in the philosophy of Judah Halevi. He terms it the ayin nisteret. I feel that it is relevant here as a metaphor

As I stated earlier, the Plotinian concepts of "dialectic" and "contemplation" play a major role in this journey. On pages 28-31 we engaged in a brief description of the action of these two constants in the Plotinian system. One must remember the two stages of dialectic as they appear in both the "divided line" and "The Cave" analogies: Step One - moving the Soul from the Sense World to the Intelligible World, and Step Two - moving the Soul from the Intelligible World to The One. The movement between these two domains is accomplished through the development of reason. The person acquires the ability to discern, to define, to synthesize, and to analyze. Through the perfection of these traits, he may then begin to understand and to know the truth. Then through contemplation, through poiesis - growth or production of a philosophic methodology, he begins to produce new relationships between the levels of the Plotinian hierarchy for himself thereby enabling him to move freely from one level to another. In other words, he moves from level to level by producing understanding and producing the relationship. These two concepts, dialectic and contemplation, help the philosopher understand how both Plotinus and Plato understood movement within the system.

THE UNION

Plotinus tells us of the praxis of mystical union: "Shut your eyes and change to and wake to another way of seeing." ⁵⁶ The soul apprehends the light and understands the source and, in effect, becomes one with the light. Only by purifying oneself can this unity be achieved. Only by making oneself alone and separate can one join with the One who is wholly separate. In *Ennead VI* we read:

For he was then one with him, and he retained no difference, either in relation to himself or to others. Nothing stirred within him, neither anger nor concupiscence nor even reason or spiritual perception or his own personality, if we may say so. Caught up in an ecstasy, tranquil and God-possessed, he enjoyed an imperturbable calm. ⁵⁷

In all the remarks about union in Plotinus, the mode is one of seeing, ecstasy, contemplation, an abandonment of oneself. If we but recall the beginning words of the *Vita Plotini* we see how much the latter is true: "Plotinus, the philosopher our contemporary, seemed ashamed of being in the body." ⁵⁸ The mystical journey for Plotinus seems to be one of constant inward turning. At each stage of the journey, the mystic pauses, contemplates his stage, and moves closer to the One. In

⁵⁶ Barnstone, Willis, ed. *The Other Bible*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1984. p.726.

⁵⁷ *Enneads VI*, 9, 11

⁵⁸ *V.P.* 1

the end the Soul will not arrive at something else, but at itself, and so being in nothing else, it is only in itself alone; but that which is in itself alone and not in the world of Being is in the Absolute. It ceases to be Being; it is above Being, while in communion with the One. It seems that the mystic does become one with the One. By this I mean that he has no "vision from afar", he actually becomes one in soul with the highest of all possibilities. Along these lines, W.T. Stace comments that a vision would "imply a duality of subject and object".⁵⁹ He continues: "when one is the One, when the flight of the alone to the Alone is complete, there is a total commingling, an ineffable union (enosis)."
This is in effect the monastic mystical experience.

Once the experience is over the mystic returns to the worldly realm. He is changed. There will be some memory of this ineffable experience, at least enough to lead the mystic to seek a return to the One. As we read in Ennead VI:

If then a man sees himself become one with the One, and if he passes out of himself, as an image to its archetype, he has reached the end of his journey. And when he comes down from his vision, he can again awaken the virtue that is in him, and seeing himself fitly adorned in every part he can again mount upward through virtue to Spirit, and through wisdom to the One itself.⁶⁰

So it seems that unio mystica is not necessarily a one time event.

59 Walter Stace The Teachings of the Mystics p. 122

60 Ennead VI, 9, 11

What seems to remain in this study of Plotinus and his theme of unio mystica is his opinion as to who is worthy of making the journey. Plotinus hints at such a person in the Fifth Ennead:

One that seeks to penetrate the nature of the Divine Mind must see deeply into the nature of his own Soul, into the Divinest part of himself. He must first make abstraction of the body, then of the lower soul which built up that body, then of all the faculties of sense, of all desires and emotions and every such triviality, of all that leans toward the mortal. What is left after this abstraction is the part which we describe as the image of the Divine Mind, an emanation preserving some of that Divine Light. ⁶¹

It seems that by this reference, Plotinus is searching for the most pure of souls, the most ascetic of individuals. Only such a person may arrive at a communion with The One. It seems that once one achieves such a state of mind, he is ready to make the journey. Porphyry does relate that on four separate occasions, Plotinus achieved the mystical communion.

The One, Plotinus emphasizes, does not need to turn towards us; ⁶² it is present wherever we turn within, away from our normal preoccupation with the sensible world. We must "divest ourselves of everything" ⁶³ or "put away all otherness", ⁶⁴ that is, all multiplicity and everything that differentiates us from the One. Having

61 Ennead V, 3, 9

62 Enneads VI, 9, 8

63 Enneads V, 3, 17

64 Enneads VI, 9, 8

attained this level of consciousness, the Soul can wait calmly and patiently until the One suddenly appears to her ⁶⁵ or until "raised high on the wave of Intelligence, she suddenly sees, though without knowing how." ⁶⁶

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Plotinus changed the way Western philosophical thought was viewed. Under his influence, it became more idealistic ... less tied to the strict rationalism that so permeated it up to his point in time. G.R.S. Mead writes that:

We ... find in Plotinus two marked characteristics; the method of stern dialectic on the one hand, and a rational and practical mysticism on the other that reminds us very strongly of the best phase of the yoga-systems of ancient India. ⁶⁷

J. R. Mozley also writes that:

There is a real soberness in the mind of its author; the difficulties connected with the divine self-substance and universality, in relation to the individuality of man, though they cannot be said to be solved, are presented in a manner to which little objection can be taken intellectually, and against no serious charge of irreverence can be brought." ⁶⁸

The philosophy of Plotinus certainly has a respected place in Western thought. He brought to the Western world a sense of the finite nature of man and the longing for a greater understanding of the world picture. His

⁶⁵ Enneads V, 5, 7

⁶⁶ Enneads VI, 7, 36

⁶⁷ Mead, op. cit. p. 18

⁶⁸ Mozley, J.R.; Dictionary of Christian Biography, 1887

efforts were designed to transform our representation of the reality that surrounds us. His doctrine is a classical instance of an attempt to develop the conception of a universe which is alive and filled with wonderful forces. Such at least was Plotinus' intent. For he was the very opposite of a sight-seer and collector of unusual facts. He sought systematically to discover the activity of the same powers in the most ordinary of phenomena.

If we reduce the philosophy of Plotinus to its essence, it seems that Plotinus takes what he can glean from a higher Good and transmits the Good to man so that man can live his life accordingly. The search for this Good takes one on a journey through the inner-recesses of one's own mind in order to locate and comprehend the ultimate truth or unity that lies so deeply within him. It is a model for introspection ... for moral and ethical growth, and for spiritual advancement.

He proposes what could be classified as a vertical panentheistic theology alongside a philosophical system of Forms. The One resides above and within the human. For Plotinus, introspection leads one to traverse the void that separates one from the ultimate truths that lay deeply within. But this method of introspection is counterposed to the rational system of Plato. There is a higher level of Forms that are above and beyond the reaches of the worldly man. Only through the dialectical

process can one gain understanding of these higher ideas. So, as the One lies within, it also lies above and beyond. This is the nature of my classification of a vertical panentheistic philosophy.

It is evident that

There is in Plotinus both an affinity for and an aversion to the new religious forms. The affinity is due to the intense feeling which he had for the spiritual life. It is due to the fact that the essential problem for him was the restoration of the soul to its pristine state. The aversion is due to his strictly rationalist conception of the universe, which denies any profound change. ⁶⁹

Plotinus' theology is influenced by the spiritual needs of the time and his own personal desire to give the masses an explanation of the great thought that filled his drawing board. The doctrine of the One is the clef de voute of his entire speculative system. Elmer O'Brien feels that he derived this concept from Philo through the teachings of Albinus and Numenius. E.R. Dodds makes the case that this concept stems from Plato. The basis for Philonic origin is that Philo brought to philosophy the ultimate immanence and transcendence of God. Plato, on the other hand, was unlikely to believe in the concept of the Plotinian One due to the ineffability of the concept. ⁷⁰ The tie to Philo has never been proven beyond a doubt. This is evident in a note in O'Brien that reads:

⁶⁹ Brehier, op. cit. p. 18-19

⁷⁰ O'Brien, op. cit. p. 15

According to Fritz Heinemann (Plotin, Leipzig: Meiner, 1921 p.189, n.1) there is no evidence of direct or indirect contact in Plotinus' "first period"; according to W.R. Inge (The Philosophy of Plotinus, 3rd ed. London: Longmans, 1948, I, p.97), there is no evidence anywhere of direct contact.⁷¹

Whatever the source of his philosophy, he sets before us a unified whole. Each sentence holds the key to his entire approach. The reader is grasped from the very first words and cradled as Plotinus relates the entire system. Plotinus is, as John Rist depicts him, the "prince among metaphysicians". He gives us a way of measuring ourselves in the world of realities. He presents man, nature, and the cosmos in an inter-related system that is both a comfort and a guide.

The system that he proposes is the one by which he lived his life. He truly believed that the One is within every human soul. Because of this belief, that there is an aspect of the divine in everyone, Porphyry relates this final image. As Plotinus lay on his death bed he uttered the words that summed up his whole approach to reality, his own philosophy: "I am striving to give back the divine which is in me to the divine in the universe."

72

71 Ibid

72 Vita Plotini p. 197

Chapter III

Sefer Hekhalot Rabbati and Mystical PraxisI. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO MYSTICISM

It is with awe and trepidation that I begin this chapter on Jewish mysticism. Our ancestors have taught that this material was not to be studied, except under the most strict of conditions by the most pious of souls. Fully cognizant of the dangers that might befall me I have delved into the study of the secrets of religion and emerged more understanding of this very important aspect of religious and philosophical life.

There has been much written on the subject of mysticism, both on a popular and a scholarly level (not being mutually exclusive). There are works by Evelyn Underhill, Steven Katz, William Inge, Ira Chernus, Sidney Spencer, Margaret Smith, Itamar Gruenwald, David Blumenthal, and most notably, Gershom Scholem. In addition to these scholarly approaches, there is much literature in the form of individual accounts, poetry and prose. All of which seemingly serve the same purpose, to describe or explain an event in which one person or a group of people come closer to the Deity (or the Higher Good), and ultimately, gain mystical union with the Deity.

In her book, *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill describes the desire of many peoples to get closer to God.

The most highly developed branches of the human family have in common one peculiar characteristic. They tend to produce sporadically it is true, and often in the teeth of adverse external circumstances-a curious and definite type of personality; a type which refuses to be satisfied with that which other men call experience, and is inclined, in the words of its enemies, to "deny the world in order that it may find reality." We meet these persons in the east and the west; in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds. Their one passion appears to be the prosecution of a certain spiritual and intangible quest: the finding of a "way out" or a "way back" to some desirable state in which alone they can satisfy their craving for absolute truth. This quest, for them, has constituted the whole meaning of life. They have made for it without effort sacrifices which have appeared enormous to other men: and it is an indirect testimony to its objective actuality, that whatever the place or period in which they have arisen, their aims, doctrines and methods have been substantially the same. Their experience, therefore, forms a body of evidence, curiously self-consistent and often mutually explanatory, which must be taken into account before we can add up the sum of the energies and potentialities of the human spirit, or reasonably speculate on its relations to the unknown world which lies outside the boundries of sense.¹

In this description by Underhill, she links together the aims and the consequences of the mystical venture. Later in her book she states in a more succinct fashion the same idea with a new qualifier. "Almost any religious system which fosters unearthly love is potentially a nursery for mystics."² The pursuit of "unearthly love"

¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, Meridian Books, NY, 1957
p. 3

² *ibid*, p. 96

is the overarching goal of any mystic. The desire for "unio mystica", the mystical union with the Deity can only be explained in terms of an intense longing to be close or one with God.

Georgia Harkness writes further:

Mysticism, or something like it by another designation, is found in every great religion. Indeed, it is the very life of religion, for it centers in the communion of the human spirit with that Ultimate Ground of Reality on which our existence rests.³

She agrees that the ideas that can be subsumed under such a category as "mysticism" are repeated in every religious system. What those ideas are and what they represent will be determined as we now try to define this very complex and often misunderstood term.

A. Definition of Mysticism

Great amounts of pen and ink have been expended in defining this elusive word. In a book by William Inge written in 1899, he lists twenty-six definitions of mysticism.⁴ I shall list some of those that he has collected and add some of more recent authors.

Mysticism is the immediate feeling of the unity of self with God; it is nothing, therefore, but the fundamental feeling of religion, the religious life at its very heart and centre. But what makes the mystical a special tendency inside religion is the endeavour to fix the

³ Georgia Harkness, Mysticism .. Its Meaning and Message, Abingdon, NY, 1973 p. 16

⁴ William Ralph Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1923.

immediateness of the life in God as such, and find a permanent abode in the abstract inwardness of a life of pious feeling. (Pfleiderer)

Mysticism appears in connection with the endeavour of the human mind to grasp the divine essence or the ultimate reality of things, and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the highest. The first is the philosophic side of mysticism, the second its religious side. God ceases to be an object and becomes an experience." (Pringle Pattison)

Mysticism is a purely formal concept; the term is a reminder that a religion is not only outward performance but also, for some of its adherents at least, a never ending quest after its own perfection, the perfection which is inherent in its specific structure, a perfection to be realized on the level of the spiritual, the interior, dimension of man." (Carl A. Keller)

There is hardly any soil, be it ever so barren, where Mysticism will not strike root; hardly any creed, however formal, round which it will not twine itself. It is, indeed, the eternal cry of the human soul for rest; the insatiable longing of a being wherein infinite ideals are fettered and cramped by a miserable actuality; and so long as man is less than an angel and more than a beast, this cry will not for a moment fail to make itself heard. Wonderfully uniform, too, is its tenor: in all ages, in all countries, in all creeds, whether it come from the Brahmin sage, the Persian poet, or the Christian quietist, it is in essence an enunciation more or less clear, more or less eloquent, of the aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self and to be at one with God. (E. G. Brown)

The type of religion which puts the emphasis of immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage. (Rufus Jones)

Cognitio dei experimentalis (Thomas Aquinas)

Mysticism is the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feelings. (Goethe)

Mysticism consists in substituting direct inspiration for indirect, ecstasy for reason, rapture for philosophy. (Victor Cousin)

Direct or unmediated experience of the Divine, in which the human soul momentarily approaches union with God ... total submission of the human will and intellect to God. (Dictionary of Philosophy)

Mysticism is that form of experience which is a real, immediate experience of the Divine, of Ultimate Reality, or a striving for that experience. It is at the same time both conservative and revolutionary for the mystic operates within the religious tradition and above it. (Gershom Scholem)

As we can see, there are as many different definitions as there are writers on the subject. Gershom Scholem probably put it best when he remarked that:

There is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract, that is to say, a phenomenon or experience which has no particular relation to other religious phenomena. There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on. ⁵

As is the case in any such comparative study, we must choose a definition that fits our needs. In reading many different approaches to defining this vague and mysterious word, the definition that has found favor with me is one proposed by Evelyn Underhill. It is similar to many of the above definitions, yet it is more compact than that which we have seen.

Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that

⁵ Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Schocken, Jerusalem, 1961, pp. 5-6

union to a greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.⁶

To this definition I would add that "Reality" is that infinite idea upon which all religion is based and that the mystic strives to bring that infinite reality into a finite world. Although Underhill may differ with the definition of "Reality", I feel that her categorization of mysticism as tied to union with something is enticing.⁷

One final point needs to be made. Even in the most basic definitions of mysticism there is one recurrent theme, there are some basic characteristics that run the gamut of mystical experience. It is to the general characteristics of mystical experience that we now turn.

B. Common Characteristics

In the past twenty years or so, the mood among scholars of mysticism has been to discover a) the common characteristics of mystical experiences, b) the historical fact behind such accounts, c) the praxis of the mystical experience, and d) the relevance for the modern religious man. Many scholars have identified what they consider to be the central core of most mystical

⁶ Evelyn Underhill, op. cit. p. 70ff.

⁷ For me, "Reality" is that which is the ultimate cause of everything that happens in the "real" world. In other words, "Reality" is God.

expression. W. T. Stace has identified seven characteristics. They are:

- 1) There is a unifying vision, in which the One is perceived by the senses in and through many objects, so that "all is one."
- 2) The One is apprehended as an inner life, or presence in all things, so that nothing is really dead.⁸
- 3) This brings a sense of reality which is objective and true (sense).
- 4) There is a feeling of satisfaction, joy and bliss.
- 5) There is a feeling of the holy and sacred, which is the specifically religious element of the experience.
- 6) There is a feeling that it is paradoxical.
- 7) There is a feeling that it is inexpressible in words.⁹

These seven characteristics run the gamut of mystical reports. Stace does use the term, "The One" in his description of the Deity. This will become important in our comparison with the philosophical system of Plotinus and Neo-Platonism.

William James also gives us a classification of generic mystical experience. He proposes four "marks" whose appearance in a given situation, may justify our classifying the experience as a mystical experience. They are:

- 1) Ineffability - the experience defies expression. No adequate report of its content can be given in words.
- 2) Noetic quality - a mystical experience brings the mystic to a new state of insight into deep truths. The experience is illuminating, revealing, full of significance and importance.

