Performing Exile in Safed School Kabbalah

1 author:

Marla Segol
University at Buffalo, The State University of New York
8 PUBLICATIONS **1** CITATION

Performing Exile in Safed School Kabbalah

MARLA SEGOL

Professorship in Jewish Studies, Institute of Jewish Thought and Heritage, University at Buffalo

In this article, I use a performance studies methodology to examine the transformation of the human body in sixteenth-century Safed school kabbalistic ritual practice, focusing on those practices described in Moshe Cordovero's *Tomer Devorah* and *Sefer Gerushin*, and Yosef Caro's *Maggid Mesharim*. Many of the rituals described in these sources rely on preexisting discourses, but enact these discourses in newly articulated rituals that apply a different understanding of the body and its capacity to act. Safed school rituals are unique in kabbalistic praxis because they are explicitly aimed at the transformation of the human body into both a venue for and a performer of the cosmic drama of redemption from exile. Once ritually transformed, the body can act to ameliorate the condition of exile.

The exile topos is key to the construction of these rituals and to their purpose. Specifically, this is the discourse by which and upon which the rituals act. While the transformation of ritual performers is a common goal of ritual praxis, Safed school kabbalistic rituals explicitly emphasize the transformation of the body, accomplished in part by enacting the conditions of exile that they wished to change. In the texts describing these rituals, the exile topos is both complicated and central, historical and discursive. Their rituals transform the body so that it can serve as a vehicle for celestial entities. This is different from earlier traditions that used rituals to achieve ascent to the divine realms or created an intermediary in order to receive prophecy.[1]

---

1. Earlier kabbalistic works aim for the transformation of the body, but interestingly, they often involve the use of ritual to create of another body (imaginal or material) which then facilitates the action they desire. For example, Abraham Abulafia (Spain, 1240–after 1291) meditates on Hebrew letters to create a golem, an artificial anthropoid, which for him is imaginal rather than material. The creation of the golem was meant to facilitate a prophetic experience for the individual, but he also saw it as a messianic ritual. See Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 99. Other thirteenth- and fourteenth-century writers such as the Pseudo-Saadia, Eleazar of Worms, and Joseph

This paper will examine key ritual innovations of Safed kabbalists to better understand their use of the exile topos, and the mechanics of the transforming of the body via the discourses of exile.

YOSEF CARO AND MOSHE CORDOVERO

Two of the most important contributors to the development of Safed school kabbalah were Yosef Caro (1488–1575) and Moshe Cordovero (1522–70). This teacher-student pair was instrumental in the development of new kabbalistic practices (ethical and ritual) in Safed, codified in *hanhagot,* or written guides for behavior, and theorized in treatises and diaries. These new practices are related to the writers' historical experience. While Cordovero was probably born to a Portuguese family in Safed, in northern Palestine, most believe that Caro was born in Spain and left there as a young child. Their work reflects the messianic ethos of their generation, expressed in the project of collecting and editing the corpus of Jewish sacred texts, and implementing them to suit their particular purposes.

In the work of Moshe Cordovero and Yosef Caro, the human body is transformed to ameliorate *galut*, or exile, in three ways; first, it is transformed as it is cultivated in *imagine Dei*; second, it is transformed through ascetic rituals that position it as a venue for sacrifice, and in so doing the body comes to stand in for the destroyed Temple where sacrifices once occurred; and third,

---

ben Shalom Ashkenazi, use ritual attempting to animate a material body with a messianic function. For greater detail, see Marla Segol, *Word and Image in Medieval Kabbalah* (New York: Palgrave, 2012). The kabbalists of Safed use rituals to facilitate an embodied experience of possession by the divine, and they do not always use intermediaries such as letters or bodies that serve as proxies, as in medieval materials. It is worth comparing the Safed school mystics to the *Heikhalot* mystics as well, specifically in terms of the type of experience they cultivated. Moshe Idel describes the three sorts of *heikhalot* experiences of ascent as *somanodia* (bodily ascent), *psychanodia* (soul ascent), and *nousanodia* (ascent of the intellect). (See Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* [Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2005], 27–28). The Safed school kabbalists aim to cultivate a possession trance, in which divine forces come to inhabit and speak through the human body. J. H. Chajes discusses this at length, focusing intently on Lurianic practice, and on Hayyim Vital's account of the spirit possession of the daughter of Raphael Anav. See J. H. Chajes. *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism*, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Jonathan Garb discusses this in contemporary kabbalah, in Jonathan Garb, *Shamanic Trance in Modern Kabbalah* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011). The present study differs from that of Chajes in focusing on the formation of these rituals in the work of the earlier Safed school kabbalists, Cordovero and Caro, and specifically on their use and conception of the human body in the process of facilitating spirit possession.

it is transformed as it performs scripts possessing both historical and cosmological valences. Once the ritual actors have performed these scripts, ideally they gain social and theurgic power to change those around them; this includes community members who are influenced by the actor's preaching and by his positive example, as well as celestial beings, such as the *sefirot Shekhinah* and *Tiferet*, who are positively affected by the ritual practitioner's newly gained theurgic power. Finally, this power is authorized by the performances they achieve in this manner. As the body is converted to a theater for celestial beings, they speak through the mystic's body to explain the efficacy of these rituals, to assert their importance, and even to innovate new ones.

<div align="center">

WHY SAFED?

HISTORY AND METHODOLOGY

</div>

The Jewish Expulsion from Spain in 1492 uprooted a large and well-established community, with evidence of its presence in the Roman colony of Hispania since the year 70 CE. Many of those expelled found their way to Safed in the early decades in of the sixteenth century, and there they established new and vibrant communities that were modeled on the old ones, but with significant differences. The kabbalists of Safed generated new rituals and practices that addressed lived experience. They relied on older texts to dramatize the experience of exile, but they did so differently after the Expulsion from Spain.[2]

Before proceeding any further it is worth pointing out that my approach to this material, understanding it as a response to the Expulsion from Spain, is an unpopular one. It is rooted in mid- to late-twentieth-century debates on the genesis of Safed school kabbalah, and it takes up, in a new way, an opinion that has been rejected because it was overly simplistic. The debate began with Gershom Scholem, who argued that the new rituals were a direct response to the historical trauma of the Expulsion from Spain in 1492,[3] and

2. These connections have been effectively made by Lawrence Fine. See Lawrence Fine, trans., ed., *Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety: The Beginning of Wisdom*. (New York : Paulist Press, 1984) See also Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

3. See Matthew Goldish, ''New Approaches to Jewish Messianism,'' *AJS Review* 25, no. 1 (2000–2001): 71–83. In this review article Goldish surveys scholarly opinions about the source of Jewish messianism in sixteenth-century Safed. Relevant to this discussion, he writes: ''*Major Trends* presents Scholem's thesis that the expulsion of the Jews from Spain created a crisis which fomented 'first a wave of mystical messianism, and then an introspective kabbalah of exile and redemption as taught by

that the new traditions appeared as a result of historical trauma.[4] Moshe Idel responded to Scholem by questioning his assumption that historical events create mystical tendencies, and hence, that mystical phenomena can be put in sequence by historical causation.[5] Idel believes instead that Safed school ritual continues earlier traditions.[6] As a middle position, Yosef Yerushalmi, argued in *Zachor*, that "memory flowed, above all, through two channels: recital and ritual,"[7] narrative and action. Yerushalmi viewed sixteenth-century Kabbalah's rituals as "a mythic interpretation of history that lay beyond history, and that seemed to endow the individual with the power to participate actively in hastening its messianic liquidation."[8] Yerushalmi, then, viewed ritual practice as an assimilation of historical experience to preexisting

---

Isaac Luria in sixteenth century Safed, culminating finally in the failed Sabbatian messianic movement'" (71).

4. Moshe Idel criticizes Scholem's thesis because it ties Safed school kabbalistic ritual directly to the Expulsion, and because Scholem frames Safed school Kabbalah as a precursor to the Sabbatean movement rather than as a distinct phenomenon. Idel points out that the messianic tendencies that Scholem identifies as a direct result of the Expulsion were already present in preExpulsion mystical texts such as the *Zohar* in Moshe Idel, "One from a Town, Two from a Clan—the diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbateanism: A Re-Examination," *Jewish History,* vol. 2 (1993). He also criticizes Scholem's thesis with his assertion that the roots of Safed school Kabbalah could be found in Italy, not Spain, and in early modern Christian religiosity. Idel makes these points in a number of different sources, most notably in "Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560–1660," *Italia Judaica* 2 (1986): 248–49. See also "Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: Toward an Interactive History of Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah," *Cutural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy,* eds. David Ruderman and Guiseppe Vetri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). See also "From Italy to Safed and Back, 1540–1640," Chapter 5 of *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

5. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988) 266.

6. Lawrence Fine seems to have accepted Scholem's point of view in his earlier work but adapted his views later.

7. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 10.

8. Yerushalmi also writes that with the Explusion, the Jewish conception of history changed, and that this change is significant within Safed school kabbalah. Some writers, such as Azariah de Rossi and Solomon ibn Verga, showed an "incipient recognition that Jewish destinies are affected by the interplay between certain of the great powers," (Yerushalmi, *Zachor,* 63). However, Yerushalmi believed that "these historians neither introduced new methods, nor fundamentally new frameworks for an understanding of Jewish history" (64). He saw that for early modern Jews, history was "still a space where biblical prophecies were realized or where the messiah left his footprints" (64).

discourse, and as a means of action with historical significance within the providential model of history as derived from biblical sources.

Recent scholarship draws upon all three of these opinions; most believe that the Expulsion from Spain shaped the culture of Safed. They also see that the rituals developed in Safed enacted preexisting discourses and rituals narrated in earlier kabbalistic works such as the *Zohar*, and from those occurring the culture of Early Modern Europe generally, to include its Jewish and non-Jewish aspects. Finally, they see real changes in the rituals of Safed, which they attribute to the emergence of a new anthropology, to alterations in the meanings of older discourses, and to technological advances such as the invention of the printing press. Thus, contemporary scholars of Safed kabbalah have set about explaining the emergence of new ritual in these terms.

So why return to the problem of the impact of the Expulsion from Spain? The scholarship described above shows that many factors contributed to the construction of new ritual practices in Safed. This approach is aptly articulated by J. H. Chajes, who argues in his discussion of spirit possession in Safed that its effective study "must . . . take several factors into consideration: shifts in kabbalistic anthropology and demonology, magical practices that closed the gap between the living and the dead, popular conceptions of 'ghost' possession, and an appreciation of the indebtedness of sixteenth-century Safedian developments to the cultural climate of fifteenth-century Spain."[9] And yet, upon examination of the rituals, it seems clear that historical experience is still important. Historical experience, lived and narrated, contributes to the emergence of a new anthropology that emphasizes physical action in a way that other rituals have not. Thus we return to an old problem, with some slightly different tools, using a performance studies methodology informed by more contemporary definitions of ritual and its relation to sacred discourse.

These two factors, cultural change due to historical experience, and changes in anthropology, are evident in the rituals' differences from their earlier articulations. They are distinct from earlier ones because they transvalue the human body, and transform it directly so that it can act theurgically. In this way it is possible to argue that Safed rituals do not explicitly recite history, but they ritualize it as it is interpreted through previously existing discourses. As they perform it they internalize it, and in this process they innovate new rituals. Thus, Safed school rituals can show how people experienced history through earlier-derived kabbalistic frameworks, and in turn,

---

9. Chajes, *Between Worlds,* 30–31.

how their experiences (of both life and story) altered these frameworks and changed their purpose.[10]

While the previous generation's historical experience of the Expulsion from Spain contributes to the innovation of new rituals, other factors are linked to it as well. Three of the most important are preexisting discourses of exile, the subsequent generations' experience of the disintegration of community structure, and the advent of Hebrew printing. The preexisting discourses of exile were both historically situated and cumulative, so they were at the same time responses to historical events and expressive of a larger cosmological vision. Historically, the Expulsion from Spain in 1492 destroyed Jewish geographical communities and disrupted their local and unrecorded customs. Thus, for the immigrants to Safed, the Expulsion itself was important, but their children experienced it socially, in a lack of communal consensus on correct ritual practice, and discursively, through the narratives of their parents. Hebrew printing began with the construction of the first Hebrew printing press in 1484,[11] and it is the printing press that allowed both the rapid distribution and authorization of new discourses and ritual scripts responding to historical events experienced through cosmological narratives.

Exile is one of the most important topoi in Safed school kabbalah, and its rituals perform overlapping, preexisting scripts of *tikkun olam* aimed redemption from exile. These scripts draw extensively on the wide range of the semantic field of the Hebrew term for exile, *galut*. Esperanza Alfonso shows that "exile" or the Hebrew *galut* "has a semantic field which includes several distinct ideas."[12] The first idea, she says, "embodies the experience of per-

---

10. In this way, my own perspective is closest to Yerushalmi's, but it differs by examining more closely the way in which the reciter is turned to an actor, the kind of action performed, the way the stories enacted in Safed rituals rely on earlier ones, the contexts that give rise to ritual innovation, and finally, the process of ritual innovation itself.

11. "Within forty years of the invention of printing in the mid-fifteenth century, Hebrew books were produced using this new technology. Through the second half of the fifteenth century, Hebrew printing was restricted mainly to the Italian and Iberian peninsulas, where some 180 Hebrew titles were issued. While Hebrew printing ceased in Spain and Portugal after the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, it quickly spread to the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe. By the end of the sixteenth century, Hebrew printed books were being produced throughout most of the Jewish world." Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Shear, *From Written to Printed Text: The Transmission of Jewish Tradition* (Philadelphia: Center for Judaic Studies University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 7.