⁸ We will see in the next chapter how this interplays with the philosophical system of the Plotinian One.

⁹ W. T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, St. Martins, Los Angeles, 1960. p. 79

- 3) Transiency - mystical states cannot be sustained for long.
- 4) Passivity - After some initial physical act such as fasting or yoga, the mystic feels as though his own will was held by some superior Being.¹⁰

Underhill rejects the ideas of James as no longer valid. In her work she lists new rules or notes which may be applied.

- 1) True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life-process, a something which the whole self does; not something as to which its intellect holds an opinion.
- 2) Its aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual. It is in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, re-arranging, or improving anything in the visible universe. The mystic brushes aside that universe, even in its supernormal manifestations. Though he does not, as his enemies declare, neglect his duty to the many, his heart is always set upon the changeless One.
- 3) This One is for the mystic, not merely the Reality of all that is, but also a living and personal Object of Love; never an object of exploration. It draws his whole being homeward, but always under the guidance of the heart.
- 4) Living union with this One-which is the term of his adventure-is a definite state or form of enhance life. It is arrived at by an arduous psychological and spiritual process-the so-called Mystic Way-entailing the complete remaking of the character and the liberation of a new, or rather latent, form of consciousness; which imposes on the self the condition which is sometimes inaccurately called "ecstasy," but is better named the Unitive State.¹¹

¹⁰ William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, The Modern Library, NY, 1936. pp. 371-372

¹¹ Underhill, op. cit. p.81

We can make certain generalizations about the mystical experience from the aforementioned opinions. First, mystics believe that there is an Ultimate Reality or Being, a dimension in existence beyond that experienced through the senses. This Ultimate Reality is Absolute Being. It is often called God, or the One. It is the source of all that is or will ever be. Second, God, or the One, is not wholly other or distant. It is knowable in some sense. Third, the soul perceives God through inward sense. "It is a spiritual sense opening inwardly," says R.W. Trine. Fourth, there is a piece of the Divine in each of us. When the mystic turns inward, he contemplates that spark of the Holy within him. Fifth, mysticism has as its ultimate goal the mystical union with the Divine. In some cases, this may not appear in the traditional mode of unio mystica, but, rather, as a form of relating to the Deity. "Mysticism," writes Margaret Smith, "going beyond religion, aspires to intimate union with the Divine within the soul and to a disappearance of the individuality, with all its modes of acting, thinking and feeling, in the Divine substance. The mystic seeks to pass out of all that is merely the phenomenal, out of all lower forms of reality, to become Being itself."¹² Sixth, there is a sense of the ineffability of the experience. It is like trying to describe the infinite with a finite vocabulary.

¹² Margaret Smith, An Introduction to the History of Mysticism, Philo Press, Amsterdam, 1973. p. 8-9.

With this categorization of the many shared aspects of mystical experiences, we are in a better position to move into a brief categorization of the types of texts and mystical accounts that fill the body of literature called mystical writings.

C. Mystical Writings

As we have noted above, there are at least as many definitions of mysticism as there are scholars of the subject. I would add that there are as many forms of experience and accounts as there are people who have experienced them. But as we have done regarding the goals of the experience, we shall try to categorize the types of literature as well.

In order to do this effectively, we look to Carl Keller whose article, "Mystical Literature," gives us new insight into the many faceted genres of this literature. He writes;

Mystical writings are texts which deal with ultimate knowledge; with its nature, its modalities, its conditions, its methods, and also with secondary insights which might be granted to a seeker in the course of the pursuit of his task. Every religion posits something as its ultimate truth or reality: a God, or some Absolute of one kind or another, and in every religion men try to obtain and perceive in the most intimate conceivable way the ultimate truth which their particular tradition proclaims. 'Mystical writings' are thus texts which discuss the path towards realization of the ultimate knowledge which each particular religion has to offer, and

which contains statements about the nature of such knowledge. ¹³

He goes on to say that mysticism expresses itself in a number of literary genres among which it is possible to identify at least the following: aphorisms, biographies, reports of visions, commentaries, dialogues, instructions, prayers, religious poetry and fiction.

Up to this point I follow Keller's reasoning, but I take issue with his statement that "the study of mysticism is primarily, if not exclusively, a philological and an exegetical enterprise, and as such it partakes of all the hermenutical problems involved in exegesis and interpretation." Following his classification of the various forms of the literature, he states that one religions approach is vastly different from another. ¹⁴ From a philological perspective this may be true, but, from a philosophical perspective one cannot help but see the points of similarity.

I tend to believe as Zaehner did when he wrote that "Comparisons between mystical writings of quite divergent religions are at least comparisons between like and like." ¹⁵ If we can agree that there are some possibilities for sharing of ideas between religions and there are some basic forms of reports as Keller has

¹³ Carl Keller, "Mystical Literature", As printed in Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis, ed. Steven Katz, Oxford, NY, 1978. p. 77

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 95

¹⁵ R. C. Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism, Athlone Press, 1960 p. 2.

pointed out, then we must look at some of the approaches within these reports.

Peter Moore, in his article "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique," points out that there are four types of reports.

- 1) retrospective interpretation - formulated after the experience
- 2) reflexive interpretation - formulated during or immediately after.
- 3) incorporated interpretation - an interpretation caused or conditioned by a prior event
 - a) ideas and images reflected in an experience in the form of visions and locutions and so forth.
 - b) features of experience moulded into what might be termed phenomenological analogues of some belief or doctrine.
- 4) raw experience - unaffected exterior/interior issues within the mystic. ¹⁶

Steven Katz follows this line of reasoning when he states that there are certain aspects of the mystical experience one must look at beyond the report itself. He states that:

In order to understand mysticism, it is not just a question of studying the reports of the mystic after the experiential event but of acknowledging that the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience. ¹⁷

We can see that there are many issues that are beneath the surface of our study. In the coming discussion of Hekhalot Rabbati, and in the subsequent

¹⁶ Peter Moore, "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique," as quoted in Katz, op. cit. (see note 13) p. 108-9.

¹⁷ Steven Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism" (see note 13) p. 26.

comparative analysis with the Enneads of Plotinus, we will hopefully discover that some of the factors and characteristics listed in general above, will be found in these texts in specific.

II. SEFER HEKHALOT RABBATI

This is probably the best known of the Hekhalot texts we have in our possession. There are a multitude of texts and manuscripts in existence.¹⁸ The text consists of thirty to thirty-one chapters with the last four or five diverging from the central theme of the mystical ascent. These last few chapters form the Sar Ha-Torah section of the text which discusses methods for memorizing the Torah.¹⁹ This work is written in the form of a mystical manual, describing at great length what should be done in order to arrive at the mystical experience and bypass the perils that stand in the way of the practitioner. In this way, it is not just a descriptive lesson but a guide to the praxis of the

¹⁸ Peter Schafer has published a work called Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur in which he lists side by side seven different manuscripts: Vatican 228 Budapest 238, Dropsie 436, Munich 22, Munich 40, Oxford 1531, and New York 8128. There are also texts published by Q.A. Jellinek and Sh. A. Wertheimer. The translations in this work are made from the Budapest manuscript deemed to be one of the most authoritative. Unfortunately there has yet to be a critical edition of this work published.

¹⁹ The last four to five chapters (depending on the text) of the work belong to the Sar HaTorah speculations. These deal with the secret method of memorizing the whole Torah and are not relevant to the subject at hand.

mystical world. It is also a liturgical work as the presence of mystical chants and hymns shows. For those who practiced this ecstatic form of mystical rite in the past and if there are any who still do, this work constitutes the textbook for mystical fulfillment.

A. Composition of the Text and prevalent themes.

In this section I shall give a brief outline of the text and the themes prevalent in each section. Within this text many different strata of material appear. As Morton Smith has said:

What we have in Hekhalot Rabbati is not so much a single composition as a collection of pieces illustrating different aspects of a single tradition of speculation concerning the Throne of God and the heavens beneath it. Its two main elements are a collection of songs, which are magniloquent descriptions of the Throne, and a detailed account of the ascent, but beside these there are other songs which show the adaptation of this tradition for liturgical purposes, and there are prose passages which show its use in folk-tales and in apocalyptic speculations. The pseudohistorical framework of the ascent section, and the imposition of midrashic form on the whole, shows how this speculative tradition was attached to the authoritative figures of Rabbinic Judaism. Finally we can see clearly how it has appropriated magical elements for its own purposes, and has in turn been exploited by orthodox Jewish magicians for purposes of their own. ²⁰

We will discuss the dating of this text later in this thesis, but for now, let us be cognizant of the fact

²⁰ Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," pp. 149-150.

that we are working in the period surrounding the destruction of the Second Temple and the growth of Christianity, surrounding the flourishing of Greek Philosophy and the influential period of gnosis. All of these concepts interplay as we try to understand the ideas in this text more fully.

The text opens with an accounting of all the special accomplishments that are accorded to mystics. The mystic knows, as does Kohelet;

Who will be made low and who will be made high,
 Who will be made weak and who will gain strength,
 Who will be impoverished and who will be wealthy,
 Who will die and who will live,
 Who will not inherit and to whom will patrimony be given,
 Who will receive Torah and who will be apportioned Wisdom.

The Special Formula empowers the mystic to predict and understand all the acts of man, even those that are done in the innermost chambers of their homes, and see whether they are good or bad.
 If one steals, he knows and recognizes him;
 If one commits adultery, he knows and recognizes him;
 If one murders, he knows and recognizes him;
 If one had illicit sex, he knows and recognizes him;
 If one slanders, he knows and recognizes him;
 ...²¹

21 HR 1:2, 1:3, 82-83: For the purpose of this work, the references to textual extractions are found by chapter reference in Yellinek, Beit ha-Midrash, Leipzig, 1855, Volume III, pp.83-108, and by paragraph number in Peter Schafer, Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur, Tübingen, 1981, pp. 41-139. In order to some semblance of organization, all references are from the Budapest 328 Manuscript. See note no. 15.

The listing of these special powers seem to be aimed at attracting people to the practice of the mystic rites. Itamar Gruenwald opines that this section at the beginning of the work is a later interpolation during a time when mystical speculation was altogether lost. ²²

The opening question is again repeated in the second chapter to the effect of; "What is the special formula that one says when he descends into the Merkavah?" ²³ What follows is a number of hymns, many felt to be liturgical in nature, that the mystic is to sing in order to facilitate his descent into the Merkavah. An interesting theme to note is that in Chapter III, God has a place to reside beyond the Throne of Glory. He is in the "eighth heaven" which is above the heads of all the Holy creatures. ²⁴ The text speaks of this when it writes:

"Wonderful loftiness, strange power,
Loftiness of grandeur, power of majesty that
the Angel of the Divine Presence of God
behaves thus three times a day in the
heavenly court before Your Throne of
Glory, when He comes and arrives on the
heavens above the Cherubim, above the
heads of the Ofanim and above the heads of
the heavenly Creatures." ²⁵

²² Itamar Gruenwald, Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1980, p. 151. He feels that there was a need to attract many new people to the tenets of the mystical religion. If this is the case, it is possible that religion at this time had become stale and unrewarding.

²³ HR 2:4, 94

²⁴ HR 3:3, 100

²⁵ HR ibid

There are a few themes interesting to note in this section. First, there are three times for meetings in the heavenly court. Second, God descends to the heavenly court from a place higher than the heads of the Ofanim, Cherubim, and other Hosts. Third, there is a reference to Angelic assistance.

According to Gruenwald, this book holds a much more prominent place in the liturgical development of Jewish worship than has been acknowledged up to this time.²⁶ In fact, the constant repetition of the Qedusha within the text, by both mystic and angel, is evidence of its liturgical relevance. Gruenwald has also made the statement that the three daily prayers and the descent by God to the seventh palace are connected in that the calls to prayer were the causal factor in God's descent.²⁷

Further we see that chapters 1-12 form a body of text containing all of the mystical magical formulations needed for the journey through the seven hekhalot. This body of material also contains some hints at the non-esoteric nature of the work. This is not a secret work. With the proper preparation and necessary piety, anyone could ascend to the merkabah. There is a command to tell all what the mystic has seen.

May the decree of heaven be upon you, descenders unto the Merkavah, if you do not tell what you have seen upon the countenance of grandeur, might, wonder, and glory.²⁸

²⁶ Gruenwald, op. cit. p. 155

²⁷ ibid p. 154

²⁸ HR 11:3, 11:5

The Hekhalot writings almost never require secrecy. Even as the mystic makes the journey, he is told to gather his disciples so that they will record the event.

R. Yishmael said. I immediately went and gathered together every great and small Sanhedrin to the great third entrance of the House of God. I sat on a bench of pure marble which my father, Elisha, had given me from the estate of my mother, who had so stipulated in her marriage contract.

Then, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, R. Eliezar ha-Gadol, R. Elazar ben Damah, R. Eliezar ben Shamua, R. Yochanan ben Dahavai, Hananya ben Chanichai, Yonathan ben Uziel, R. Akiva, and R. Judah ben Baba. We came and sat before him while the mass of chaverim stood on their feet, for they saw that the globes of fire and torches of light formed a barrier between them and us. R. Nehunia ben Hakkanah sat and set in order for them all the matters of the Merkavah: the descent to it and the ascent, how to descend, who should descend, how to ascend, and who should ascend. ²⁹

Within the first section of this work (Chapters 1-12), there appears an interesting side note which turns out to be the driving force for this particular text. In chapter four, we see the beginning of what is termed the "ten-martyrs-apocolypse." Much has been written on this body of material. It is unclear when this section entered the text. ³⁰ Morton Smith points to the use of the title "Caesar" as evidence for a date prior to Diocletian. He notes further that the slaughter theme points to the troubled times in the mid-third century. ³¹

²⁹ HR 14:2, 14:3

³⁰ We are talking about HR 4:3 - 6:end.

³¹ Morton Smith, "Observations ... " p. 149. Also refer to the historical sections in the prior chapter of this thesis.

The reason for the inclusion of this material is clear when we look at the text. In 4:4, R. Nechuniah ben Hakkanah asks R. Yishmael to undergo a journey to the Merkavah in order to discover the reason why four sages were to be put to death. What he finds is that, in actuality, ten sages were to be put to death to expiate the sins of the ten brothers who sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. This need for an explanation into the problem of evil surrounding the death of the ten sages led this group of mystics to delve into the realm of the unknown. One might say that the genesis for this work lies in the very book of Genesis.

Chapters 13-26 contain a lengthy description of the descent to the Merkavah. Here we are told of the names of the angelic hosts, the special acts required of the mystic making the journey, the inherent dangers of the journey, and the activities surrounding the culmination of the journey.

B. Biblical Source for the Merkavah

Most mystical texts that speak of an ecstatic vision of God or other deities describe that experience in terms of the vision of Ezekiel. It is an apocalyptic vision. The vision of Ezekiel is imaginative and powerful. It has relevance in this work. Here Ezekiel describes in graphic detail what he saw in his vision. This vision

becomes the model for all subsequent visions of mystical origin.

Ezekiel 1

"Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God... And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was round about it; and out of the midst thereof as the color of the electrum, out of the midst of the fire. And out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. and this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And every one of them had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and the sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and as for the faces and wings of them four, their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went everyone straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces; and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies. And they went every one straight forward; whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like coals of fire, burning like the appearance of torches; it flashed up and down among the living creatures; and there was brightness to the fire, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel at the bottom hard by the living creatures, at the four faces thereof. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl; and they four had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a

wheel. When they went, they went toward their four sides; they turned not when they went. As for their rings, they were high and they were dreadful; and they four had their rings full of eyes round about. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went hard by them; and when the living creature were lifted up from the bottom, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, as the spirit was to go thither, so they went; and the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When those went, these went, and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

And over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, like the colour of the terrible ice, stretched forth over their heads above. And under the firmament were their wings conformable the one to the other; this one of them had two which covered, and that one of them had two which covered, their bodies. And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of a host, when they stood, they let down their wings. For, when there was a voice above the firmament that was over their heads, as they stood, they let down their wings.

And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above. And I saw as the colour of electrum, as the appearance of fire round about enclosing it, from the appearance of his loins and upward; and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke.

This text is the model for most apocalyptic visions.

There is a view of the throne which will be explained

later. There is also a view of the Holy Hayot, the robes of the Deity, the sound of His voice, the flashes and the movement of a scene that is wholly different than that which man has experienced.

C. Tannaitic and Mishnaic Sources for the Merkavah

The Merkavah literature traces its roots to many talmudic and biblical texts. Much of it is centered around Mishna Haggigah 2:1 and the corresponding Tosefta passage. There is also material in the gemara to this mishna.³² In this section, we shall list all the various sources that are relevant to this work. As the work under discussion is a composite work, we shall draw upon the relevant sources and demonstrate how they interrelate. I translate using the edition of Pinchas Kahati (Jerusalem, 1977).

Mishna Haggigah 2:1

- a. "They do not expound the "arayot" (in Gemora "sitrei arayot") among three.
nor "the act of Creation" among two.
nor "the act of the Chariot" among one.
Unless he is wise (a scholar of Jewish teachings) and understands on his own.
- b. Anyone who looks at these four things, it
would be better for him if he had not come
into this world:
what is above and what is below,
what is before and what is after.
- c. Anyone who has no forbearance (respect) for
the honor of his Creator, it would be

³² I am greatly indebted to David Halperin and Ira Chernus for their extensive work in this area.

better for him had he not come into this world.