12. Esperanza Alfonso, "The Uses of Exile in the Poetic Discourse: Some Examples from Medieval Hebrew Literature" in Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe, eds..

sonal exile''[13] and the second ''implies the exodus of large groups of population, produced by social and political crises.'' The third and most prevalent meaning is that of ''the national or historical exile of Israel.'' Finally, she focuses on the metaphysical, Neoplatonically influenced element of its meaning, which ''conceived of the soul as being exiled in the body, longing for the union with its divine source, the 'homeland.' ''[14]

In the thirteenth century this term underwent a significant development with the elaboration of medieval kabbalah. Alfonso argues that in ''the context of medieval kabbalah, separation is seen to affect all levels of existence.''[15] Thus in medieval kabbalah, the state of exile, with its political, physical, and metaphysical denotations, is a constant and ineradicable part of being. The 1492 Expulsion from Spain, a beloved homeland, added yet another layer of significance to this already multivalenced term. The kabbalists of Safed, some of whom were themselves expelled from Spain, drew upon the whole field of meaning for the term *galut* and on preexisting conventions for representing it as they and their children developed a roster of rituals that actively worked to remediate exile. In this way, the Expulsion of 1492 added meaning and urgency to the long-established exile topos in Jewish thought as the events of this period led to its reinterpretation, along with its attendant theodicies.[16]

Earlier iterations of the *galut* topos, the historical experience of exile, and the invention of the printing press together spurred the editorial efforts to collate and distribute Jewish texts. As Safed school kabbalists synthesized earlier texts they also applied them differently,[17] often reimagining them to suit their new circumstances post-Expulsion. This reimagination is connected to place; ritual actors and audiences were receptive to it because of the upheavals of the Expulsion from Spain, so that as the Jewish sense of place was under-

---

Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From al-Andalus to the Haskalah (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 31.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 32.

15. Ibid., 33.

16. See Joseph Dan, ''No Evil Descends from Heaven: Sixteenth-Century Concepts of Evil,'' in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). See also Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism, Volume III* (Northvale, Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999).

17. Pinchas Giller sees these factors acting together in the editorial process: ''as these kabbalists brought their households to Safed, they began to pool their compilations of the *Zohar,* many of which were incomplete. Even the printed editions lacked important texts, which would be included in appendixes to subsequent editions.'' Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

mined, the human body itself became a place and a venue for enacting cosmic drama. Place is also important to Safed school kabbalah because Safed is located in Palestine, historically very important to Jews generally and kabbal-ists specifically.[18] Similarly, both are reframed in relation to a newly synthe-sized corpus of kabbalistic discourses.

RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES

In order to understand how Safed school rituals relate to historical experi-ence, it is helpful to frame them in relation to the function of ritual generally. In *Holy Terrors,* Bruce Lincoln defines religious practices (including both rit-ual and ethical practice) as ''a set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious dis-course to which these practices are connected.''[19] According to canonical Jewish messianic narratives, the production of a proper world consists in end-ing *galut*, while a proper subject is one formed through ritual practice in the image of the divine. According to some Safed school kabbalists, one perfected community could itself end the exile with proper ritual practice.[20]

While Lincoln's definition speaks very well about the function of ritual and about the ways in which religious discourses shape its performance, it does not speak about what *happens* to those discourses as they are used in ritual practice. This is to say that when religious discourses are used, or enacted, their meaning is contextually dependent in the fullest sense of the word. Here, context includes the time, place, and identity of ritual actors, and on the identity of the audience. The significance of the relevant canoni-cal discourse is realized in its use by particular people in particular times and places. And as canonical discourse is used in context it is reinterpreted, and even rewritten in the form of ritual scripts with new interpretive material. In

---

18. It is part of the land promised in the covenant of the Hebrew Bible, and it is the gravesite of Shimon bar Yochai, a talmudic sage who appears as the main character in the *Zohar*. The Safed kabbalists, therefore, live on the same site as the revered teacher of the central kabbalistic text.

19. Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after 9/11* (Chicago: Uni-versity of Chicago Press, 2006), 6.

20. Fine writes: ''Whereas at an earlier time, men such as Abraham ben Eliezer ha Levi believed that the redemption would come of its own accord, independent of the cooperation of human beings, the Safed mystics were motivated by the belief that redemption would only come if the people of Israel worked for it. Mystical devotion during prayer, and fulfillment of the commandments, accompanied by proper con-templative kabbalistic intention, rigorous ascetic behavior, and ethical deeds, would lift the Shekhinah out of her exile and restore the divine realm to its original state.'' Lawrence Fine, *Safed School Kabbalah*, ix.

this process, the ritualization of kabbalistic discourses effectively *adds* discursive elements to the ones enacted. These innovations occur as a result of adapting discourse and its conventional ritual application to context. A performance studies methodology is helpful for considering ritual innovation in terms of the relation between setting, performers, performance, and script.

The treatment of religious ritual as performance is well accepted. Anthropology and Religious Studies commonly use this methodology to understand the social function and the meaning of religious ritual.[21] Perhaps the most important theorization of ritual as performance appears in Stanley Tambiah's classic essay, "A Performative Approach to Ritual."[22] He identifies three main features that allow the treatment of ritual as performance:

Ritual action . . . is performative in these three senses: in the Austinian sense of the performative, wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the sense of indexical values . . . being attached to and inferred by the actors during the performance."[23]

According to Tambiah, "Rituals work within the constructs of a given cosmology."[24] As such, cosmology is the "body of conceptions that enumerate and classify the phenomena that compose the universe as an ordered whole and the norms and processes that govern it." This is always an important part of the setting. The Safed school rituals I examine meet Tambiah's criteria: They take place within a cosmology structured by conceptions of *galut*. They prescribe utterances that act as deeds (performative); they involve all the senses so that participants and viewers experience the event intensively (multiple media), and the acts performed are layered with values and meanings that transcend the specific actions performed (indexical values), attached to and operating within a given cosmology (the setting). Because the Safed school rituals were recorded in the form of *hanhagot*, treatises, and mystical diaries, these written scripts offer interpretations of the rituals, which work in part to theorize ritual action, in relation to those indexical values articulated in these works.

---

21. See Rebecca Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998). In this book she employs a performance studies methodology to examine *Hekhalot* adjurations in terms of their social function and meaning.

22. Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja. *Culture, Thought, and Social Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1985), chap. 4.

23. Ibid., 128.

24. Ibid., 129.

While Tambiah's model identifies the various aspects of ritual practice, it does not explain how and why new rituals are developed. Ronald Grimes's theory of nascent or emerging ritual theorizes this in terms of what he calls "receptivity." In "Defining Nascent Ritual" Grimes argues that "ritualizing is enactment in the face of imagined, socially experienced, and mythologically construed receptivity."[25] This receptivity in all its forms (of both ritual actors and their audience) is part and parcel of the definition of ritualizing. This is to say, simply, that new rituals are developed because their performers and their audiences are open to them, whether because of their lived or imagined experience, because of preexisting religious discourses, or other sorts of discourses engaged in these performances. Gannanath Obeyesekere calls this the translation of private symbols, which are meaningful only to the individual who originates them, to public symbols,[26] which convey meaning to a receptive community. In his work he shows that the transformation of private symbols to public ones requires their translation into preexisting shared discourses, which modifies those discourses in the process.

The concept of discursive receptivity is important here. In both models communal receptivity is a result of shared discourses and experiences, such as shared historical narratives, as opposed to an exclusive emphasis on lived historical experience. This makes it possible to think of history differently; it allows us to say that history is significant, without asserting that it was the "cause" of ritual innovation. In this way we can think about the relation between the Safed school ritual innovation and the 1492 Expulsion without asserting a simple causal relationship. Instead, it is plausible to argue that the Expulsion from Spain added another shared discourse to the preexisting biblical, messianic narratives, to kabbalistic ones, and to Jewish experiential narratives, and that it effected a greater resonance for and receptivity to the exile topos in all its forms.

As such, the ritual scripts of the Safed school kabbalists describe ritual performance aimed at the perfection of the world and of human subjects as defined by previously existing religious discourses, shared historical experience, and shared historical narratives. They name the setting, the players, the audience, and the medium for this performance, and in addition to this they theorize human action as they explain why ritual performance matters, what it does and how. Similarly, a performance studies methodology allows us to

25. Ronald Grimes, "Defining Nascent Ritual," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 4 (1982): 539–55, 548.

26. Gananaath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). See chap. 1.

consider the relation between previously existing religious discourses, individual experience, and the narration of historical experience in considering receptivity to new ritual.

<div align="center">

IMAGO DEI

</div>

Moshe Cordovero worked to synthesize divergent textual traditions in kabbalistic thought,[27] and to codify and to popularize kabbalistic practice. His *Tomer Devorah,* (*Palm Tree of Devorah*) is an ethical treatise that presents an ideal behavioral model based in the biblical conception of human creation in the divine image. That divine image was in turn imagined using a kabbalistic cosmological model. According to this notion, humans realize their true potential by modeling their behavior on revealed divine attributes conceptualized here as *sefirot.*

In *Tomer Devorah,* Moshe Cordovero provides explicit instructions for acting in *imagine Dei.* While his other works discuss ritual practice, this work has mainly to do with ethics as enacted through body practices. His work prescribes particular body practice for affective formation of the self as *imago Dei,* and this formation underlies the rituals articulated in other works of Safed school Kabbalah. *Tomer Devorah* has ten chapters, and Chapters 1 through 9 provide these instructions, while the last chapter of the book describes the results of proper praxis. The chapters focusing on emulation of the divine are carefully scripted, as he describes in detail the various parts of the body to be used, how they should be used, how they should be positioned, and even how the ritual actor should feel in order to act in the image of God. In this process the body is transvalued so that it is consciously participating in the qualities of the divine. This transformation lays the groundwork for effective, theurgic action, narrated in his *Sefer Gerushin* (Book of Exile).

The first chapter of *Tomer Devorah* focuses on the thirteen attributes of the divine. Each succeeding chapter describes one of the ten *sefirot*[28] (except for Chapter 8, which describes three), providing instruction to "emulate the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed Be He."[29] Chapter 10 describes more ritualized body practices but focuses mostly on the kabbalists' "binding" with the *Shekhinah.* Cordovero opens *Tomer Devorah* by stating that the purpose of his work is to provide instruction for emulation of the divine:

---

27. J. H. Chajes, "He Said She Said: Hearing the Voices of Pneumatic Early Modern Jewish Women," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 10 (2005): 99–125. Chajes describes Cordovero as "the great systematizer of kabbalistic knowledge accumulated up to his time," 100.

28. Some chapters combine *sefirot,* such as *Netzach* and *Hod.*

29. Here Cordovero quotes *Gemara: Sotah* 14a.

It is proper for man to imitate his Creator, resembling Him in both likeness and image according to the secret of the Supernal Form. . . . Hence it is proper that these thirteen attributes, which we shall now expound, be found in man.[30]

He continues to identify each of the divine traits, and to show how human beings can model themselves on the divine by shaping their behavior in accordance with them. One example can be found in the first chapter of the book, interpreting the phrase from the Yom Kippur liturgy, ''Who is a God like unto Thee?'' He explains:

This attribute refers to the Holy One, Blessed is He, as a patient King, Who bears insult in a manner that is above human understanding. . . . This, then, is a virtue man should emulate, namely, tolerance. Even when he is insulted even to the degree mentioned above he should not withdraw his benevolence from those upon whom he bestows it.[31]

This is fairly simple. Here Cordovero provides an example of the behavior of God, which is taken as a model for human behavior. Because God is forgiving, so too should people be forgiving. Even more, because people insult God, so too should one maintain a benevolent attitude even after suffering insult. In this case, suffering insult is newly valenced as it begins to articulate a theodicy that valorizes the cultivation of particular affects, because it forms humans as *imagines Dei*.

Cordovero's virtue ethics are clearly intended as an embodied practice. They come complete with instructions applicable to nearly every part of the body. These instructions are intended to form the parts of the human body according to the model articulated in the *sefirotic* divine androgyne. According to this model, all ten *sefirot* together comprise a divine androgyne with the each of the ten *sefirot* corresponding to a part of the body. It works as follows: *Keter*, or crown, corresponds to the top of the head. *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, Wisdom and Understanding, are also located at the head. *Hesed* and *Gevurah* (Lovingkindness and Severity) are placed at the right and left arms, *Tiferet* (Beauty) at the heart, and *Netzach* and *Hod* (Eternity and Majesty) at the legs, while *Yesod* (Foundation) corresponds with the penis, and *Shekhinah* (Revealed Divine Presence) is united with *Tiferet* through *Yesod*, so that she corresponds to the womb. The *Tomer Devorah* describes practices that shape

---

30. Moshe Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah*, trans. Moshe Miller (Southfield, Mich.: Feldheim, 1993), 4–5.
31. Ibid.

the human body to accord with the qualities attributed to each of these *sefirot*, and that in so doing, perfect the self.

For example, because *Keter* is analogous to the head of the *sefirotic* model, Cordovero provides instructions for using the mind and face. For example, he explains that Keter "is the most sublime of all attributes; nevertheless it does not exalt or glorify itself over the other attributes. On the contrary, it always descends, gazing downwards." Similarly a person should "lower his gaze, minimizing his worth."[32] He advises that "just as the *Hokhmah* of *Keter* never stops thinking good thoughts . . . severity and harshness having no place there, so, too, should a person's thoughts be void of anything unseemly." He explains that the forehead, "should display no harshness, and should emulate the display of divine willingness," that "a person's ears should always turn to hear good," that the eyes, "should always be open to watch over the suffering of the unfortunate" and that the nose, "should contain the breath of life, and good will and patience."[33] In addition, "His mouth should express nothing but good, and the content of his words should be Torah and constant good will," so that the end goal is forming the head in the image of *Keter*, emulating its actions, and pronouncing the script of Torah. From the start, this is an embodied ethics that is ritualized, scripted, and interpreted. This is made possible by the conceptualization of the *sefirot* in the human form, and in this case Cordovero synthesizes divergent textual traditions to create a new ritualized ethical practice that includes instructions for thinking, walking, and talking.