In this first text, we see that there is some concern over the danger of those who attempt such speculative activity. The mishna wants to discourage those who recklessly practice such rites. This is sacred writ, and deserves the respect and honor due to such material. In addition, the knowledge that one gains through the study of this material was felt to be dangerous and uncontrollable. As we will see in other texts, the attempt to limit the study of this literature is expanded.

The next text that forms the core of the Hekhalot experience is found in Tosefta Haggigah. I have supplied a translation of this material using the text as it appears in the volume published by Saul Lieberman. 33

Tosefta Mishna Haggigah 2:1-7

1. They do not expound upon the laws of prohibited relationships before three persons, but they do expound them before two; or the Act of Creation before two, but they do expound them before one; or about the Chariot before one, unless he was a sage and understands of his own accord. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was riding on an ass, and R. Eleazar ben Arakh was driving the ass from behind. He said to him, "Rabbi, repeat for me a chapter of the works of the Chariot." He said to him, "Have I not ruled for you to begin with that they do not repeat

33 Saul Lieberman, The Tosefta: According to the Codex Vienna with variants from Codices Erfurt, London, Genizah Mss and Editio Princeps (Venice 1521), JTS 1962 p. 380-382.

concerning the Chariot for an individual, unless he was a sage and understands of his own accord?" He said to him, "Now may I lay matters out before you?" He said to him, "Say on." R. Eleazar ben Arakh commenced and expounded concerning the works of the Chariot. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai got off his ass, wrapped himself in his cloak, and the two of them sat down on a rock under an olive tree, and Eleazar laid matters out before him. Yochanan got up and kissed him on his head and said to him, "Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, who gave to Abraham, our father, a son who knows how to understand and expound upon the glory of his father who is in heaven. "Some preach nicely but do not practice nicely, or practice nicely but do not preach nicely. Eleazar ben Arakh preaches and practices nicely. Happy are you, O Abraham, our father, for Eleazar ben Arakh has gone forth from your loins. Who knows how to understand and expound upon the glory of his Father who is in heaven."

2. R. Yose ben Judah says, "R. Joshua laid out matters before Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. R. Akiva laid matters out before R. Joshua. Hananiah ben Kinai laid out matters before R. Akiva.
3. Four entered the garden: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher, and R. Akiva. One gazed and died, one gazed and was struck down, one gazed and cut down the shoots, and one ascended in peace and descended in peace. Ben Azzai gazed and died. Concerning him scripture writes, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:15). Ben Zoma gazed and was struck down. Concerning him scripture says, "If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you be sated with it and vomit it." (Prov. 25:16). Elisha gazed and cut down the shoots. Concerning him scripture says, "Let not your mouth lead you into sin. (Koh 5:5).
4. R. Akiva ascended in peace and descended in peace. Concerning him scripture says, "Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. (Song of Songs 1:4)
5. To what is the matter to be compared? To a royal garden, with an upper room built over it. What is the guards duty? To look, but not to feast his eyes from it? And they further compared

the matter to what? To a platoon passing between two paths, one of fire and one of ice. If it turns to this side, it will be smitten by fire, and if it turns to that side, it will be smitten by ice. Now what should a person do? He should go right down the middle, and not turn either to this side or to that.

6. R. Joshua was walking in a public thoroughfare, and Ben Zoma came toward him. When he reached him, he did not greet him. he said to him, "From where and to where, Ben Zoma?" He said to him, "I was concentrating upon the works of Creation, and there is not even a handbreadth between the upper waters and the lower waters." For it says, The spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (Gen 1:2). And it says, Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, so the Lord alone did lead him." (Deut. 32:11-12). "Just as this eagle flutters above its nest, touching and not touching, so there is no more space between the upper and lower waters than a handbreadth." R. Joshua said to his disciples, "Ben Zoma already is on the outside." The days were few before Ben Zoma disappeared.

7. Whoever reflects upon four things would have been better off had he not been born: What is above, below, within, and beyond. Might one suppose that this applies before the works of Creation? Scripture says, "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you since the day that God created man upon the earth. (Deut. 4:32) Might one suppose that this is before the order of the seasons was created? Scripture says, "And ask from one end of heaven to the other whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of" (Deut. 4:32). What then, is the meaning of this scripture, "Since the day that God created man upon the earth?" Concerning matters since the day that God created man upon the earth you may expound. But you may not seek to know what is above, what is below, what is within, and what is beyond.

This material is important in many respects. First, there is the prescription not to relate mystical

information to others unless they have achieved a certain level of knowledge in such lore. Second, there is the story of the four who entered the garden. This, as Scholem points out, is a description of an actual mystical experience. Joseph Dan believes that this is the benchmark in the new format for mystical study.³⁴ It becomes an experiential activity rather than a homiletical one. Third, there is a passing down of mystical experiences. And fourth, a command to take heed when engaging in the study of mystical teachings. As the rabbis teach, this material is not to be taken lightly. As we look deeper into its secrets, we shall see the dangers inherent in its study.

As we will see in later pages, the text of Hekhalot Rabbati also takes on a liturgical bent. The songs and hymns form prayers, many of which may have been used in the synagogue. One of the most repeated lines in the literature is Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh Adonai Tzevaot, Melo Kol Ha'aretz Kevodo. This line can be traced back to the vision of another prophet (Isaiah). It forms a central theme in Jewish mysticism and in our text. The section quoted below from Isaiah is another model of a mystical experience. As we see in the text, there is a throne, the Deity seated wearing robes, the heavenly hosts, and the voices.

³⁴ Joseph Dan, "The Religious Experience of the Merkavah" Printed in Jewish Spirituality, by Arthur Green, Crossroad, NY, 1986. pp. 293

Isaiah 6:1 ff

... I saw the Lord sitting high and exalted, and His robes filled the Temple. Above Him stood the Seraphim; each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to the other and said: Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory...

The next text begins the section of Hekhalot Rabbati which I shall deem the ascension section. In Chapter 13 of the text, the journey/ascent/descent is compared to a ladder that one can ascend and descend at will. This ladder theme is found in Genesis in the story of Jacob.

Genesis 28:12

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

When studying any literature, it becomes necessary to decide what was the reason for its genesis. In Hekhalot Rabbati we see a call by R. Nechunia to R. Yishmael. R. Nechunia asks R. Yishmael to descend to the merkavah and discover why the sages were targeted for destruction. He finds that they were targeted to expiate the sins of the ten brothers who sold Joseph into slavery. For this they must perish. Below is that text from Genesis that describes the act.

Genesis 37:27-28

Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh. And his brethren hearkened unto him. And there passed by Midianites, merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they brought Joseph into Egypt.

These texts contain many different ties to mystical literature. Some references can be seen in the text, some references are merely drawn from the text. Nevertheless, the biblical imagery that we have seen above is incorporated into Hekhalot Rabbati. From the Biblical prophetic visions to the rabbinic commentaries on the Talmud, rabbis, prophets and sages have had much to say regarding this very elusive form of religious practice. It is now upon us to turn to the dating of Hekhalot Rabbati, for it is the date that will determine whether or not there was a possibility of cross-cultural influence.

D. Dating of Hekhalot Rabbati

One of the basic problems in our study is determining the date of the literature. Since the author of Hekhalot Rabbati is unknown we have little hope of pinpointing a date for its codification. What we must do in order to afix a reference point for this literature is look at some of the themes within the text, some of the literary styles, and some of the available lexicographical data.

In general we know that we are dealing with a period spanning almost one thousand years (100 B.C.E. to 900 C.E.). We know that Palestine was the center of this movement. Some of the names attributed to this literature belong to those who formed the core of religious thought in the early centuries of the common era. Many of these thinkers belonged to the school of Yochanan ben Zakkai. Other names appear such as Rabbi Akiva, Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, and Rabbi Yishmael. It is felt (Joseph Dan) that these references are merely fictional much in the way the book of Koheleth was attributed to King Solomon.

According to Scholem, during the Second Temple Period an esoteric doctrine was already taught in Pharisaic circles.

The first chapter of Genesis, the story of Creation, and the first chapter of Ezekiel, the vision of God's throne-chariot were the favorite subjects of discussion and interpretation.³⁵

In the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Paul Edwards, concurs with Scholems' findings. He states:

Mysticism developed within Judaism by the first century B.C.. It centered mainly on the imagery of the merkabah, described in Ezekiel as a complex vision of the manifestation of divine power in the shape of supernatural beings riding on a mysterious four-wheeled chariot. The Talmud indicates that some of the chariot. The Talmud indicates that some of the early rabbis practiced asceticism and self-purification as a preparation for a mystical "ascent into heaven." Philo Judaeus mentioned

³⁵ Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 42.

a community of Therapeutae near Alexandria who practiced a form of contemplative monasticism, and like-wise mysticism may have been a part of the Essene way of life. ³⁶

Joseph Dan also notes the growth, and actually, the beginning of this new thought process. He states:

The appearance of Jewish mysticism in the talmudic period occurred, so it seems when active mystical ascent to the divine world replaced passive homiletical speculation in the midrashic manner concerning the chariot envisioned by Ezekiel. ³⁷

There was a transition from the midrash of the ma'aseh merkavah to the active mysticism of the yordey ha-merkavah. This change apparently occurred in or around the school of Rabbi Akiva in the first third of the second century C.E. ³⁸ The indication of this transition is found in the story of the "four who entered the pardes." This is one of the first accounts of an actual ascent by a known figure or figures.

Ira Chernus also supports this relatively early dating of the material in question. He concludes in his work on revelation and merkavah mysticism that:

Reviewing both the tannaitic and amoraic midrashim studied here, we find a number of plausible models for reconstructing the process of historical development. It may be that Merkabah mysticism was developed within the rabbinic academies, with the midrash on Sinai being developed concurrently in those same academies; this would be the simplest explanation for the many parallels which we have found. Or it may be that Merkabah

36 Encyclopedia of Philosophy, p. 423

37 Joseph Dan, "The Religious Experience of the Merkavah" p. 292

38 *ibid.*

mysticism was developed outside the leading rabbinic circles in the first or early second centuries, with R. Akiba and his followers responding to it by creating new traditions about Matan Torah. Perhaps alternatively, Merkabah mysticism was not developed until the third century, outside of revelation; in this case the third-century amoraim would be the ones who responded to the new creation by new midrashic creation of their own concerning Sinai. (It is hardly likely, though perhaps possible, that Merkabah mysticism was not developed until the fourth century or later).

39

Finally, Joseph Dan gives us once more a hint at the dating. He states in his article "L'Ba'ayat Ha-Periodizatzia shel Torat ha-Sod ha-Ivrit" that Plotinus and Proclus were contemporaries of the yordei ha-merkavah and dorshei ma'aseh bereshit. 40

So it seems that most scholars agree that this text, Hekhalot Rabbati, belongs to the early strata of mystical literature. It is necessary to note that the literature is not one complete work. In other words, we have many layers of material, some older than others. Nevertheless, we must move ahead with the premise that we are dealing with a watershed text which marks the dawn of a new religious movement and a new outlook. As we delve deeper into the secrets of this work, we will hope to begin to see a pattern that will carry us back full circle to the schools in Alexandria and Rome.

39 Ira Chernus, Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism, De Gruyter, Berlin, 1982, p.32

40 Joseph Dan, "Problems in the Periodization of Jewish Mystical Literature" (in Hebrew) Published in the Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1985 p. 94.

E. Parallel Texts

In the discussion of this material it is important to know where the ideas and concepts that are expounded in this literature appear in other traditions. The notion of an "ascent of the soul" permeates the pseudepigrapha. The use of seals is prominent in later Coptic works. The use of magical formulae are also found in other gnostic works. And the names of the guards at the gates of the palaces are found in the magical papyri and in Gnosticism. ⁴¹ As Smith states:

Not only have the Gnostics taken over Hebrew names, but the hekhalot have taken over Greek names and sometimes have even taken back Greek corruptions of names which were originally Hebrew. ⁴²

Other examples of this ascension literature can be found in the Greek text of the Testament of Levi, Paul's text, and the lost Apocalypse of Zephania supplied by Clement of Alexandria. ⁴³ And Hans Lewy has traced a pagan form similar to this literature to the end of the first century. ⁴⁴

Smith makes the bold statement that it is impossible to deny the relationship of this material to the hekhalot tradition. It seems, in the light of much evidence, that

⁴¹ Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati" p. 150

⁴² *ibid.* p. 151

⁴³ Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism ... , JTS, NY, 1960. p. 18

⁴⁴ Smith, *art. cit.*, p. 160

there was a sharing of these mystical traditions. This claim is the subject of the next chapter. Now we shall turn to the text of Hekhalot Rabbati that describes the journey aspects of the mystical experience.

III. AN INTERPRETATION OF THE JOURNEY IN HEKHALOT RABBATI

A. The Prerequisites for the Descent

In determining the requirements for descent unto the Merkavah, let us first look at the text that appears at the beginning of the ascension section of our material:

It is like having a ladder in one's house for all who are pure and purged of idolatry, sexual offenses, bloodshed, slander, vain oaths, profanation of the name, impertinence, and enmity, and who keeps every positive and negative commandment. ⁴⁵

It is important to be ritually pure, but as the text relates, one must also be courageous and well versed. ⁴⁶ Though ascetic practices are central to the ability of

⁴⁵ HR 13:2

⁴⁶ HR 14:1 "Go and bring before me all the mighty ones of the Yeshiva so that I may recite in their presence the secrets and mysteries which have been suppressed, the wonders and the weavings of the tractate upon which the betterment of the world, the setting on its path, and the beautification of heaven and earth depend."

the mystic to experience his mysticism, there is still more the mystic must know. In Hekhalot Rabbati we find:

No one successfully goes down to the Merkavah who does not have the following two virtues. He must have repeatedly studied the Torah, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings, and he must have repeatedly studied Mishna, halacha, Aggadah, and the rendering of legal decisions on what is permissible and forbidden. Also, he must have observed all of the Torah in its entirety, observing all the warnings, the statutes, the judgements, and the teachings which were given to Moses at Sinai. ⁴⁷

Steven Katz also relates in general the necessary prerequisites of the mystic:

In the cultural-social sphere the Jewish mystic will have learnt and been conditioned in all kinds of ways from childhood up that: 1) there is more to reality than this physical world; 2) that this more than physical reality is an Ultimate Reality which is a personal God; 3) that this God created the world and men; 4) that men have spiritual souls that commune with God; 5) that God enters into covenants with men; 6) that even in covenants He remains distinct; 7) that God's Being and man's being are ontologically distinct; 8) that God entered into special covenants with Abraham and his heirs, Israel; 9) that these covenants are expressed in the acts of circumcision and the giving of the Torah; 10) that the Torah and its commandments are the most perfect expression of God's will as well as the most perfect means of relation between man and God, and so on. ⁴⁸

So, not only is there a need to be ritually pure, but there is a need to be knowledgeable in Torah.

In fact, this literature displays a distinct Pharisaic-Rabbinic bent, and is in no way heretical as some scholars have hinted. Scholem in his book on Jewish

⁴⁷ HR 20:1

⁴⁸ Katz, "Literature" (see note 13) p. 33

Gnosticism demonstrates the extent of the halakhic character of this literature. In Chapter 18 of Hekhalot Rabbati we find a story of the students of R. Nechunia ben Hakkanah. As they sat recording his experience, they became unclear about some aspect of the journey. Given the danger that the mystic would be exposed to if he were to interrupt his journey, his students needed a way to recall him without endangering him. They exposed a piece of cloth to a woman who had not been completely purified after her menses. They then placed this cloth on the lap of R. Nechunia ben Hakkanah. This act of ritual impurity released him from his concentration and he withdrew from his journey. ⁴⁹

Looking once again to the Tosefta, we find that there is a shalshet ha-kabbalah of mystical lore. Each rabbi learned the material from a prior mystic. There is much to learn in order to make the journey beyond the standard rabbinic theology. It is to the specific practices that we now turn.

49 HR 18:1-3

B. Mystical Practices During the Descent

There are three basic things that a mystic must master in order to complete his journey. First, the mystic must memorize and be able to recite the mystical incantations that carry him on his journey. Second, the mystic must know the names of all the angels and their order of appearance. Third, the mystic must understand the inherent dangers involved in the journey and be able to counter the angelic opposition to the completion of his goals. We shall begin our discussion with a look at the magical formulae/incantations.

1. Fomulae and Incantations

Our text begins with a question: "What are the formulas which should be recited by him who wants to behold the vision of the Merkavah, to descend safely and to ascend safely." ⁵⁰ The formulas are "songs" and their recitation enables the mystic to not only ascend to the highest heaven and see the Throne, but also to know the past and the future and the secrets of men's minds. They secure for the mystic Divine protection and assure that his enemies will be vanquished.

In chapter I, the text continues:

The formula allows him to enter, guides him to
the innermost chambers of the Temple ...

carries him and places him to the right of the Throne ... to observe what occurs in the present and to perceive what the future will hold. ⁵¹

In addition, there seem to be two types of hymns. On the one hand, there are formulas directed to the Throne and to God who sits upon the Throne. These are the celestial songs of praise. There are also formulas that are recited by the mystic before and during the ecstatic ascent to heaven. ⁵² In general, these hymns describe the power and might of God. They also form the core of the celestial worship liturgy. ⁵³

Through the recitation of these formulas, the mystic becomes knowledgable. Reminiscent of the High Holy Day liturgy, the mystic comes to know "who shall live and who shall die." The formulas are the means to this knowledge.