The final chapter shows the effects of this formation; it is aimed at binding the practitioner to the *Shekhinah* so that "This way, a person (actually) journeys together with the *Shekhinah* from a state of sleep and death to the secret of Supernal Life, where he is bound up in the mystery of *Gan Eden* (Garden of Eden), and *Tiferet* . . . begins to shine on him." He does this by following the instructions contained in the *Tomer Devorah*, in a daily cycle of rituals:

This is his daily cycle in accord with the cycle of the *Sefirot*, so that he is attached, ever, to the dominating light. This counsel is chiefly contained in the opening section of Genesis and the rest of it has been compiled from many places in the *Zohar*. And this is a comprehensive method by which man can bind himself always to holiness, so that the crown of the *Shekhinah* nevermore departs from his head.

The practitioner is able, at the end, to maintain a continual attachment to *Shekhinah*; she is literally his crown, a *Keter* to his own body, which has been

---

32. Ibid., 48.
33. Ibid., 49.

formed in the image of God according to the model of the *sefirotic* tree. In this, the human body is structurally analogous to the *sefirotic* structure, ritually formed to enact this analogy, and in the end, is physically bound to it. Later parts of the chapter describe this bond as erotic as well, so that the formation in *imagine Dei* also allows the practitioner to interact with the *Shekhinah* in this way as well.

This formation in *imagine Dei* fulfills the first function of ritual according to Lincoln, that is, the formation of a proper subject, and in so doing it allows the subject to participate in the second project of ritual, the formation of a proper world. *Tomer Devorah* describes the process of conversion of the body, whereby it is modeled upon and becomes connected to the supernal realm, and through this connection, is capable of acting on the cosmos, and of changing it for the better.

ASCETIC RITUALS, PERFORMANCE, AND PLACE: THE HANHAGOT

The practical ethics expressed in *Tomer Devorah* is codified in treatises, but it is also expressed in the form of *hanhagot*, or codes of behavior, which were compiled, collected, and circulated by the residents of Safed in the second half of the sixteenth century.[34] *Hanhagot* literature "tends to focus on the most specific, practical details of daily religious life. They are usually composed of lists that, in a terse, systematic format, enumerate practical behavioral standards and expectations."[35] The purpose of these *hanhagot* was the promotion of communal mystical life through correct ritual practice, and to hasten redemption thereby.

While *Tomer Devorah* is aimed explicitly at enacting the human likeness to the divine, and in so doing transforming the body, some of the *hanhagot* aim at a different sort of transformation. In both Cordovero's and Caro's *hanhagot,* the body acts as a vessel for holy books or celestial voices, holding them and becoming a home to them. It acts as a place in two different capacities; it works first as an altar for sacrifice, so that it stands in for the Holy Temple, and second as a dwelling place for sacred texts or for celestial entities like the *Shekhinah* and others. The body is transformed in three important ways: first, by meditation on sacred texts; second, by ascetic practices centered on limiting or reinterpreting the enjoyment of food, wine, and sex; third, by cultivating affective states replicating those attending exile or expulsion. In this third aspect the ritual performer emulates the imagined plight of the *Shekhinah* as

---

34. These are described and compiled in Fine's *Safed Spirituality.*
35. Fine, *Safed Spirituality*, 27. Rule 1.

well as the material conditions described in accounts of the Expulsion from Spain. As the body is transformed to locus, it acquires the potential for theurgy.

Cordovero prepares the adept for *devekut*, or cleaving to the divine, by instructing him to meditate on sacred texts. In so doing, the sanctity of these texts is transferred to the body of the practitioner. This prepares the body to act as an arena for action: "A person should not turn his heart from meditating upon words of Torah and holiness . . . in order that his heart may become a dwelling place for the *Shekhinah*."[36] Three things happen here: first, the heart meditates on the Torah; second, meditation on the holy books transforms the heart; and third, the heart becomes a dwelling place for the *Shekhinah*. Here, the process of transference is extended to the human body. In his book *Early Judaism*, Martin Jaffee argues that the Israelite religion became Judaism through a process of transference; once the Temple was destroyed, its cultic significance was transferred to the Torah, the emergent synagogue, and the home, while some of the power of the priesthood was eventually transferred to the rabbinic class who mastered the Jewish canon.[37] In our case, Cordovero ritualizes transference of sanctity to the body. While in Jaffee's model the home, the synagogue and holy books acquire the sanctity of the Temple and the power of the priesthood, here, by meditation on holy books, the body becomes the Temple, as it becomes a dwelling place for the divine presence, the *Shekhinah*. The body then functions as the Temple did in the Hebrew Bible. The metaphors of domesticity are also salient; if the Jews of Safed had internalized a narrative of homelessness, in this ritual they also internalized a narrative of home.

Enacting this domestic narrative becomes effective, as even ingesting food influences divine forces. Cordovero writes, as the fifth rule of his *hanhagot*: "One should be sparing with meat and wine during the weekdays, even at night, inasmuch as these foods endow Sama'el with energy."[38] Here, the nourishment of the body with meat and wine also nourishes demons. In the same way, the emptying of the stomach transforms it into an altar, so that the human body acts as a place, in this case as the destroyed Temple.

The stomach serves a similar but inverse function in the following as it is transformed to sacred space through the ritual of sacrifice.

---

36. Ibid., 34.

37. Martin Jaffee, *Early Judaism* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997). See especially the Introduction and Chapter 5, "Ritual Space and Performance in Early Judaism."

38. Fine, *Safed Spirituality*, 35, Rule 5

A person ought to meditate upon matters of Torah with each and every bite he eats in order that his food may serve as a sacrifice and his drinking of water and wine as drink-offerings.[39]

There is a clear pattern here. Mentally reproducing and engaging Jewish holy texts, or religious discourses, changes the act of eating. Scripted according to religious discourses, the stomach of the practitioner acts as an altar, but without them, it ingests food that nourishes demons.

The *hanhagot* are also aimed at duplicating the conditions of exile and producing an affect associated with it. This in turn helps to change these conditions. All of the collections of *hanhagot* have ascetic components. They advise practitioners to limit their intake of food and wine, and they regulate sexual pleasure, as well as the affect associated with both of these. They also script the cultivation of guilt and repentance, while some even recommend flagellation, simulated stoning and strangulation, and other self-inflicted torments for the purpose of atonement. Stoning and strangulation serve two functions: they effect atonement at the same time that they both emulate and create the conditions of the restoration. These punishments were only inflicted when the Temple stood, and therefore this ritual is performative in the Austinian sense, wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act. Ideally, *performing* the conditions of restoration will bring it. At the same time, performing scripted suffering draws upon memories and narratives of lived suffering, transforming it from a pointless and meaningless experience passively undergone to an effective, meaningful action deliberately undertaken in the service of restoration. This is in effect a new theodicy, wherein suffering forms the individual as *imago Dei*, and as *imago templi*.

EMULATION OF EXILE, GNOSIS, AND THEURGY: *ZOHAR* AND EXPERIENCE IN *GERUSHIN*

Gerushin is described in *Tomer Devorah, Or Ne'erav, Elimah Rabbati*, and most importantly, *Sefer Gerushin*. *Sefer Gerushin* describes its practice by Rabbi Solomon Alkabetz, Cordovero, and their fellowship. This practice consisted of excursions, called *gerushin* (voluntary banishment or exile)[40] aimed at achieving three things: first, mystical insight or gnosis, second, the erotic binding of the kabbalist to *Shekhinah*, and third, theurgic action contributing to the restoration of the *Shekhinah* from exile. In practice, this happens in several

---

39. Ibid., Rule 32.
40. Cordovero also uses the Aramaic word תירוכין (divorce) in this context, see *Sefer Gerushin* (Jerusalem: Ahuzat Yisrael, 1962) entry 96, 110.

steps, as discussed below in the analysis of *Sefer Gerushin*. *Gerushin* operates by imitation and sympathy, as the wanderers physically duplicate the conditions of exile in its full range of meanings, meditate upon sacred texts, including the *Zohar*, and perform ritual actions scripted according to discourses of historical experience and sacred texts. Zwi Werblowsky writes that *gerushin* was used to generate an experience resembling automatic speech, yielding intuitive insights into the Torah.[41] This clearly does occur in both the *Zohar* and in Cordovero's sources, but Cordovero has developed the ritual and increased its significance and power.

As Pinchas Giller and Zohar Raviv have convincingly argued, the *Zohar* provides the setting for the ritual,[42] as do some of its most important characters, such as Shimon bar Yochai, his mystical fellowship, and those of the celestial realm such as *Shekhinah* and *Tiferet*. The sources themselves acknowledge this. For example, ''In order to fathom these wisdoms,'' *Or Yaqar* states, ''We firstly need to familiarize ourselves with the *gerushin* which were practiced by Rabbi Simeon and his colleagues, whose disclosure of such matters had occurred while traversing the roads.''[43] The *Zohar* provides the model, but does not pay as much attention to the mechanics of its performance. Cordovero creates instruction for these mechanics, and these are elaborated in Chapter 9 of *Tomer Devorah* and in *Sefer Gerushin*.

EMULATION, EMPATHY, TRANSFORMATION

Tomer Devorah offers instructions for the performance of *gerushin,* which replicated the material conditions of exile, to transform its practitioners so that they would resemble *Shekhinah*. In so doing, the idea was that they would gain the capacity for theurgic action; once transformed, they could serve as a vehicle, or a *merkavah* for the *Shekhinah*, in order to restore her to her rightful place in the cosmic order, and to bring about the restoration. In the ninth chapter of *Tomer Devorah,* Cordovero describes the process and the purpose of *gerushin*. He frames it as the emulation of *Malchut* (another name for *Shekhi-*

---

41. See J. Zwi Werblowsky, ''Mystical and Magical Contemplation: The Kabbalists in Sixteenth-Century Safed, *History of Religions* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1961), 9–36.

42. Giller writes: ''The Safed mystics came to replicate the events described in the *Zohar* . . . The return to the actual setting of the Zohar piqued interest in the framing narratives of Shimon and his comrades. The Upper Gallilee, the foot of the Golan Heights, became part of the spiritual landscape for immigrant kabbalists'' (*Reading the Zohar,* 14 and 15).

43. *Or Yaqar* on *Zohar* 1:6a, vol. 1, 58, trans. Zohar Raviv, ''Fathoming the Heights, Ascending the Depths: Decoding the Dogma within the Enigma'' (diss., Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 2007), 246.

nah), the aspect of God that, like humans, lives in a state of exile. The body is transformed in two separate steps here: first, the mystic is instructed to remove symbols of social status from his body so that it can enact, and thereby participate in the exiled state of the *Shekhinah* and the Jewish community; second, he is told to exile himself, in order to become a vehicle for the *Shekhinah*. Cordovero takes pains to root this practice in those described in the *Zohar,* but upon examination it is clear that he modifies these practices as he applies them, providing specific instruction for their enactment and increasing the significance and the power of the ritual.

Cordovero prescribes two kinds of actions for a person to "train himself in the attributes of *Malchut*."[44] First is emulation, and second is the cultivation of empathy. In emulation, the practitioner is instructed to desymbolize the body in various ways, removing all signs of wealth and social identity. To cultivate empathy, the practitioner is instructed to contemplate particular texts and topics as he completes these actions. In emulating *Malchut*, Cordovero writes that the practitioner's "wealth should not make him proud. Rather, he should always behave like a poor person, standing before his Maker like a pauper, begging and pleading."[45] Similarly, he advises isolation. This is so, he says, because "each member of a man's household must fend for himself . . . for what help will even his wife and children bring when he stands in judgment before the Creator? [46] To this end, he instructs the practitioner to leave his home, advising:

A man should exile himself, wandering from place to place for the sake of heaven, thereby becoming a vehicle for the exiled *Shekhinah*. . . . Better still, he should weary his legs by trudging from place to place, without horse or wagon. Concerning such a person, it is stated: ". . . his hope (s-b-r-v) is with the lord his God, (*Psalms* 146:5) deriving from the word s-b-r, meaning breaking."[47]

In completing this he has symbolically left society. The preparation for *gerushin*, which includes packing as few belongings as possible, strips the mystic of material goods. Isolation and wandering itself strip the body of the context of place and kin. In this, the practitioner is both broken and made hopeful so that the meaning of suffering is transformed, as he becomes a vehicle for the *Shekhinah*.

---

44. Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah*, 123.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 123–24.
47. Ibid., 124.

The first part of Chapter 9 describes the manner in which the ritual should be completed. It tells the ritual actor what to wear, what to bring, what not to wear or bring, and the affective state he should cultivate in its execution. The second part of the chapter explains the source of the ritual, its purpose, and its effects. Cordovero explicitly roots *gerushin* in the *Zohar*. He writes: "A second method is explained in the *Zohar*, and it is very important."[48] Here Cordovero draws upon *Zohar* II: 198a and b.

Now you exalted saints who endure bodily affliction in wandering from place to place for the sake of the Holy One, Blessed is He, how much more are you worthy that miracles and acts of redemption should be performed for you, and that you should win the life of the world to come![49]

Notable here is the redemptive function of *gerushin*. Other passages show its end goal as intuitive insight or gnosis, or as a sort of theurgy, while still others emphasize its transformative function.