As was stated above, the formulas also offer the mystic protection. Recalling the curses in Leviticus concerning leperous skin disease, we find in Hekhalot Rabbati similar themes. In chapter I, the mystic is given the power, once he has mastered the formulas, to defend himself with something resembling the biblical curses.

51 paraphrase HR 1:1

52 See the note in Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, regarding the use of ascent and descent regarding this literature. These terms are interchangeable.

53 Many of these hymns include the trishagion of Isaiah and therefore become part of a liturgical framework. This writer would welcome an analysis of the prayer aspects of the Hekhalot literature. This seems to be an element permeating every paragraph of the literature.

The formulas enable the mystic, for if one lifts up his hand as if to strike him, he can cover him with plagues and encircle him with bright spots on his skin. ⁵⁴

The mystic must be careful in the use of these formulas. It says in the text at the beginning of the section devoted to the actual journey that:

When anyone would want to go down to the Merkavah, he would call upon Surya, the angel of the Divine Presence, and make him swear to protect him 112 times ... He may not do it more than 112 times, or less, for he who adds or subtracts has his blood on his own head. One's mouth brings forth the names and one's fingers count the 112 times. He immediately goes down and masters the Merkavah. ⁵⁵

Let us now turn to some of these hymns. They are central to our text and our discussion of the praxis and philosophy of the journey.

Chapter 3:4

A quality of holiness, a quality of power,
A quality of fearfulness, a quality of
 sublimity,
A quality of trembling, a quality of shaking,
A quality of terror, a quality of
 consternation.

Chapter 4:2

Who is like unto our King? Who is like unto
 our Creator? Who is like unto the Lord
 our God?
The sun and the moon is cast out and sent forth
 by the crown of His head.
The Pleiades and Orion and the Planet of Venus
Constellations and stars and zodiacal signs
Flow and issue forth from the garmet of Him
Who is crowned and shrouded in it, sits upon
 the Throne of His glory.

54 HR 1:4

55 HR 14:4-5

Chapter 7:4

O wreathed in splendor, crowned with crowns,
 O chorister of Him on high,
 Extol the Lord enthroned in flames
 For in the presence of the Presence,
 In the inmost glory of the inmost chambers, You
 set up your posts.
 Your name He distinguished from his servant's
 name,
 From the Chariot's servants He set you apart.
 Him who the name of one of you mentions
 The flame surrounds, a leaping fire, around him
 burning, glowing coals.

Chapter 24 ff

King of the King of Kings, God of Gods, and
 Lord of Lords,
 Who is surrounded with chains of crowns,
 Who is encompassed by the cluster of the rulers
 of radiance,
 Who covers the heavens with the wing of his
 magnificence,
 And in His majesty appeared from the heights,
 From His beauty the depths are kindled,
 And from His stature the heavens are sparked.
 His stature sends out the lofty, and his crown
 blazes out the mighty, and His garment
 flows with the precious.
 And all trees shall rejoice in His word,
 And herbs shall exult in His rejoicing,
 And his words shall drop as perfumes,
 Flowing forth in flames of fire,
 Giving joy to those who search them,
 And quiet to those who fulfill them.

These few selections give us a good cross-section of the mystical hymn. Included in these hymns are words of praise and thanks, mystical imagery of fire and flame, crowns and garments, jeweled robes and perfume, and most important for our discussion, the Chariot. These few themes permeate the mystical hymns in this text. Each hymn has as its goal either the aiding of the mystic or

the glorification of God, or both. They function as a beacon much like the lighthouse guides a ship past a dangerous point. Next we turn to the key to unlock the doors of the Hekhalot, the seals that the mystic uses to move from gate to gate.

2. Seals and Signs

One of the central aspects to this work, beyond the hymns, is the importance of angelology in the journey. There are angels every step of the way to guide and to confound the mystic. In chapter 15 of Hekhalot Rabbati we are given that complete list of angels and their positions in the heavenly hekhalot. There are four guards on the left and four on the right to guard the entrance to each palace. Tootrusiel YHVH (God) permeates each palace and resides in the innmost room of each palace. ⁵⁶ Below is a list of the guards at the gates of each palace.

Hekhal 1

Dehaviel	Tofiel
Kashriel	Dehariel
Gehoriel	Matkiel
Bezotiel	Shuiel (Shuviel)

Hekhal 2

Tagriel	Shehariel
Matpiel	Satriel
Sarhiel	Regaiel (Ragshiel)

⁵⁶ HR 15:1

Arfiel	Sahaviel
Hekhal 3	
Shevuriel	Zehazahiel
Retzutiel	Hadriel
Shalmiel	Bezariel
Savliel	
Hekhal 4	
Pachdiel	Shatkiel
Gevurtiel	Araviel
Kazuil	Kafiel
Shekiniel	Anaphiel
Hekhal 5	
Tachiel	Safriel Falatriel ⁵⁷
Uziel	Garafiel
Gatiel	Gariel
Getahiel	Dariel
Hekhal 6	
Rumiel	Agrumiel
Katzpiel	Faratziel
Gehagiel	Mehakiel
Arsavrasbiel	Tofariel
Hekhal 7	
Zehafnuriel YHVH	Anpiel YHVH
Avirzahia YHVH	Nazuriel YHVH
Atrigiesh YHVH	Sastiel YHVH
Nagriel YHVH	Anafiel YHVH ⁵⁸

One begins the journey by conjuring up the angel Surya, the Prince of the Divine Presence, one hundred and

⁵⁷ There are only seven guards in the third palace when there should be eight. It has been proposed that the extra guard in the fifth palace is a scribal error and belongs in the third or fourth palace.

⁵⁸ Although the text does not follow in chapter 15 with the names of the guards of the seventh palace, it does state that these guards were angry, war-like, and fierce. They were heavily armed and stood at the door barring entrance.

twelve times. ⁵⁹ The mystic may not add or subtract from this number. There are many interesting aspects to the seals, signs and angelology that are discussed in these chapters. Israel Efros, in his book on philosophy says that the angelology in the apocalyptic texts such as Hekhalot Rabbati, marks a new stage in religious speculation.

He labels three stages in the early days of Jewish philosophy. First, there was the prophetic philosophy dealing with the Holiness of God as expressed in the Holy Writ. Second, there was a transition to a period of Glorification of God, which was expressed by the early Jewish mystics. And third, there was the period beginning with the Essene community and carrying over into tannaitic and amoraic times. Efros says regarding the angelic hosts that in the time of the Bible, there was a direct relationship between God and the angels. The angels carried Gods' message to Man, from heaven to earth. Under this structure, God became far too remote for man to comprehend. The hierarchy of angels required to get a message across became ever so complicated. Therefore a new system had to be born. The Holiness of God was enhanced with a new found Glorification of God. Man took a more active role in relating to God and strove to be unified with God. ⁶⁰

59 HR 14:4-5

60 Israel Efros, Ancient Jewish Philosophy, Bloch, 1976. p. 32-38.

As Efros states:

When Holiness winced at the thought of God's coming down, Glory came and made man ascend. Classical Judaism also saw in man's ascension a removal of boundaries.

Thus apocalypse abandoned prophetic communion and offered a kind of revelation, not in which God is active and man passive but in which man rises and with the aid of angels unveils the tablets of heaven. It was not really divine revelation but a mystic human ascent and discovery. ⁶¹

So, the angelic hosts and the seals that one must show them for admission to the palaces, play a highly important role not only within this text but within the larger whole of Judaism. We shall now turn to the journey itself and the attempts by the angelic hosts to prevent the mystic from gaining an ecstatic vision of God.

3. Surmounting Angelic Opposition

In this section we will see how exacting the praxis is for the journey to the Hekhal of God. As we have already seen, the journey begins with the mystic calling on Surya, the Angel of the Divine Presence, and conjuring him 112 times. In 14:5, he is to count exactly 112 times or "his blood is on his head." We get an initial vision of the awesomeness of this vision in 15:8 when the angels at the seventh hekhal appear thusly:

They stand angry and war-like, strong, harsh, fearful, and terrifying, taller than mountains

⁶¹ *ibid* p. 33

and sharper than peaks. Their bows are strung and stand before them. Their swords are sharpened and in their hands. Bolts of lightning flow and issue forth from their eyes, and balls of fire from their nostrils, and torches of fiery coals from their mouths. They are equipped with helmets and chain-mail coats, and javelins and spears are hung from their arms.

Their horses are horses of darkness, horses of death, horses of misfortune, horses of fire, horses of blood, horses of hail, horses of iron, and horses of fog. The horses upon which they ride stand beside mangers of fire, full of coals and juniper, and they eat fiery coals from the mangers, taking a measure of forty seahs in one mouthful. And the measure of the mouth of each horse is three mangers the size of the mangers of Cesarea. ⁶²

Besides the beginning of the journey where the mystic was to recite the name of Surya a certain number of times or face the consequences, the mystic really faced danger when he approached the sixth hekhal. In 17:6 we find:

Now the guards of the sixth palace make a practice of killing those who go and do not go down with permission. They hover over them, and strike them, and burn them.

In chapter 24 we are given a view of the tests that the mystic must pass in order to move on to the seventh palace. In the text we find:

If one is worthy to descend to the Merkavah, when they (the Angels) say to him "Enter", he does not enter. They repeat it to him, "Enter" and he enters immediately. They praise him as though to say, certainly this is one of the descenders to the Merkavah. But if he is not worthy to descend to the Merkavah, when they say to him "Enter", he enters immediately.

They then throw thousands of iron bars on him.
63

Another challenge comes just a few lines later when we have a passage that is taken from Tosefta Haggigah 2:3. 64 In Hekhalot Rabbati 24 we are relayed the test of the water:

The guards of the gates of the sixth palace make a mirage for him of a million waves of water and there is not any water there, not even a drop. And if one says: "What is the nature of this water?" They immediately run after him, stoning him and say: "Stupid, perhaps you are from the seed of those who kissed the golden calf. You are not worthy to see the King and His Throne of Glory." He does not move from there until they throw a million bars of iron on him.

The sixth palace becomes the proving grounds for all who desire to proceed on to the seventh palace. The mystic must be patient and ready for all the obstacles that will be placed in his way. He must be able to distinguish between appearance and reality. If we recall the change from prophetic revelation where the angels were the medium between God and Man, to the time when man could ascend directly without the angels (?), we can understand how there would be a need for the angels to impede the relationship of Man and God. 65 Now, we turn to the end of the journey. What does the mystic experience?

63 ibid 24

64 see infra p. 72.

65 The reference to indirect prophetic revelation can be found in Efros, Ancient Jewish Philosophy p. 32. He states that even the Mosaic revelation was through an angel.

C. VISION OF THE DIVINE

As one readies for the apex of the journey, he must reaffirm certain pre-requisites that were necessary for the journey to begin in the first place. One must be well versed in the words of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, and be equally versed in the tannaitic literature and law. One must also be fully observant and faithful to the teachings of Judaism. Given the fulfillment of these virtues, the mystic is able to continue on his way.

We return to the gate of the sixth palace. The mystic readies the seals which he has prepared to show to the ministering angels on the left and right of the door to the palace. He shows one seal to Dumiel and three to Katzpiel. Immediately the angels sheath their swords and unload their bows and escort the mystic on through the gate. 66 The mystic is placed in a carriage of light and a multitude of horns are sounded. Dumiel, the angel, precedes the chariot on its journey. Dumiel asks the mystic to affirm his piety and purity. Once this is done, Gabriel records the affirmation and send the chariot on its way.

As the carriage approaches the seventh palace, the guardian angels see that the carriage is preceeded by

Dumiel, Katzpiel, and Gabriel. They lay down their arms and await the seals that are needed for this part of the journey. Morton Smith finds in this section concerning the seals, a reflection of the greek words "Chaos, Uranos, Ges, and Despotes (chaos, heaven, earth, and Lord)." ⁶⁷ Once these seals are shown, the ministering angels bring the mystic before the Throne of Glory and play for him all kinds of music and song. They then bring him and sit him beside the Holy Hayot, Cherubim, and Ofanim. There he sees wonders and powers, majesty and greatness, holiness and purity, terror and meekness, and righteousness, at the same time.

1. The Vision

As the gates to the seventh palace are opened, the mystic's first view is of the Holy Creatures. ⁶⁸ The mystic sees that there are "256 wings per Holy Creature in the seventh palace." ⁶⁹ The mystic then views the most awesome creatures of all. He sees "five hundred and twelve eyes per creature." ⁷⁰ Each creature has four faces of human proportions and each face has sixteen separate faces. ⁷¹ As the mystic stands in the doorway

⁶⁷ Morton, Smith, art. cit. p. 146

⁶⁸ This section can be traced to the vision in Ezekiel 1 of the Holy Hayot.

⁶⁹ HR 22:5

⁷⁰ HR 23:1

⁷¹ In spite of my distaste for mathematics I have calculated these figures. There are four Holy Hayot.

to the palace, he stands in awe of the 512 eyes plus the eyes of the Cherubim and Ofanim.

The mystic is overwhelmed by fear as well as by awe. He collapses backwards. ⁷² Anafiel, the guide of the seventh palace, and sixty-three of the gate-keepers, help him and reassure him. ⁷³ They, the Holy Hayot, then blow a trumpet from "above the vault which is over the heads of the Hayot." ⁷⁴ The mystic then begins to recite, with the aid of the angelic hosts, a number of "Glory Hymns." The hymns are designed to comfort the mystic in this very emotional setting. ⁷⁵

What is missing from this text is a description of the Deity. Nowhere in the text is such a description present. We have hints in the hymns of God's characteristics. God is "true and solitary", "omnipotent", "omniscient", "just and clear", "full of praise", etc. ⁷⁶ In the end, the mystic reports three things: he faints but is supported by the angelic hosts, he hears the hymns recited before God, he receives a revelation from God (The Sar Torah material). he does

Each one has four faces. Each face has sixteen faces.
Each face has two eyes. $4 \times 4 = 16$; $16 \times 16 = 256$; $256 \times 2 = 512$.

72 HR 23:2

73 There are eight gate-keepers at each of the first six gates. There are sixteen at the seventh gate. $8 \times 6 = 48$; $48 + 15 = 63$; $63 + \text{Anafiel} = 64$.

74 This is taken by all to mean the eighth palace or the abode of God.

75 In note to Mishna 4, David Blumenthal, Understanding Jewish Mysticism, KTAV, NY, 1978 proposes that the acrostic nature and rhythmic feel of these hymns assists the meditative state of the mystic.

76 HR 24

not tell us what the Throne looks like nor does he report what sits upon the Throne. Rather, he states that God is shielded by Anafiel.

2. Unio Mystica or Vision from Afar?

The question of whether or not such a vision is actual mystical union with God has been debated by many scholars. Generally speaking, the kabbalists were wary of speaking of an actual mystical union of the soul with God. Later mystics (middle ages) spoke of deveikut, a spiritual communion. But the early literature does not give any conclusive evidence to support unio mystica. As we shall see, each person that approaches this question brings to it certain evidence in support of his position.

In his work on mysticism, David Blumenthal states:

What type of mystical experience is it? It is not a unification of the mystic with God. It is not even a separation of the soul from the body, or a return of the separated soul to its Source. It is an ecstasy, not in the proper sense of the word ("standing outside oneself") but in the general, sublime sense of the word. It is not a descent into one's own self or a voyage into nothingness, but a coming before the King. Properly put, this type of mysticism is a "visionary mysticism"- "visionary" because the mystic sees and hears something of the supernal world, and "mystical" because he must prepare for it and work toward it.⁷⁷

Scholem states that all forms of mystical experience have fallen under the categorization of "unio mystica," therefore, the term has become meaningless. He states:

⁷⁷ David Blumenthal, op. cit. p.91.

Numerous mystics, Jews as well as non-Jews, have by no means represented the essence of their ecstatic experience, the tremendous uprush and soaring of the soul to its highest plane, as a union with God. ⁷⁸

David Blumenthal agrees with the opinion expressed by Scholem in that there is no evidence in this literature for mystical union.

Ecstasy there was, and this fundamental experience must have been a source of religious inspiration, but we find no trace of a mystical union between soul and God. Throughout there remained an almost exaggerated consciousness of God's "otherness", nor does the identity and individuality of the mystic become blurred even at the height of ecstatic passion. The Creator and His creature remain apart, and nowhere is an attempt made to bridge the gulf between them or to blur the distinction. The mystic who in his ecstasy has passed before the throne; he sees and hears - but that is all. ⁷⁹

Given the reliance on the "eighth palace" the text assumes a certain level of Divine transcendence. ⁸⁰ Yet there remains a hint of the immanence of God.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As our survey draws to a close, we can draw several conclusions as to the contents, characteristics, theology, themes, and purpose behind this material. No doubt the authors of this material were well versed in

⁷⁸ Gershom Scholem, Major Trends... , p. 5

⁷⁹ Ibid pp. 55-6

⁸⁰ Gruenwald, op.cit. p. 153

Jewish texts. ⁸¹ The text is full of biblical and rabbinic textual references. We shall now turn to some of the interesting contents.