Cordovero draws upon Zoharic discourses as he theorizes the function of *gerushin,* but he adds to it, providing a recipe including textual sources, instructions for physical action, and for affect. The point is not only to suffer, but also to reinterpret suffering so that the practitioner feels empathy for the *Shekhinah*. The practitioner cultivates empathy for the *Shekhinah* by reproducing her experiences and contemplating them. Cordovero writes that

He should exile himself from place to place for the sake of Heaven and in this way he will become a chariot (*merkavah*) to the Exiled *Shekhinah*. He should imagine: "Behold I have gone into exile but, behold, my utensils go with me. What shall be with the honor of the Most High seeing that the *Shekhinah* is in exile without Her utensils which are lacking as a result of the Exile?" Because of this he should be satisfied with as little as possible, as it is written "Prepare thee stuff for exile" and he should humble his heart in exile and bind himself to the Torah and then the *Shekhinah* will be with him.[50]

This empathy transforms his body to vehicle (*merkavah*) as it forges an erotic bond between the ritual actor and *Shekhinah*. The word *merkavah* is the key to this: it works on at least three levels of meaning here, and at the

---

48. Ibid.
49. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, eds. *The Zohar* (London: Soncino Press, 1949), Vol. 4, *Zohar* II, 198b,171.
50. Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah*, 124.

second level, it connects becoming a chariot for *Shekhinah* and establishing an erotic bond with her. The male character in the *Song of Songs* exclaims that "she sat me in the most lavish of chariots,"[51] referring clearly to the act of intercourse, with the chariot identified as the vagina. The mystic here, then, by identifying with the *Shekhinah* becomes her, and as this passage suggests later, joins with her in a relationship analogous to marriage:

Man stands between the two females, the physical female below who receives food, raiment and conjugal rights from him, and the *Shekhinah* who stands above him to bless him with these which he, in turn, gives to the wife of his covenant. This is after the pattern of Beauty, which stands between the two Females: the Higher Mother, which pours out all that it requires, and the Lower Mother, which receives from it food, raiment and conjugal rights, namely loving kindness, justice, and pity, as is known. And the *Shekhinah* cannot come to him unless he resembles the Supernal Reality.[52]

The man's likeness to *Shekhinah* forges an erotic bond that transforms practitioners and allows them to act as *imagines Dei*, bestowing blessings as the divine does. This is accomplished through ritual practice aimed at cultivating empathy, as the ritual actor emulates the state of exile, in all its senses, as he meditates on the destruction of the Temple and the fate of the *Shekhinah*. These might also resonate with the actor's own historical experience and that of his parents, as these conditions also replicate those of the Expulsion from Spain.

The gender dynamics are fairly complex here, as the mystical practitioner empathizes with, becomes like, and engages in an erotically framed relationship with the *Shekhinah*. But they make more sense in light of the Zoharic understanding of gendering, insomuch as it is determined by position: an entity is called male in relation to those below it, and female in relation to those above. So it is that a man can imagine intercourse with the *Shekhinah*, through which she bestows upon him the husband's blessings of "food, raiment and conjugal rights," and can then turn around to bestow these same things on his wife. Toward the end of the chapter, he gives these blessings to the *Shekhinah* herself through proper performance of the rituals of *tzitzit* and *tefillin*, proper *kavvanah* (intentionality) during the recitation of the *shema'*

51. *Song of Songs*, 6:12. See Ariel and Chana Bloch, trans., *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 97.

52. Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah*, 1.

(the Jewish confession of faith recited with the ritual of donning *tefillin)*, and by setting aside time for Torah study. Transgendering may or may not be a metaphor here; however, the most important point is that transgendering is one of the most potent ways of expressing the transformation of the body, and the text states clearly that it changes the capabilities and the powers of the practitioner. Hence, suffering serves several purposes; it cultivates empathy, establishes a relationship, and empowers the ritual sufferer to dispense blessings.

In *Tomer Devorah*, Cordovero provides instructions for *gerushin* that are focused intently on both the practitioner and his actions; the goal is ''attainment of the quality of *Malchut*,'' which necessarily precedes actions themselves; the positioning of the body, the words recited, and the affect of the practitioner explicitly emulate the conditions of the exile, which are transformed to identify the wanderers with both their exiled forebears and the exiled *Shekhinah*.[53] Significantly, the wanderers consciously relive historical experience and identify with the *Shekhinah*, acting out two related roles that come together in the person of the performer. In this case, Cordovero uses textual traditions to frame his endeavor, but he alters them to speak to communal experience. Thus, *Tomer Devorah* offers instructions for the performance of *gerushin,* which replicates the material conditions of exile, in order to transform its practitioners so that they would resemble the *Shekhinah*. In so doing, they gained the capacity for theurgic action; once transformed, they could serve as a vehicle (or *merkavah*) for her, in order to restore her to her rightful place in the cosmic order, and to bring about the restoration.

THEURGY

Sefer Gerushin is different from *Tomer Devorah* in many ways, but the most important is its genre. Whereas *Tomer Devorah* was written for circulation, as were the *hanhagot, Sefer Gerushin* is neither a treatise nor a manual. Instead, it is a narration of the experiences of Cordovero and his fellowship. It is, therefore, a narration of action. It is not prescriptive, but descriptive, explaining what happened and how. In *Sefer Gerushin*, the increase in and significance of *gerushin* is clear. In it he states that ''The [*Sefirot*] are affected by men who

---

53. In the introduction to *Safed Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988). Fine writes that ''even though the earlier Spanish Kabbalah had already spoken of the Shekhinah's exile, it was the kabbalists of Safed, now consumed by the horrors of historical exile, who took up this theme and pushed it to its extreme. In the process, they achieved a personal identification with the Shekhinah (8). See also Bracha Sack, ''The Exile of lsrael and the Exile of the Shechina in Or-Yakar of Rabbi Moses Cordovero'' (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1982): 157–78.

plead before them [. . .]; that is, the *Ein-Sof* affects the [*Sefirot*] in turn *to conclude the request of the seeker*'' [54] Yet this power is solidly grounded in the correct performance of the ritual, in the power of the ritually transformed human body, and in its action in particular settings.

Zohar Raviv describes *Sefer Gerushin* as a work which narrates ''a multifold theatre within which space, time, landscape, tombstones, past saintly souls, prostrations, meditations, body movements and liturgy all acted as indispensable agents between RaMaK, his fellowship, the *Shekhinah* and the theosophical edifice by and large.''[55] In so doing, Raviv identifies the various aspects of performance, including setting (i.e., space, time, landscape), characters (practitioners, departed saints, and *Shekhinah* and *Tiferet*), actions (prostrations, meditations, body movements), and narrative (liturgy and other religious discourses such as those from the Torah and the *Zohar*). The theosophical edifice refers to the complex of ideas that constitute the cosmology, and these act as both setting and narrative, and the ways in which these actions affect the theosophical edifice shows an enactment of the indexical values as described by Tambiah. In short, then, all of these elements are used together in a performance that is both meaningful and theurgic, and which acts within a particular cosmology. Moreover, they gain meaning specifically in context, in all of its senses. Isolating the various elements of the performance enables us to better understand how it works.