A. Contents

Hekhalot Rabbati is a composite work, full of material collected over at least a six hundred year period. ⁸² It is divided into three main sections. Chapters 1-12 are full of the requirements for the descent, a collection of mystical hymns that enables the mystic to arrive at a mystial state, and a warning that anyone who attempts such a journey, does so at his own risk. Chapters 13-26 contain the detailed account of the journey, the angelology, and the vision of the Throne of Glory. This section also contains the hymns that one recites in the presence of the Deity and that Deity recites to the mystic. Chapters 27-31 contain the Sar Torah material in which God reveals the essence of Torah study and the secret method by which one memorizes the entire Torah.

Within the first section there is an additional gem of material. The "ten-martyrs-apocalypse" is incorporated in chapters 4:3-7. As Gruenwald says, it is

⁸¹ Some have said that these mystics were outside the pale of Judaism. Scholem feels that the gnosticism of those who practiced this form of mysticism was more Hellenized than Jewish.

⁸² Scholem, op. cit. p. 44

not clear when this section became part of the text, yet all versions of the manuscript contain it.⁸³ This material serves as the genesis of the journey. R. Nechuniah ben Hakkanah asks R. Yishmael to descend to the Merkavah in order to understand why certain sages were to be put to death. His journey sets up a theme of journey to understand all there is to be understood.

Other interesting contents to be noted are the angelology and hierarchy that appear in chapters 15-19, the recounting of the story of the four who entered the orchard, and the vision at the summit that is quite similar to Ezekiel I.

B. Characteristics

There are many different characteristic ideas within this text. First, and most pronounced, is the rabbinic nature of the work. We shall go into further detail in the section on theology but, let us say that there is a distinct rabbinic flavor to this work as evidenced through piety, ritual purity, and knowledge of the tradition. Second, there is the magical element. Through the use of the angelic seals and signs, the conjuring of the angel Surya, and the highly mystical nature of the hymns, we can see that this text has many magical themes. The mystic is placed in a trance. He

⁸³ Gruenwald op. cit. p. 157

then undergoes a journey, guided by angelic beings while reciting certain very powerful formulas. The assistants sit around the mystic as if they were at a seance. They record all that the mystic says as if he were talking aloud and did not realize it.

Third, this mysticism is not secret. The mystic is told to let it be known what he has seen and heard. He reveals many things. The imagery is anthropomorphic, yet clouded. Fourth, the text is oriented around the times of prayer. God is said to reside in the eighth palace and to descend to the seventh palace (the palace of mystical experience) three times a day. This corresponds to the three times of daily prayer. The recitation of the trishagion becomes part of the mystical hymn. Fifth, there is a distinctive attempt on the part of the angelic hosts to distance God from man. When the mystic arrives at the sixth palace (one step away from the summit) the angels attempt to trick him. It is to the angels benefit that God remains fully transcendent. The angels retain their place in the close relationship with God.

Sixth, this is a very dynamic system. We learn that there is indeed a mystical "praxis"; the story of R. Yochanan ben Zakkai and R. Eleazar in Tosefta Hagigah attests to this. The material (hymns, angelology, and midrashic stories) in this text give the mystic a way to approach God on His Throne. Smith states:

The Hekhalot books are not merely theoretical or imaginative works, but reflections on actual practice.⁸⁴

Finally, there is a pseudo-historical vein to this work. The ascent section, and the imposition of midrashic form on the whole, show how this work was attached to the leading rabbinic figures of the talmudic period.⁸⁵ There was a need, as with many literary formulas, to attach the work to a leading figure. The examples of this date back to biblical days.

These are just a few of the texts main characteristics. It is a short yet complex work that contains many different strata. Now we shall turn to the theology of the work.

C. Theology

Hekhalot Rabbati has a definite rabbinic mindset. In the text, God is absolutely transcendent. Monotheism is supreme. Granted there is a distinct angelic hierarchy, but, it is distant from God. Man can approach God when properly prepared. The prayer aspects of the literature are strictly rabbinic.

As stated explicitly in chapter 9, God's descent to the Throne of Glory corresponds to the time of daily prayer. As Gruenwald says, "the mystical ideas of prayer

⁸⁴ Morton Smith, art. cit. p. 154

⁸⁵ Cf. Ira Chernus, op. cit. and David Halperin, op. cit. who address the issue of midrash and mysticism.

occupy in Hekhalot Rabbati a much more prominent place than has hitherto been noticed." ⁸⁶ Much text is filled with references to God descending from the eighth palace to the seventh in order to hear the mystical incantations and prayers.

Another clue to the orthodox nature of this literature is its halakhic ties. ⁸⁷ As Scholem states:

For them (the Yordei Merkavah) the Halakhah never became a province of thought in which they felt themselves strangers. Right from the beginning and with growing determination, they sought to master the world of the Halakhah as a whole and in every detail...Every mitzvah became an event of cosmic importance, an act which had a bearing upon the dynamics of the universe. ⁸⁸

This tie to the halakhic teachings of Judaism is expressed within the text. First there is the presecrption that the mystic must be ritually pure. We look at chapter 20:

No one sucessfully goes down to the merkavah who does not have the following two virtues. he must have repeatedly studied the Torah, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings, and he must have repeatedly studied Mishna, Halakhah, Aggadah, and the rendering of legal decisions on what is permissible and forbidden. Also, he must have observed all of the Torah in its entirety, observing all the warnings, the statutes, the judgements, and the teachings which were given to Moses on Sinai. ⁸⁹

Second, we have the story in chapter 18 about R. Nechunia ben Hakkanah and R. Yishmael. The members of the yeshiva

⁸⁶ Gruenwald, op. cit. p. 155

⁸⁷ Cf. Scholem, "The Halakhic Character of Hekhalot Mysticism" in Jewish Gnosticism, pp. 9-13

⁸⁸ Scholem, Major Trends, pp. 29-30

⁸⁹ HR 20:1

were seated around R. Nechunia as he underwent a journey on the Chariot. When he relayed a puzzling question, the students wanted to recall him from his journey and ask the significance of a point. What follows is a description of the rabbis exposing a piece of cloth to a woman who was ritually unclean and then exposing that unclean cloth to R. Nechunia. This act of ritual desecration cause the angels to release R. Nechunia from his journey so that the students could ask their question.⁹⁰

What is important here is the demonstration that even the slightest possible suspicion of impurity is enough to have the mystic dismissed. Certainly the case can be made that this literature contains many references to "Gnosis." But as Scholem states, it is rabbinic Gnosis, and the illuminations and revelations granted to the adepts as such to conform to the Jewish vision of the hierarchy of beings. Indeed, this text goes to great lengths to stress its strict tie to the halakhic tradition.⁹¹

D. Sensitivities

There is a current running throughout this literature. Is this a form of "Jewish Gnosticism" or is it "Anti-Gnosticism"? Gershom Scholem was probably the

⁹⁰ HR 18:1-3

⁹¹ Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, p. 10

most voiciferous advocate of the former position. He views the whole body of Hekhalot literature as a Jewish variation on the chief preoccupations of the second and third century gnostics. In his opinion, the activities described in the text: the ascent of the soul, angelology, the return to this world, signify the central ideas of Gnosticism.⁹²

Ira Chernus takes the opposite track. His view is that the whole of Merkavah mysticism was based on many of the "Sinai midrashim." These midrashim have a very "traditional" view of the Sinaitic revelation and would be diametrically opposed to the dualism of true Gnosticism. In his writing, he disagrees with Scholem. he says:

If, then, the Merkabah mystics of the third century modeled their experience on the Sinai midrashim, they were clearly denying any relationship with the basic concepts of Gnosticism, though they may have borrowed some external techniques and features from the Gnostics. If, on the other hand, the tannaim were shaping their midrash to conform with existing Merkabah mysticism, they were saying implicitly that Merkabah mysticism was consistent with a law-affirming and history-affirming Judaism in which Sinai must continue to be of central importance.⁹³

In other words, he denies the "gnostic sensitivities" that Scholem describes. Gruenwald also disagrees with Scholem. He says that the relevant material in the Hekhalot literature shows no formal ties to the gnostic beliefs.

⁹² Scholem, Major Trends, p. 49

⁹³ Chernus, op. cit. p. 14

In his survey of the Hekhalot literature he states emphatically that:

We always have to keep in mind that gnosticism was a religious phenomenon diametrically opposed to everything Jewish; in fact, the God of the Jews was considered by the gnostics an evil deity. If we keep this in mind, it becomes clear that the Jewish mystics, who were everything but downright heretics, avoided all conscious contacts with the gnostics, their concepts, their practices and their writings.
94

In fact, as Gruenwald has pointed out, the gnostic writings were in one way or another influenced by Jewish thought and beliefs. He is sure that a number of Jewish ideas and concepts found their way into gnosticism, in spite of the fact that gnosticism totally rejected Judaism. 95

Finally, to introduce an opinion that walks a thin line between these two positions, we turn to an article by Robert M. Gimello. He states that the mysticism of a certain religious system is essentially formed by that system, and our assessment of that experience must be viewed in the light of that system. 96 It is left to us to determine whether or not gnostic beliefs were a part of the general cultural milieu or not.

E. Why do we study esoteric literature?

94 Gruenwald, op. cit. p. 111

95 ibid, p. 112

96 Robert Gimello, "Mysticism in its Contexts" in Katz, Mysticism and Religious Tradition, p. 85

We now bring our study full circle. We began with a statement by Underhill that explains what attracts humanity to the study of esoterica. We now close by demonstrating what can be gained from this material. In one of the many popular works on the subject, Herbert Weiner answers this question. He states:

U'v'chen - and so? Returning to the main question and asking what Jewish mysticism can offer children from the chamber of yearnings in our day, one might reply: not only a way of going out, but a tested and quite effective system of return. A way of preventing the ecstatic flame from consuming the soul. A way of using every high so that it lifted the lows. The desire to tie heaven to earth is not, to be sure, an exclusively Jewish goal, but the stubbornness, energy, and measure of success which accompanied this attempted unification in Judaism is perhaps singular in the history of religion. Its secrets, in an age which has seen the bankruptcy of so many attempts to balance spirit and flesh, its exits and reentries, would seem worthy of serious consideration.⁹⁷

Weiner gives us an initial hint at the overarching importance of this study. But his is a popular approach. What brings scholars together to study this literature? Why is there more and more material emerging every year?

We turn first to Gershom Scholem to see his answer. Scholem was a scholar of mysticism but was far from being a mystic. By the tone of his lectures which were full of skepticism and doubt, we can surmise that his interests were historical and philological. He notes the influence of the Kabbalah on society, both Jewish and non-Jewish,

⁹⁷ Herbert Weiner, 9 1/2 Mystics, Macmillian, NY, 1969.
p. 336

and the initial push by Christian scholarship in these areas to create a science of study. From a Jewish point of view, he notes that the major influence was felt in the areas of prayer, custom, and ethics. Kabbalistic prayers entered into the synagogal liturgy and folk-mores arose around the mystical piety of the rabbis of the esoteric literature. Certain pietistic rites were created according to those expounded in the literature. Most of these rites were tied to the latter works. It is my opinion that the historical aspects of the study of this literature is what has lighted a spark in Scholem.

Ithamar Gruenwald looks at this literature as a body of material full of secret knowledge and lore. He spends much time identifying all the textual interpolations that are in the literature and how they have been changed from their original context. He analyzes eight different texts plus sections of additional material and compares their contents. As a scholar, he wants to give the most objective view he can. He, like Scholem, is a skeptic and must fight his urge to debunk this valuable aspect of Jewish thought.

Ira Chernus approaches this literature from a different vein. He is concerned with the relationship between Merkabah mysticism and rabbinic Judaism as reflected in rabbinic midrash. It is his conclusion that the literature of Merkavah mysticism reflects the themes present in the midrash of Sinai and the O'lam ha-ba.

David Halperin works in much the same way with the literature of the talmud and other texts. His aim, which I feel he succeeds in, is to bring to light this literature as manifested in Tannaitic and Amoraic times.

Whichever scholar or author one refers too, the goals are the same. These individuals hope to breath life into a tradition that has existed for almost two millenia. Whether from a historical standpoint or a philological bias, a scholarly bent or a popular hope, these works bring to the layman a view of the Divine. It is an ecstatic vision, one available to all who are pure of heart and soul.

In conclusion, I wish to offer my own assessment of this literature. It is a rich tradition, full of secret knowledge and esoteric material. From a skeptic's view it is hard to believe the angelology and mystical dangers. I feel that it does hold vital importance in any study of the development of Jewish philosophy. It is also important in its own right. It traces the beginnings of an important kind of religious fervor which continues to this day. As a Jew or non-Jew living in the twentieth century, the desire for some system to bring a person to a higher level of consciousness, is widely felt. The text of Hekhalot Rabbati gives us a mystical praxis. Granted, it is one not used today. Yet, its

calls for piety and ritual purity are valid today as they were two thousand years ago.

We are tied into a chain of tradition that knows no time boundaries. We have a responsibility to keep alive those aspects of our tradition that hold meaning for us. I only hope that through this survey of this literature, you have seen some of the value in its perpetuation.

In the next chapter we shall place one more link in the chain of tradition. We hope to examine the possible influence of a transmission of ideas from Judaism to Greek philosophy and visa-versa. As we have seen in this chapter, Plotinus and the ideas presented in this text, existed at approximately the same time. Was there a sharing of tradition. or did their ideas develop separately?

CHAPTER IV

Unio Mystica or Aspaklaria?I. INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD OF COMPARITIVE MYSTICISM

I shall begin this final chapter in our study with the words of Bertrand Russell, a prominent anti-religionist: "The greatest men who have been philosophers have felt the need both of science and mysticism." He continues by saying that the union of these two seemingly contradictory concepts forms "the highest eminence, as I think, that it is possible to achieve in the world of thought." Further, "this emotion (mysticism) is the inspirer of whatever is best in man." ¹ We begin in this way because the words of Russell express the core of this thesis. The search for evidence of a blending of traditions, of philosophic and religious mysticism, is the subject of much research. This study focuses on one aspect of that conjunction. Our focus is on "the journey" as a theme in mystical literature.

¹ Bertrand Russell, Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays, London, Longmans, Green and Co. 1921 pp. 1,4, and 12. As quoted from W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, London, Macmillian Press, 1960 p. 13. In spite of the fact that Russell is an ardent anti-religionist, his words at this point demonstrate the point that there is a need for both science(philosophy) and mysticism. Concerning his linking of emotion and mysticism, I would respond that that is one way of looking at the whole realm of mystical study. I have proposed other definitions in Chapter III.

Mystics throughout the ages have described the spiritual life as a journey or pilgrimage.² The motif of heavenly journey is found throughout world literature.³ The Sufi - for example, advances along a "path." He calls himself a "traveler." He is embarking on an inner journey, an interior ascent. By an "inner journey," we mean an ascent of the soul - the inner self - to a higher level at which the soul is "pure" enough or "godly" enough to experience the highest level of reality - the Divine. Indian mysticism speaks of different levels of consciousness. At each level the "soul" gains a more complete experience. The three levels are: jagrat-a state of awakesness, the soul is caught in a wave of sensory perceptions; swapna-a dream state. The beginning of definition of sense data; sushupti-the highest form of consciousness. Man is freed from the restrictions of all senses and pursues ultimate unity with the divine.

In another vein, the Dhyana of Buddhism, Dzyan in Tibet, Ch'an in China, and Zen in Japan, correspond closely to the via mystica of Christianity. It begins by a simple discipline of the mind and control of the emotions corresponding to the via purgativa. It further leads to states of felicity and universal enlightenment which are a replica of the via illuminativa. Finally it

² William Kaufman, Journey's, Bloch, New York, 1980. p. 11.

³ Mary Dean-Otting, Heavenly Journey's, Frankfurt-am-Main, Bern, New York, 1984. p. 1.

ends in a sublime union with the undescribable glory of the Supreme. ⁴

Judaism is also replete with examples of the heavenly journey motif. In Mary Dean-Ottings work, she traces the theme throughout the apocryphal literature. As she surmises from her study,

"what binds these diverse texts together in a broad way is the idea that man can learn secrets of the cosmos and gain a knowledge which is normally beyond his ken." ⁵

This must be the general goal behind all of these types of works. Man is in search of ultimates or absolutes. Dean-Otting continues and gives us a more specific list of characteristics that bind the Jewish apocalypics together. ⁶

1. The vision overcomes the main character; he does not request the ascent.
2. The ascent takes place in a sleeping state,
3. The narrative is given in the first person.
4. An angel-guide accompanies the one ascending.
5. A question-answer dialogue is the format through which the revelation is given.
6. There are a number of levels or heavens.
7. The temple setting lends its structure to the ascension.

⁴ Jacques de Marquette, Introduction to Comparative Mysticism, Philosophical Library, New York, 1949. p. 94.

⁵ Mary Dean-Otting, op. cit. p.4

⁶ What is interesting to note here is the rise of the Jewish apocalypics in the last 250 years of the Second Temple. These individuals took the essence of biblical scripture and added analysis, explication, and philosophy. They took the teachings beyond that which was relegated to them during that period in history.

8. There is a judgement scene or intimation of eschatological judgement.
9. There is a revelation of mysteries.
10. The glory of God, if not a view of Deity as DOXA enthroned, plays a central role.
11. The journey is finite and ends with the main character returning to earth.⁷

Among the many different works that she researched, this characterization may hold. I must reject her claim if it is to include the text under discussion in this work. Points 1,2,3 and 5 are not found as valid in my reading of Hekhalot Rabbati (hence referred to as H.R.). In H.R. the mystic pursues the mystical state through certain ascetic practices. It takes place in a meditative state where the mystic still communicates with those around him. In our case, the narrative is given in the second or third person. Finally, the experience culminates in a silent vision of the Deity, not verbal intercourse as she suggests. Nevertheless, her work is important in the general study of ascension literature.

Before we attempt to characterize our works, we must answer some very important questions. First, do mysticism and philosophy have some relationship or is comparing them like comparing apples and oranges? Second, are studies such as this philosophical exegesis or eisegesis?

⁷ Dean-Otting, op. cit.

A. Mysticism and Philosophy?

It is the purpose of this section to discuss the nature of a philosophical study of a mystical system. We shall begin by saying that there are many who feel that it is impossible to conduct such a study. Most notably Bertrand Russell who says that the essence of mysticism is emotion. ⁸ Emotions are not a part of the philosophical enterprise because they can hold no objective truth, only subjective feeling.⁹ As W.T. Stace points out, this view is faulty. ¹⁰ It was noted in the previous chapter, this claim, that mysticism is emotion, is not always the case. There is a place for mysticism in the philosophical world. As we hope to see further in this chapter, Plotinus, the quintessential Neo-Platonic philosopher was both a mystic and a philosopher.

Stace makes the claim that it is possible to study mysticism from the "outside" by using the analogy of Mohammed and the donkey. In this analogy, Mohammed compared a scholar or philosopher of mysticism who writes from a purely theoretical knowledge to a donkey carrying a load of books. In the story, Mohammed claims that the non-mystic can have no more knowledge of mysticism than

⁸ W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, St. Martins Press, New York, 1960. p. 14.

⁹ See note 1. for information as to the worth of Russell in this vein.

¹⁰ W.T. Stace, op. cit. p. 15.

the donkey can have of the books he is carrying. There is some plausibility to this reasoning in that, as Stace points out, a blind person is at a psychological disadvantage in the study of light as the non-mystic is at a disadvantage in the study of mysticism. Yet, it is possible that the blind person can contribute something of value to the study of light and the mystic can contribute something of value to the study of mysticism.

¹¹ In other words, blind people can often overcome their handicap and learn the proper use of the color language. Nevertheless, it is a struggle.

Stace concludes that the two fields of philosophy and mysticism cross. On the one hand, the philosopher attempts to study the writings and accounts of mystics and make cogent studies of their contents. Many have done this, and many will continue to do this. It is the nature of scholarship in this field. The mystical accounts need systematic probing in order to find the true meaning and relevance to the non-mystical world. Just as the spiritual beauty of mystical accounts draws many to its fold, so too, does the philosophical study of its tenets draw many followers.

On the other hand, many mystics tend to philosophize. As Stace notes:

In doing so they descend to the intellectual plane and therefore cannot expect to escape from intellectual criticism and analysis ... They make general philosophical inferences

¹¹ W.T. Stace op. cit. p. 18-19

about the world, about the nature of reality, about the status and source of value judgements - all of which matters fall within the legitimate province of the philosopher.¹²

There is a blending of approaches. One is based on the spiritual accounting of individuals and one is based on the philosophic probings of others. As I have argued, there is a conjunction. The purpose of this work and this chapter is to find out when and where it occurred.

B. Eisegesis or Exegesis?

The question asked in this section is one usually asked by the scholars in the field of Bible. Some may argue that this question is injected into a place in which it does not belong. What I am attempting to do in asking this question is to decide whether or not such a comparision is born from pretext or context.

Our first task is to define the terms used in the title of this section. For students of Biblical literature, these are familiar terms. But, for others these terms need to be explained. First, we have the term eisegesis. According to Richard Soulen:

Eisegesis (Greek: to lead, bring, or introduce into). In the interpretation of Scripture, eisegesis refers to the practice of reading into a text the meaning which one wants to get out of it.¹³

¹² W.T. Stace op. cit. p. 22

¹³ Richard Soulen, Handbook of Biblical Criticism, Knox Press, Atlanta 1971. p. 60.

In spite of the fact that this word is used in relation to biblical literature, we can still see the relevance for our study. The question can be asked whether the results of comparative studies are born from preconceived notions or are the results found through comparative study itself?

There is a second term in our topic heading quite similar in scope and content to the one previously described. Again we turn to Soulen:

Exegesis (Greek: explanation, interpretation). Broadly speaking, exegesis is the process by which a text, as a concrete expression of a "sender" to a "receiver," is systematically explained.¹⁴

The boundaries between these two definitions can become blurred when a person approaches the text with certain preconceived notions, specifically when the preconceived notions are presented as pure exegesis. The question is consistently raised whether there is such a thing as pure exegesis. Inherent in any systematic explanation of a passage is an attempt to draw out its relevance for the time frame in which it is being interpreted.

I raise this issue out of a need to inform the readers of the genesis of this work. It was begun with the hope of finding a direct link between the two works under investigation in this document. It could be said that the impetus was eisegetical. Over the two year development of this work, the focus has changed. What

¹⁴ ibid p. 66.

lies before the reader is as close to pure comparative exegesis of the two works as is possible for me, given the language and time barriers. The subject is by no means exhausted. I hope that some interest in these two works is sparked so that further research into this discipline will be undertaken.

In the next two sections we will place side by side many aspects of the textual similarities and differences. Then we shall hope to draw some further conclusions in the final section of the chapter.

II. ASPECTS OF COMPARISON

In making a comparison between the two works under study in this paper, it becomes necessary to divide the aspects of comparison along rather broad lines. We will be comparing these works along five major themes. They are: 1) the ascetic practices of the mystic/philosopher, 2) the language and terminology of the works, 3) the liturgical nature of the work, 4) the stages of the journey, 5) the vision or "at-one-ness".

As will be the case in all sections of comparison, the study shall first look to the Enneads of Plotinus then to Hekhalot Rabbati for evidence.

A. Ascetic Practices

An ascetic is defined as "a person who renounces the comforts of society and leads a life of austere self-discipline, especially as an act of religious devotion."

¹⁵ By ascetic practices, we mean the necessary preparations that the mystic had to go through in order to prepare himself for the "journey".

Evelyn Underhill says that there is a five step process towards mystical union.

- 1) The awakening of the Self to consciousness of Divine Reality.
- 2) The Self eliminates by discipline and mortification all that stands in the way of its progress towards union with God.
- 3) Enhanced consciousness (from steps one and two), then Illumination or Contemplation.
- 4) "Mystic Pain" or "Mystic Death" is the death of human happiness. The ultimate purgation of the Soul.
- 5) The mystical Union with the Divine Power.¹⁶

These five steps, four of which are preparatory, lead to the completion of and "conversion" to the mystical discipline. The outline she has proposed is not exhaustive. Others have proposed different stages of the mystical journey. Most agree that there is some form of ascetic/preparatory practice prior to mystical union.

Plotinus, the quintessential Neo-Platonic philosopher of the third century, gives us his system. We have discussed his ideas in general in Chapter II of

¹⁵ The American Heritage Dictionary, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1980.

¹⁶ Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism, Meridian Books, NY, 1957 pp. 169-70.

this study. Let us now turn to some of the specifics in his system.

Porphyry reports in the Vita Plotini of the activities of Plotinus prior to his experience which he had no less than four times. ¹⁷

There was shown to Plotinus the Term ever near: for the Term, the one end, of his life was to become Uniate, to approach to the God over all: and four times, during the period I passed with him, he achieved this Term, by no mere latent fitness but by the ineffable Act. ¹⁸

Plotinus' system was viewed as a praxis. Unfortunately, we are not told directly what he sees. Porphyry tells us that Plotinus did make the unitive journey. In fact, Porphyry tells us that he also made the journey.

To this God, I also declare, I Porphyry, that in my sixty-eighth year I too was once admitted and entered into Union. ¹⁹

We are interested in the preparation for the journey to the One as experienced by both Plotinus and Porphyry.

R.T. Wallis states that Plotinus was a mystic. ²⁰ Plotinus is a mystic in the sense that he claimed to have had had an experience of the One or Ultimate Reality. Plotinus' experience, as W.T. Stace relates, corresponds with the "undifferentiated unity", a state where sensual imagery and thought is transcended and replaced by pure reason and unified being. ²¹ In order to arrive at this

¹⁷ This is Porphyry's report.

¹⁸ Vita Plotini 23.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ R. T. Wallis, Neoplatonism, Duckworth, London, 1972 p. 3

²¹ Cf. W.T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy

point, one must undergo a purification process, a training in the art of philosophy. For Plotinus as well as for Plato, the purification of the soul is a philosophical exercise. Although, he does hold that moral self-discipline is essential to this purification.

As Wallis points out, Porphyry, though still regarding the philosophic method as necessary to salvation, took the view that it was too difficult for the average man. As an easier first step, he used the practice of theurgy, a system of ritual purification based on a magical view of the universe and derived from the Chaldaean Oracles.²² This use of theurgy became paradigmatic for later Greek neoplatonic thinkers.

The philosophical system of Plotinus can be explained in terms of introspection or contemplation. The philosopher/mystic prepares himself for the journey by turning inward in search of the most basic of tendencies within man. His movement is a deliberate "drawing inward" of thought, a sort of recessive suction of the intellect into itself.²³ Just as the theurgic practices of the later mystics and the meditations of the transcendentalists were used to free the mind of earthly bounds, so too the introspective process was used by

²² R. T. Wallis, *Op. Cit.* p. 3. Theurgy is defined by the *Encyclopedia of Religion* as "actions that induce or bring about the presence of a divine or supernatural being." It was a practice closely related to magic.

²³ *Enneads* VI, 9, 8. Plotinus speaks of "circling," not "drawing inward." The idea used here seems closer to the meaning of Plotinus. See O'Brien, *The Essential Plotinus* pp. 26ff. for further elucidation on this point.

Plotinus to bring about the mystical state.²⁴ Although we have some evidence from Porphyry concerning ascetic practices used to prepare oneself for the journey, we have little support in the writings of Plotinus. All he gives us is the philosophical topic of contemplation which carries him on his journey.

Now, we turn to Hekhalot Rabbati for evidence of preparatory practices. Hekhalot Rabbati, as well as most other Hekhalot writings, are written like mystical manuals, describing at some length what should be done in order to achieve the desired experience. In this regard, these writings are mystical guides to experiences. These experiences carry the mystic from the realm of worldly matters to the higher realm of God.

From the very first statement of the text, it becomes clear that mystical formulae and magical incantations and names form a major part of the practices needed to fulfill the goal of the journey.²⁵ Itamar Gruenwald states that these opening sections of the text may be interpreted as reflecting a stage where mysticism declined into "wondermaking".²⁶ The proper performance of the necessary rituals leading up to the mystical journey grants the mystic certain powers. The mystic

²⁴ Transcendentalism is a philosophy which promotes the spiritual and the intuitive over the empirical and rational. It is connected with Kant, although the ideas are older.

²⁵ Itamar Gruenwald, Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1982 p. 151. See also HR 1:1.

²⁶ Ibid.

becomes able to identify those who transgress halakha. ²⁷
 In addition, the mystics social status is lifted through his ability to know the future of individuals. Third, the mystic is given supernatural "protectsia" against his enemies. ²⁸

The special "hymns" that the mystic recites during the journey resemble the same songs of praise that are supposedly sung by the angelic beings to God who sits on the divine throne. ²⁹ As Gruenwald continues, the idea of the mystics sharing the songs of the angels comes close to the idea expressed by the Qumran sects that partnership with the angels, and, ultimately with God, was of the essence. ³⁰

Beyond the magical, there is also the religious. Hekhalot Rabbati is the work of pious Jews. The halakhic requirements for a person who desires to make the journey are strict. The text gives us a list.

No one goes down to the Merkavah who does not have the following two virtues. He must have repeatedly studied the Torah, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings, and he must have repeatedly studied Mishna, Halakha, Aggadah, and the rendering of legal decisions on what is permissible and forbidden. Also, he must have observed all of the Torah in its entirety,

²⁷ religious law

²⁸ It has been suggested that the addition of these materials belongs to a much later stage in the development of mystical religion. It stems from the claim by Gruenwald and others that the digression into the areas of magic is caused by the lack of religious fervor in those times. As Gruenwald notes on p. 151, such supernatural qualities are found in Sefer Ha-Razim and Sefer Ha-Malbush.

²⁹ Gruenwald, op. cit. p. 152.

³⁰ Ibid

observing all the warnings, statutes, judgements, and teachings which were given to Moses at Sinai. ³¹

Beyond the specific knowledge of Torah and rabbinic law, there is also a need to be knowledgeable of philosophy.

³² This literature has a traditional vein running through it. It is because of the paradox posed by the inclusion of classical material and magical formulae that this literature is placed as a possible bridge between the Jewish and Hellenistic modes of thought. ³³

B. Language

In any comparative study of texts, it is necessary to look at the terminology that is used in expressing the author's intent. One comes up against two divergent views on this exercise. On the one hand there are those who feel that "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." In other words, there are those who view the exercise as a comparison of similar ideas in different terms. W.T. Stace expounds this view. He gives us the "principle of causal indifference. This view states:

If X has an alleged mystical experience P_1 and Y has an alleged mystical experience P_2 , and if the phenomenological characteristics of P_1 entirely resemble the phenomenological characteristics of P_2 so far as can be

³¹ HR 20:1

³² HR 14:1

³³ There is no Q.E.D. to prove this point. Scholem does hint at both the "halakhic" and "gnostic" natures of the "Hekhalot" texts. See Jewish Gnosticism for further explanations.

ascertained from the descriptions given by X and Y, then the two experiences cannot be regarded as being of two different kinds ... merely because they arise from dissimilar causal conditions.³⁴

$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{X} & = & \underline{Y} \\ P_1 & & P_2 \end{array} \quad \text{therefore} \quad P_1 = P_2$
--

In other words, regardless of the "sitz-im-leben," if the language is describing the same event or type of event, even with different terminology, the events should be regarded as equivalent. Stace uses this formula in regard to the use of drugs among some mystical circles. If the "true contemplative" experience, say of an Eckhart, is valid and cogent, then so should the drug induced experience of the African tribal mystics.

I feel that his formula has some credibility here. If the language of the Jewish mystic (Hebrew or Aramaic) is different from that of the Greek philosopher (Greek), and the characteristics of the experience are the same, then the connection can be made that the experiences are the same. This proposition seems logically self-evident. Objections can be raised, and have been, to this proof.

The other view proposed is that of contextual interpretation. Steven Katz, in his article, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism", raises this view. He states:

³⁴ W.T. Stace. Op. Cit. p. 29ff.

There are no pure experiences. Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or grounds for believing, that they are unmediated. That is to say, all experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. ³⁵

In order to understand a mystical experience, it is necessary to recognize that the report of the mystic is biased by the concepts that the mystic brings to that experience. For example, Plotinus' experience is shaped, not only by his Plato centered education and his upbringing in a wealthy family in Alexandria, but also by his travels with the army of Gabinius II and his study of Eastern mystic thought.

This view is also very enchanting. The use of the filter of "sitz-im-leben" is a popular approach. As Katz points out, different religious traditions have multiple mystical traditions. The Jewish mysticism of the 1st to 6th centuries (Hekhalot/Merkabah mysticism) is very different from that of the 13th century (Zoharic mysticism). ³⁶

Regardless of the view one chooses, whether Stace or Katz, it is necessary to look at some of the areas where terms and concepts are used that can be found in each text, and areas where loan words can be found. As we have stated earlier, there are no exact replicas. We can only approximate meanings.

³⁵ Steven Katz, "Language ..." Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis Oxford, NY, 1978 p. 26.
³⁶ Ibid. p. 27

1. Use of Loan Words and Concepts

Interestingly enough, the prevalence of loan words runs mainly from the Greek language to the Hebrew text. The most glaring example is argued by Professor Johanan H. Levy. He states regarding the name of one of the Angels - Dumiel - that the real name is not "Dumiel" but "Averghidrihm". He sees this as a corrupt transcription of the Greek: ἀῖρ , γῆ , ὕδωρ, (air, earth, and water). Levy suggests that the strange ending of the word also reflects the Greek "πῦρ" - fire. These four words are the four basic elements in Greek cosmology. ³⁷

The converse is hard to uncover. There are some concepts, most specifically "the One", where a sharing can be supported.

2. The One or God

The first concept that brings these two texts together is the concept of the One or God. First, let us turn to the Plotinian concept of the 'One'. As we saw in Chapter II of this investigation, Plotinus' "One" occupies the center of his philosophical exercise. In The Essential Plotinus, Elmer O'Brian explains this concept. He writes, "It is by the One that all beings

³⁷ J.H. Levy Studies in Jewish Hellenism, Jerusalem, Bialik 1969. p. 261.

are beings." ³⁸ The "One" is an authentic unity. It is not a part of a multiplicity of meanings. It has only one meaning. There is no duality, for to be a duality, there must be more than one. If there were a duality, there could be no "One". ³⁹

In searching further in the Enneads for references to the "One", we find that all things are in the One and the One is not in anything, but all things depend upon It. ⁴⁰ The One is not form, or any particular, definable thing; so in this sense It is said to be "beyond being." But to call it "beyond being" is not to give it any sort of definition of It, but simply to indicate that It is indefinable. ⁴¹ Plotinus goes on in his explanation of the One by applying his definition to the general definition of God or Supreme. Ennead VI states:

For it is the greatest of all things, not in size but in power—that which is without magnitude can be great in power, for the things which come after It are indivisible and without parts in their powers, not in their bulk. It must be considered as infinite, not by unlimited extension of size or number but by the unboundedness of Its power.

When you think of him as Mind or God, He is still more: and when you unify Him in your thought, the degree of unity by which he transcends your thought is still greater than you imagine it to be. For He exists in and by Himself without any attributes. One might conceive of His unity in terms of His self-sufficiency. For He must be the most

³⁸ Elmer O'Brian, The Essential Plotinus, Hackett, Indiana, 1975 p. 73.

³⁹ Ennead V, 5, 4.

⁴⁰ Ennead V, 5, 9.

⁴¹ Ennead V, 5, 6.

sufficient of all things, the most independent, and the most without wants. ⁴²

Plotinus carries the omnipotence and omnipresence of the One past what he considers God has in His power. In other words, the Plotinian concept of God is superseded by his concept of the One.

Where we must depart from Plotinus is in his terming the One, the Good. This implies only good, not bad. Plotinus is forced into creating an "urge" and "demiurge." If the One is "Good", then how does the One account for all that goes on in the world. Plotinus would say that all evil that occurs can be explained as an imperfect attempt to replicate the form of the Good. Those that followed in Plotinus' footsteps made the bolder statement that a duality was needed.

Plotinus may have seen this dualism on the horizon, and may have come into contact with the "Gnostic" philosophy. ⁴³ To mitigate against the idea of the One being construed as evil, Plotinus wrote a section

⁴² Ennead VI, 9, 6

⁴³ A religious movement blending established religious doctrine with esoteric pagan philosophy, that flourished in the first two centuries CE. It manifested itself in many forms, ranging from serious philosophical enquiry to debased magic ritual. Its defining characteristic, however, was its adherents' belief in "gnosis" (Knowledge)- the knowledge of God supposedly revealed to initiates to enable them to attain salvation. Gnosticism is fundamentally dualistic, drawing a sharp distinction between the "good" spiritual world and the "evil" material world. To evade the problem of how a supremely good God could create a material world in which evil exists, the gnostics insisted that the world was the work of the Demiurge. See E. Pagels, Hans Jones, and others for bibliography. A central source is J.M. Robinson, The Nag-Hammadi Library.

"Against the Gnostics." ⁴⁴ In this section Plotinus leaves us in no doubt about his distaste for Gnosticism. He attacks it as untraditional, irrational and inconsistent, arrogant, and immoral. As A.H. Armstrong states:

"The neurotic Gnostic search for a secret sacred knowledge, a gnosis, the possession of which would automatically bring salvation, which led to the production and mass circulation of a mass of fantastic compilations claiming to be divine revelations and respositories of ancient Oriental wisdom, was utterly repugnant to Plotinus' Hellenic conservatism." ⁴⁵

Plotinus fights long and hard against this philosophy. In the end, Christianity adopts many aspects of Plotinus' teachings and unites them with some gnostic thought. The concept of the One or the Good is Plotinus' gift to Western thought. Let us now turn back to Hekhalot Rabbati for an explanation of God-the pinnacle of its journey.

Gershom Scholem remarks in his work on Jewish Gnosticism about the halakhic character of the mystical literature.⁴⁶ As we have seen in the previous chapter, what we are dealing with in this text is a classical Jewish world view. From biblical imagery to prayers, we have in our possession a work that was studied only by the most pious of Jews. With that introduction, it becomes evident that this work would contain a

⁴⁴ Ennead II, 9, 1-18.

⁴⁵ A.H. Armstrong, Plotinus, Collier, NYC, 1962 p. 24.

⁴⁶ Gershom Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism ..., JTS, NYC, 1960.

traditional view of God. What is that view? First, Judaism believes in the "oneness" of God. The God of Judaism is a unified God. He is not divisible. Although, at one time, there was a gnostic influence on Judaism, the dualistic influence never took hold. ⁴⁷ Today, what remains is a unified, monotheistic system of religion. At the time of the hekhalot works, this idea held sway. In fact, there are many biblical references to the anti-dualistic fervor of Judaism. ⁴⁸

Second, traditional Judaism teaches that God is omniscient. God sees all and knows all. God is also omnipotent. God has the power of adjudicating all worldly problems. In all respects, what we have in Hekhalot Rabbati is a "theistic" God. It is evident in the poetry of the work. ⁴⁹

But, nevertheless, we have some "non-traditional" ideas here. In a text which has a distinctly traditional view of God, we find references to angels and archangels which opens this work to much criticism concerning its "Jewishness."⁵⁰ If we accept the widely

⁴⁷ Many scholars now feel that Judaism was an influence on Gnosticism. I am indebted to Dr. Ben Zion Wacholder for this point.

⁴⁸ See Isaiah 45:6-7, Deut. 32:39, Ex. 20:2, for proof texts against gnostic dualism.

⁴⁹ See Chapter III pages 75-76 for textual references to the God image of the work.

⁵⁰ The point has been made that there were such apocalyptic views of angels and archangels in classical Jewish teachings. As many have pointed out previously, the actions of the angels, independent of God and for their own benefit, constitutes a new view of the holy creatures. See Chapter III section on the ascent to see

held date of this work (2nd - 3rd centuries c.e.), we may wonder why such a text would "beg the gnostic question."⁵¹ Gershom Scholem writes:

Originally, we have a Jewish variation of one of the chief preoccupations of the second and third century gnostics and hermenutics: the ascent of the soul from earth, through the spheres of the hostile planet-angels and rulers of the cosmos, and its return to its divine home in the "fullness" of God's light, a return which, to the gnostic's mind, signified Redemption. Some scholars consider this to be the central idea of Gnosticism. Certainly the description of this journey, which a particularly impressive account is found in the second part of the "Greater Hekhalot," is in all its detail of a character which must be called gnostic. ⁵²

This opinion is not shared by all. Ira Chernus takes the opposite view. He writes:

The rabbis were aware of the formal similarities between the newly developing esotericism and existing Gnostic traditions, and they acted to integrate this new kind of experience into the fabric of their religiosity, negating its potentially disruptive effects. This integration must have occurred relatively quickly.... Given that success, Merkabah mysticism became not a "Jewish Gnosticism" but rather a Jewish refusal to accept the validity of Gnosticism. ⁵³

Although we have departed from our initial point of the apex of the mystical journey, we have uncovered a crucial point which will continue to surface, namely: Where do the ideas of Hellenistic thought and Jewish

the vindictive nature of the angels and the attempt to confound the mystic.

51 see infra to section on dating the Hekhalot text, Chapter III.

52 Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Schocken, New York, p. 49.

53 Ira Chernus, Mysticism and Rabbinic Judaism, De Gruyter, Berlin 1982 p. 32. See note 42.

mysticism come together? It is unclear if we will ever know the answer to this question. No Q.E.D. exists to prove it either way. Nevertheless, we have further evidence to cast some light on the possibilities of a blending of traditions.

C. Prayer

In this section of the conclusion, we must begin by drawing some broad distinctions. On the one hand, in Hekhalot Rabbati, we are speaking of traditional Jewish forms of prayer. Although the prayers may refer to mystical concepts, these prayers fall within the framework of traditional liturgical material. In fact, many of the later mystical prayers contain some of the same references as do the prayers in our text.⁵⁴

On the other hand, in the Enneads, we do not have any prayers. Plotinus does give us a theory of the place of prayer in Ennead IV, Chapter 4, paragraphs 40-45. It is important to keep in mind that we are working with a pagan concept of prayer as we look at the prayer aspects of the Enneads.

Turning first to Hekhalot Rabbati we find that this material is inherently Jewish. From its halakhic viewpoint with its insistence on ritual purity and

⁵⁴ Cf. points in Chapter III on the use of the trishagion in the mystical liturgy and its use in the modern day liturgical material.

scholarly pursuit to the mystical hymns which invoke the name of God (YHVH), this text is manifestly Jewish. As we look at the text we find some interesting features that relate directly to prayer. In Chapter IX, we find that God's descents to the throne correspond to the times of the three daily prayers of the people of Israel. As Itamar Gruenwald relates, that there is a liturgical connection between the "Qedusha" and the Sanctus is a common idea in Jewish and Christian sources.⁵⁵

I now rely heavily on Gruenwald for his analysis of the prayer aspects of this text. He states:

What is new here in Hekhalot Rabbati is the concept that prayers said even by those who are not consciously practicing muystics do in fact have mystical consequences. This adds a novel dimension to prayer, and it was the privilege of the Merkavah mystics to reveal that new aspect of prayer. The mystical aspects of prayer were considerably developed through the Middle Ages, both in Judaism and in Christianity, but attention has not been given to this particular significance which the daily prayers have: they are, in fact, taken to be invocations to God to descend to His throne in the seventh Hekhal.

To compliment this idea of prayer as it is conceived of in Hekhalot Rabbati, we must refer to XI, 3-4 where God is described as addressing, twice daily, words of blessing to those officiating before Him. In the blessing said in the morning, God asks the angels to be silent so as to enable Him to listen to the prayers of His People.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Itamar Gruenwald, op. cit. p. 154. Quoted from D. Flusser "Sanktus und Gloria", Festschrift für Otto Michel, Leiden, Brill 1963 pp. 129 ff.

⁵⁶ Ibid pp. 154-155

Much of the text is centered on those times of the day when God would descend to the throne in the seventh palace from His throne in the eighth palace.

As I have noted in Chapter II of this thesis and above in brief, there are recorded prayers in the text we have in our possession. This does not occur in Plotinus' work. Also, Plotinus does not view prayer as the means to a mystical experience. Nevertheless, he has some very interesting ideas to offer along the same lines as we have seen in the Hekhalot text.

Plotinus has been called a religious philosopher.⁵⁷ Whether this was true in his day is uncertain. But in retrospect, Plotinus has formulated a detailed religious system that has become the centerpiece of much of Western Christian thought.

Plotinus looks to Plato and becomes the extension for his thought. Plato talks of the possibility of the gods being moved by prayer. This movement is said to be an attempt by an evil person to confuse the gods into giving the person what he asks for.⁵⁸ The gods, however, become administrators of justice and mitigate against this ploy. Plato comes to the conclusion that if a man prays to the gods he shows respect and improves his soul, but when he makes requests, and this is what Plato really seems to feel that prayers are, then the will of

⁵⁷ J.M. Rist, Plotinus - The Road to Reality, Cambridge, 1967, p. 199

⁵⁸ Plato, Laws, 909E

the gods is inexorable and the significance of prayers is slight. ⁵⁹ Plato regarded prayer as morally efficacious but little more.

Plotinus looked to Plato for guidance. But, this was not his only source. He also looked to the Stoics. Here prayer can be valuable for the Stoic sage and is to be defended along with divination and many other traditional religious activities. ⁶⁰ The ideas that Plotinus advocates are closer to those expressed in Stoic thought. For Greeks, the traditional gods were the sun, the moon, and the stars. The prayers of mankind were intoned towards these figures. Plotinus asks the questions 'Can these gods have knowledge of our prayers?' And, 'Are these prayers answered?' According to Plotinus, the gods have knowledge of these prayers through a kind of linking together of everything in the cosmos. ⁶¹ He uses the Stoic idea of 'sympathy' which demonstrates the innerconnectability of everything that exists in space. ⁶² This idea is central to his system.

Beyond the linking together of many different gods, there are further questions that arise. Do the gods remember? What about immoral prayers? Are the gods omnipotent, can their will be changed?

⁵⁹ J. M. Rist, op. cit. pp. 201 ff.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 203

⁶¹ Enneads IV, 4. This is the Stoic idea of "cosmic sympathy."

⁶² J.M.Rist, op. cit. p. 26. Ennead IV, 4, 26

First, according to Plotinus, the gods have perceptions. These perceptions cause prayers to be heard. This perception is not hearing as we think of hearing. It is a higher knowledge of that which goes on in this world. Second, since each part of the whole system is in 'sympathy' with the other parts, an immoral or evil prayer cannot be heard by something which is inherently good.⁶³ Third, only those who do not partake of the world of forms, and rely completely on the realm of magic in order to influence reality, operate with the assumption that magic can control the gods. What is magic? Magic according to Plotinus is a form of prayer. Prayer is simple; magic is more complex prayer. Magic is understood in a "quasi-scientific" manner as a means by which to influence the cosmos.⁶⁴

In Ennead IV, Plotinus demonstrates through the use of an analogy how magic and prayer interact with the universe.

What happens can be understood by considering plucking the string of a lyre. The petitioner plucks one end, as it were, and the other end is affected. When man prays, he is playing on the harmonious strings of the universe.⁶⁵

Ultimately he comes to the conclusion that any relationship between the One and Man is ad hoc. What

63 "Sympathy" is a system of complete reliance by the cosmos on the sum of the parts and the parts themselves. In this context, prayer is a reliance by the philosopher on the the external world and the individual parts which form the internal world.

64 J.M. Rist op. cit. p. 206

65 Ennead IV, 4, 41

happens once may never be repeated. It could be compared to the analogy of the river. The question asked is can the same person walk through the same stream? The answer is no. Ultimately, the stream changes.

This is all well and good. Though Plotinus places very little credence in the importance of prayer to the philosophical exercise, it is a means of uniting the One in ourselves with the One itself. Its main purpose is for the preparation of the soul. He maintains that one should wait for the experience and not actively pursue it. Those who are prepared will gain the vision. Contemplation, discussed in Chapter II, is the avenue to this vision.

Plotinus' view of prayer is elevated. It is a highly rational philosophical view of the exercise of prayer. The Hekhalot text, on the other hand, gives us a more emotive view.

These two different views of prayer diverge from each other in many respects. The most glaring difference pertains to the purpose of prayer. For Plotinus, prayer is a preparatory exercise to the vision of the One. As Plotinus states:

We must not run after it, but fit ourselves for the vision and then wait tranquilly for its appearance, as the eye waits for the rising of the sun ... ⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Ennead V, 5, 8

The mystical experience is not to be pursued through prayer.⁶⁷ It will come after time. The philosopher/mystic must be ready when that time comes. As Rist states further:

This preparing of oneself, this meditation and reflection on the One by a soul which is not distracted by the multiplicity of things, is what Plotinus thinks of as the highest kind of prayer ...

When a man prays 'alone to the Alone', he has come to recognize that the One is always present and that it is up to himself to look towards him if he wishes. The higher prayer, like the lower, is a recognition by man of what the universe is like. The One is always turned towards us; in the highest act of prayer we turn again towards him.⁶⁸

The concept of prayer in the Hekhalot text is quite different from Plotinus'. As has been said earlier in this section, prayer for the Jewish mystic was the catalyst for the mystical experience. God is said to have descended from the eighth palace to the seventh palace when He heard the prayers of the mystics. The angels attempted to block the prayers of the mystics by making noise in order to prevent God from hearing the prayers of mortals. The role of prayer here is much stronger than is present in the Enneads.

There are many passages where the role of prayer is illustrated. Ithamar Gruenwald identifies them for us.

As explicitly stated in Hekhalot Rabbati IX, God's descents to his throne correspond to the time of the three daily prayers of the People of Israel To complement this idea of

⁶⁷ J.M. Rist, op. Cit. p. 212

⁶⁸ Ibid.

prayer as it is conceived of in Hekhalot Rabbati, we must refer to XI, 3-4 where God is described as addressing, twice daily, words of blessing to those officiating before Him. In the blessing said in the morning, God asks the angels to be silent so as to enable Him to listen to the prayers of His People Chapter X contains a mystical hymn to encourage the Holy Creatures to perform their heavenly duties, while chapter XI describes what the Prince of the Countenance does when he prepares the throne for God.⁶⁹

This text shows that there is a distinct prayer theme in the mystical literature. Gruenwald feels, as do many other scholars in this field, that the liturgical aspects of this material occupy a much more prominent place in the material than has been noticed.

These two texts place differing amounts of emphasis on prayer. One holds prayer as a necessary preparation for the mystical experience. The other regards prayer as the catalyst for the experience. What is important to note is that each text places prayer as necessary. This idea will be discussed later.

D. The Journey

Mysticism embraces the search for spiritual knowledge - for understanding of truths we cannot know by the ordinary use of our minds. Its essence is that longing that religious men and women of have felt for union with their God. Mystical experience is not

⁶⁹ I. Gruenwald op. cit. pp. 154ff

confined to the historical past; it is possible here and now - indeed, anywhere, anytime.

Mystics, in their writings and teachings, have described intensely personal spiritual journeys which started many on the quest to discover the secrets of God and the universe. The two works under discussion in this thesis represent two distinct views, one from the Greek philosophical tradition that has been carried over into the Christian church, and one from an early Jewish mystical tradition. We shall, once again, isolate the aspects of their respective journeys that form the skeleton of each system.

<u>Enneads</u>	<u>Hekhalot Rabbati</u>
The One	8th Palace
	7th Palace
	6th Palace
	5th Palace
The Intellegence	4th Palace
	3rd Palace
	2nd Palace
The Soul	1st Palace

The Philosopher	The Mystic

This chart illustrates the stages of the journey as presented in each of the texts. In the Enneads, Plotinus speaks of three levels of relationship to the One. The

lowest, or most distant, is the relationship between the Soul and the One. The least distant from the One is the level of the Intelligence or the Intellectual-Principle. The method of movement between the levels is through Contemplation and Dialectic. ⁷⁰

Let us look at some passages from the Enneads that illustrate this relationship.

When we speak of the One and when we speak of the Good we must think and speak of It as one and the same Nature, not applying any predecates to It, but explaining It to ourselves as best as we can. We call It the First because it is the simplest, and the Self-Sufficing because it is not a compound; we speak of It as That which is nothing else, because everything which is in something else is derived from something else. If then it is neither derived from nor in something else, nor any sort of compound, there cannot be anything above It. We need not then go looking for other Principles. We set This first, then "Nous", the primal Intelligence, then Soul after "Nous". This is the order according to the nature of things. We must not assume more or fewer than these in the intelligible realm.
71

The pinnacle of the system is the One. Following the One, there are two levels. Each of these levels is less simple than its prior.

A.H. Armstrong writes in his study on Plotinus that there is a series of relationships emanating from the One. "Nous" proceeds from the One, and Soul from "Nous",

⁷⁰ See *infra* for explanations of these concepts

⁷¹ Ennead II, 9, 1. Note that when the Enneads speak of the downward progression, there is no true direction implied. We have engaged in a discussion in Chapter III concerning the use of "ascent" or "descent".

by a double movement of outgoing and return in contemplation. ⁷²

This is also the way of the philosopher. In a way, the process of journey is much like the inward turning of many forms of meditation. ⁷³ As movement is directed toward a higher stage of being, the mystic changes. A new consciousness is born.

As we have discussed earlier, prayer is necessary for this transformation. Plotinus does say that it is necessary to pray in order to prepare the Soul for the journey. Certain ascetic practices are also necessary. The body and mind must be purged of all impurities. ⁷⁴

The true way of life for Plotinus is the way which leads the soul to itself then to its unity with "nous" and so to the One. The soul must detach itself from the sense world and look beyond to the world of the Intelligence. The higher life is a life of purification - purification of the soul. The mystic way is for Plotinus the way of inner freedom and detachment from externalities. It is also the way of introversion. The mystic must detach from that which is without and attach to that which is within.

The vision, when it comes, is an experience of unity - a unity so close, so immediate, so complete, that it transcends even the intuitive perception uniting subject

⁷² A.H. Armstrong, Plotinus, Collier Books, NYC, 1962 pp. 49ff.

⁷³ Cf. the concept of "teshuvah" in Judaism

⁷⁴ See infra for further material.

and object which is distinctive of "nous". The experience is one which cannot be adequately expressed in words.

The vision baffles telling: for how could a man bring tidings of the Supreme as detached, when he has seen it as one with himself? ⁷⁵

The term "vision" is, properly speaking, insufficient, since it implies a duality of viewer and viewed. The mystical experience according to Plotinus is one of identity. In this experience, not only is the viewer lifted into oneness with the object of his vision; the act of vision itself is identical with the object.

⁷⁶

Plotinus asks why the experience of this oneness is not continuous. He answers in Ennead VI, that the reason the experience is finite is that as humans we are tied to a fleshy existence. Sidney Spencer writes that:

It is the limitations of life in the flesh that stand in the way of a continuous vision of the One. While we are in the physical world, the ecstatic vision which lifts us into the divine union is a rare experience; but in the eternal order, to which even now we belong in our deeper being, it is a normal and necessary condition. ⁷⁷

This is Plotinus' system. The journey, combined with this vision, or more properly put, mystical union with the One, is the philosophical exercise for which Plotinus strove. He lived his life by these goals.

⁷⁵ Ennead VI, 9, 10

⁷⁶ Sidney Spencer, Mysticism in the World Religion, A.S. Barnes and Co. NY, 1963, pp. 167ff

⁷⁷ *ibid* p. 169.

Porphyry writes in the Vita Plotini, that Plotinus had this experience on four separate occasions. Whether that is accurate or not we cannot say. What is important to realize is that he viewed this system as a praxis. It was a living philosophy.

Now let us turn to the journey as discussed in Sefer Hekhalot Rabbati.

In the book of Psalms we find a statement that touches this text and the mystical praxis it espouses.

Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in His Holy place?
Those with clean hands and pure hearts,
 who never speak with malice,
 who never swear deceitfully.
They shall receive blessings from the Lord,
 justice from God, their Helper. ⁷⁸

This is a text with a journey. It is a praxis. It may have been used by mystics in the early centuries of the common era. The goal was a vision. The model of the vision was taken from the book of Ezekiel. ⁷⁹ Various scholars have held that this was not the first strand of Jewish mystical lore, and we know that it was not the last. It seemed to be a link in a chain of esoteric philosophy which some feel bordered on heresy. Prima facie, this claim can be made. The use of angels and magical seals can send the most pious of Jews into a frenzy. But, a deeper look indicates that in this text there are halakhic requirements for the vision, and ascetic practices which, from all perspectives, are

⁷⁸ Psalm 24: 3-5

⁷⁹ see infra

consistent with those of traditional classical Judaism. We shall now concentrate on those aspects of the journey which are relevant to our comparison.

The Jewish mystics conceived of their journey in terms of the vision of Ezekiel and the chariot. They desired to journey from the realm of this world to the realm of God. This was done through a trance. In this state, they felt that they could leave the body. Ecstasy - a feeling of being outside the body - was the goal of the trance. The mystics saw heaven as consisting of seven Hekhalot (palaces). If one could reach the seventh heavenly palace, one would see God's chariot and throne.

The mystical ascent is preceded by certain ascetic practices.⁸⁰ Gershom Scholem, in Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, quotes Hai ben Sherira Gaon, the head of a Babylonian academy about the year 1000 ce.

Many scholars were of the belief that one who is distinguished by many qualities described in the books and who is desirous of beholding the Merkabah and the palaces of the angels on high, must follow a certain procedure. He must fast a number of days and lay his head between his knees and whisper many hymns and songs whose texts are known from tradition. Then he perceives the interior and the chambers, as if he saw the seven palaces with his own eyes, and it is as though he entered one palace after the other and saw what is there.⁸¹

As the journey unfolds, the mystic after preparing for the journey, begins to chant certain special hymns or

80 See infra

81 Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Schocken, NYC p. 49

incantations that will enhance the experience. ⁸² As the mystic enters deeper into the trance, he begins the ecstatic journey. The mystic is led by certain angels to the gate-keepers of each palace. ⁸³ At the gate, he is asked to show the correct seals. If he shows the correct seals, he may continue on his journey. If he shows the wrong seals, he is thrust into danger. Every new stage of the ascent requires a new seal with which the mystic "seals himself" so that "he shall not be dragged into the fire and the flame, the vortex and the storm which are around Thee, oh Thou terrible and sublime." ⁸⁴

As has been stated already, the danger of the journey are great. Angels and archons attempt to drive the mystic from his trance. They play tricks on the mystic in order that he may lie or misinterpret what he sees. The most poignant passage is found as the mystic approaches the gate of the sixth palace. The mystic is shown what appears to be a wall of water coming towards him. If he questions the angels on the water, it is as if he has lost faith in their protective nature. The mystic is then wounded by the angels. ⁸⁵

⁸² The mystic must be ritually and spiritually pure in order to complete the journey. Those who do not purify themselves before the journey run the risk of injury. Cf. the parable of "The four who entered the Pardes". One must also prepare amulets or seals with certain mystical names upon them. We are not given the content of the seals in the text.

⁸³ HR 16-17

⁸⁴ G. Scholem op. cit. p. 50. Taken from Merkabah Rabbah.

⁸⁵ It has been suggested that this is what happened to the four who entered the pardes.

The mystic who is successful in completing this journey, is led into the great hall of the seventh palace and takes a seat before the Throne of Glory. He sees, in full biblical imagery, the vision of the Holy Hayot, Cherubim, and Ofanim as expounded in the prophetic visions. He sees them, but does not become one with them.

No doubt that this was an ecstatic experience. Nevertheless, there is no mystical union. As in the biblical imagery, the mystic sits at the feet of God who sits upon his high throne. The mystic can only see the skirts of his robe. As Scholem states:

The Creator and His creature remain apart, and nowhere is an attempt made to bridge the gulf between them or to blur the distinction. The mystic who in his ecstasy has passed through all the gates, braved all the dangers, now stands before the throne; he sees and hears - but that is all. ⁸⁶

What remains for our discussion is the method of movement from one stage to another. Here it is important to remember that this is an inherently Jewish text. The prayer aspects have already been discussed at length but it is important to remember that they play a great role in the praxis of this journey. The mystic must be a halakhic Jew. He must be steeped in the textual tradition. He must be ritually clean and spiritually pure.

All of these attributes interplay to assist the

86 G. Scholem, op. cit. pp. 55ff

mystic on his way. If at any time during the journey, the mystic fails any one of these tests or compromises one of these attributes, he comes into danger.

In concluding this section, it will be helpful to summarize some of the similarities and differences between Hekhalot Rabbati and the Enneads. There are many differences. First, the element of danger and peril does not appear in the Enneads at all. Second, there are no direct references to magical seals in the Enneads. Plotinus is a rational philosopher. Third, in the Enneads, the climax is mystical union with the One - unio mystica - becoming one with the One. In Hekhalot Rabbati, the climax is a vision from afar of the Throne of Glory. This is an important distinction. The tension between the two concepts of vision and union is what really divides these two works.

There are also many similarities. First, both texts speak of a journey of the soul. Second, both require spiritual purity.⁸⁷ Third, there is a hierarchy of relationships between the philosopher/mystic and the pinnacle, whether it be the One or God. Fourth, movement requires inward turning.⁸⁸ Fifth, preparation is paramount to the experience. Sixth, the experience is

87 The case can be made that Plotinus was a religious mystic and required certain rituals, hence, ritual purity.

88 In Hekhalot Rabbati, the point has been made that those who fail the tests, do so out of shallowness of soul. They have not prepared themselves for the inward turning necessary for the journey.

repeatable. Seventh, the mystic is transformed after this experience. He gains a higher consciousness. Eighth, there are aspects of prayer in both works. Ninth, both works describe a praxis and claim that there were actual practitioners.

Nevertheless, the crucial point at which Hellenism and Judaism differ is the point of mystical union.⁸⁹ The goal of hellenistic philosophy is mystical union. The goal of the Jewish mystical tradition of this period is vision. This chasm is one which cannot be crossed.

III. CONCLUSIONS

What do we do with the material uncovered? How do we conclude a thesis where the question seems to be left open to future generations? Let us analyze some of the data.

It has been suggested that there may have been an Ur text or tradition. This would account for the similarities between the two works. The differences could then be explained as different approaches to the same traditions. We can respond to this by saying that if

⁸⁹ The point has been made by Prof. Isaiah Tishbi that in later Kabbalah such as is found in the Zohar, there is the idea of deveikut. This can be read as a mystical clinging to God. For the purposes of this study, there is no evidence that there was such an idea as early as these two texts are dated.

there was an Ur text or tradition, why are there such differences in the two works?

In the beginning of chapter II, in the dating of Plotinus' writings, we spoke of the conflicts going on in Roman/Greek society. Plotinus lived from 204-270 C.E. This was the period of the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Church. As it was the period of the decline, we know that Roman society was in turmoil.

The first signs of trouble were a lack of artistic creativity, no new answers on the part of philosophers for issues which affected all of Roman society, increasing tendencies on the part of the central government to interfere in the affairs of the local communities, rapid expansion, monetary woes which led to an increase in taxes, plagues, and military troubles caused by all of the above. Far beneath the first signs of cultural, political, economic, and military troubles there lay a fundamental shift in the feelings of the many individual human beings who lived and died in the Empire. The emperors had given them security and dullness. Marcus Aurelius wrote at this time:

Everything above and below is ever the same,
and the result of the same things. How long
then? That is, how long must a man do his duty
and live?⁹⁰

If history is the product of human ambitions and fears, and thought is its expression, then we must look

90 Chester G. Starr, The Ancient Romans, Oxford, 1971, pp. 147ff

at the people and the tensions of the period in order to find out what drove the people. The task is not an easy one. The conclusion of this cursory look at the 2nd century is that peace and prosperity of the Empire were not able to give men the intellectual and spiritual support which was necessary for continuing advances. All that men could consciously do was to repeat the old forms in many fields of culture. Yet no society can survive forever if it simply relives the past.

Due to these factors, new concepts and ideas were needed. Some of these new attitudes showed themselves through the expression of poets and philosophers, artists and diplomats. Nevertheless, a fuller, more conscious revelation came in the fields of religion. Plotinus, who many have called a religious mystic, participated in this influx of new ideas. He had a new expression, seen through the development of Platonism to its (his) logical conclusion.

The turmoil felt in the Roman city-state was not only felt in Rome. The trends discussed above were also felt in those areas affected by Roman control. Palestine was one such area. The tensions felt there gave rise to a different answer than that posed by Plotinus. Let us look at the trends there.

In order to find out what was going on in this period that would give rise to the mystical philosophy of

Hekhalot Rabbati, we must look back to the period surrounding the Great Revolt (66-70ce.).

The Great revolt, which lasted for more than four years and involved all parts of the country, together with the various sieges, the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, was a heavy blow to the Jewish people as well as to the towns and villiages of the land of Israel. Thousands were killed in the campaigns against the Jews. Many towns were burnt down or razed. The agriculture of the country was ruined. Crops were left rotting in fields or whole fields were burnt by the Israelites "scorched earth" policy.

In addition to these problems, taxes paid to the Roman procurators were increased. A Roman author of the second century wrote that because of the Jews rebellious spirit, they were required to pay heavier taxes than the subjects of other neighboring territories.

No less severe were the effects of the destruction on the institutional and spiritual needs of the nation. The ravages of war, the conquest of Jerusalem and the loss of the Temple meant that the institutions that led the nation - the High Priesthood and the Sanhedrin - no longer functioned, and the result was, for a certain period of time, paralysis and confusion. ⁹¹ The

91 The High Priesthood was responsible for the daily worship activities of the Jewish people. In the time of the Temple, they were responsible for sacrifices and all Temple ritual. The Sanhedrin or "synedrion", in Greek, was a court of religious law responsible for the judicial needs of the community.

synagogue and the Temple were bound together by everyday practice as well as by historical derivation: the hours of prayer were determined by those of the Temple service, and during prayer the congregation faced in the direction of the Temple; the local charity organization were based on those of the Temple; and the Sanhedrin met in the Temple and was legally bound to rule there.

The destruction of the Temple not only meant the abolition of many rituals, but upset many of the positive and negative commandments. The destruction left a vacuum in the spirit as much as in the everyday life of the people. The spiritual deflation that ensued after the destruction of the Temple thrust the Jewish people into despair.

The transition to the new religious attitude that sought to rebuild the life of the nation, without a Temple and without its own state, on a basis of observance of the Torah and the performance of good deeds while awaiting the redemption could not have taken place under less auspicious circumstances.

These explications of history demonstrate one important point. At the time preceeding the development of the texts under discussion, the people were in need of emotional and spiritual support. This lack of support led those of the time to come up with new and innovative methods to attract people to a way of life. As is the case throughout history, the thinkers of the time put

together those aspects of preexisting traditions that were popular among the people. They did this within the framework of their own written and oral traditions.

For Judaism, this took the form of Hekhalot Rabbati, a mystical text which borders at times on Gnosticism, yet is tied strongly to Jewish conceptions of God and prayer. For Hellenism, it was found in the philosophical tradition of Plato. Plotinus took the extant philosophy and adapted it for his time. He offered himself as the commentator on Plato. We have called his philosophy neo-platonic. Whatever the system, they both stemmed from troubles that were felt across the broad spectrum of society.

Can we identify the Ur text? This question is hard to answer. As we saw in the compilation of the Hekhalot literature, it is composed of many strands, some hard to detach from the rest. We can only piece together parts. Some from the Old Testament, some from gnosticism, some from the Stoic tradition. In fact, there may not be one text, only a compilation of oral traditions that were passed like the wind from one camp to the next.

This is rich material. If I were asked why should we study it, I would respond that these texts are two responses to the problem of lack of spirituality in the early centuries of the common era. I would also respond by saying that these two texts gives us a picture of the

differences among people of relatively close proximity. Third, I would say that they give us a picture of the development of thought as it unfolded in this time. Fourth, I would respond that it is necessary to study in order to keep the tradition alive.

Each of these texts speaks of a way of getting closer to the Ultimate cause. This is a goal of religion. As one integrally bound by a strong religious tradition, I cling to this desire with the hopes that all will attempt a spiritual journey, or at least think of the possibilities. The Hasidic Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk said:

God sends souls down to earth and then brings them back by making them climb ladders. Thence man's preoccupation: souls upon souls, all in pursuit of ladders.

In this study we have seen the tracing of two journeys to the Divine. Each one finds the Eternal in his or her own fashion. Meditation is central. Inward turning is essential. The deeper we travel, the more we can understand. The mystical experience, we begin to realize, is open to all. What is needed is the desire to search. The gateways to God are contemplation, meditation, and knowledge - the ineffable knowledge of the oneness of the universe in God. ⁹²

92 William Kaufman, Journeys, Bloch 1980. p. 181

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