Raviv identifies seven steps appearing in the accounts in *Sefer Gerushin*; they include (1) exilic excursion to the Galilean vicinity; (2) occupation with a particular verse, usually from the Torah portion of the week; (3) inquiry into the esoteric meaning of the verse; (4) human exegesis in resolution, that is, people talk about the verse and answer the question; (5) travel, ascetic practices, liturgy, prostration on gravestones, cave visitations, and isolation within the landscape in order to evoke divine exegetical assistance; (6) gnosis, or according to Raviv's terminology, divine innovative exegetical assistance; and finally (7) conclusion of the ritual.

These seven steps show two interlocking tripartite structures, centered on the performance of two sets of ritual actions. The first set of ritual actions occurs with the travel to the Galilee itself. The travel coincides with discussion of the ''matter of the day,'' or the daily selection from the weekly Torah portion, and this set of rituals ends with the resolution of the question. But it is important here to consider the point of the question. Torah study is itself a ritual, and the question is how it relates to the sense of place so important

---

54. Cordovero, *Sefer Gerushin*, entries 2 and 3.
55. Raviv, ''Fathoming,'' 258.

to *gerushin*. So what role does the inquiry play? Because the weekly Torah portions are distributed over the course of the year, and because meaning is attributed to this distribution, studying "the matter of the day" is in part a study of time and cosmology. As such, the practitioners' inquiry into these things is in part an inquiry into the "when," the significance of a particular day, and the meaning of their particular situation in time. The journey to the Galilean region, the setting of the *Zohar,* situates the "when" in a "where" so that their Torah study gains meaning in the context of place. This establishes a setting for the second set of ritual actions.

The second set of ritual actions begins as the question is resolved and the practitioners become situated in time, space, and narrative. When the initial question is answered, the ritual actors begin a new set of movements and actions, and this time they are more specifically situated in both time and space. These involve particular actions with particular objects and landmarks such as caves and gravestones, and as Raviv has shown, the practitioners physically mime the erotic bonding between the physical and metaphysical actors.[56] In this case, the physical enactment of this erotic bond leads to noetic insight, and according to the theology of the *Zohar* and that elaborated by Cordovero, this knowledge is salvific. According to Cordovero, however, proper practice of these rituals allows people to influence the *sefirot* and to change them. In this scheme, as these actions must be situated in specific times and places, and as these rituals involve more physical action, the results become more significant; that is, the actor receives noetic insight rather than a rational, rhetorical resolution to his question, along with the power to influence the *sefirot* themselves.

In this case, we are able to observe the transformation of ritual. The first set of ritual actions is more or less conventional; many of them are described in the *Zohar,* and the ascetic rituals accompanying them are clearly modeled on rabbinic sources. Further, *the Zohar* employs traditional methods of study aimed at the resolution of a particular textual problem. This set of actions serves to establish setting, including time and place, as well as the cast of dramatis personae. These traditional ritual acts emulating the conditions of exile (in all of its four senses) help to establish the identity of the performers by removing them from one setting and placing them in another, and in relation to a particular cast of characters. In so doing, these mimetic acts help to establish the actors' position within the cosmology (Raviv's theosophical edifice), and to transform participants from regular people to actors in this

56. Raviv, "Fathoming," 256.

drama. Once they have performed this new identity within time and space, and have established their relationship to cosmological entities such as the *Shekhinah* and other *sefirot*, they are prepared to participate in the second set of rituals. This second set of rituals is intended to be effective; in many cases their effectiveness lies in their interactive nature. As noted above, these include acts of isolation within the landscape, travel, ascetic practices, recitation of liturgy, prostration on gravestones, and cave visitations. In each case, the ritual is shaped around interaction with another party, such as departed saints, or supernal entities like *Shekhinah* and *Tiferet*. The practitioner's ability to interact with these entities is dependent on the transformation effected by the first set of rituals, so that in this structure we witness the efficacy of ritual in preparing the practitioner to act and to exert power.

THEURGY, PERFORMANCE, AND RITUALIZATION IN MAGGID MESHARIM

Yosef Caro's *Maggid Mesharim* is one of the first instances of Jewish life-writing. Life-writing is a term of compromise here, describing writing about the self that does not fit the definition of autobiography.[57] The general consensus in the field is that autobiography is "the attempt to relate a retrospective, narrative history of one's life, [and that] autobiography is most fundamentally a history in which the author is his or her own subject."[58] In Caro's case, as in others from sixteenth-century Safed, the self is not necessarily the subject. It is instead the vehicle for enacting messianic objectives and the setting in which significant action occurs, but it is not the subject of the narrative per se. Caro wrote *Maggid Mesharim* in diary form[59] in entries dated between the years of 1536 and 1572, with the last one dated on Yom Kippur 1572, three years before his death.[60] As early instances of life-writing, Cor-

---

57. For a thorough consideration of this topic, see J. H. Chajes, "Accounting for the Self: Preliminary Generic-Historical Reflections on Early Modern Jewish Ego-documents," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 1–15.

58. Aviad Kleinberg, "We Did Not Know That He Was Like That: Three Medieval Autobiographies" (Hebrew), *Alpaim* 13 (1997): 44–64.

59. Moshe Idel, "On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah," *Kabbalah* 3 (1998): 145–73. Moshe Idel writes that the sixteenth century marks the advent of the mystical diary, with three of these appearing in its second half. Chajes asserts that this is not a diary, but argues that it should be categorized instead as an ego-document, or as a piece of life-writing, because these labels imply a different conception of self than does the term "diary."

60. Zvi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), 37.

dovero's *Sefer Gerushin* and Caro's *Maggid Mesharim* both express and exemplify the ritual of self-chronicling that became an important part of religious life in some Jewish circles from the seventeenth century onward. [61] Yossi Chajes writes that eventually, the recording of individual experience was also codified in *hanhagot* as "rabbis in the sixteenth century begin to recommend the use of *pinkasim* (notebooks) to record everything: business transactions, dreams, and, like Ishmael ben Elisha, transgressions." [62] In so doing, they produce, exemplify, and authorize practices intended to transform the body into a venue for and a performer in the drama of restoration. These then take the form of ritual scripts as they are codified in *hanhagot*. As such, Caro's work can be considered a product of the increased emphasis on the significance of human action that characterizes Safed school kabbalah.

For both Caro and Cordovero, the combination of the ascetic practices described in the *hanhagot* were focused on achieving interaction with celestial beings, in the form of either *devekut* or *maggidism*. In both cases, these communications served two important purposes, including theurgy and the authorization and innovation of new ritual practices. *Maggid Mesharim* narrates the visitations of Caro's *maggid*, a celestial voice that would come down to speak in him, through his mouth. The *maggid*'s appearance depended on his completion of ascetic rituals and Torah study, which asserts the significance of ritual action. Moreover, because the speaking voice is not human but divine, it provides divine authorization for the efficacy of such ritual.

The *maggid* plays an important role in the innovation and the authorization of ritual. Yoram Bilu defines the *maggid* as "a celestial entity, usually an angel, who delivered mystical secrets to the kabbalist."[63] Yosef Caro is well known for his *maggid*, an angel that entered his body and spoke kabbalistic wisdom through his mouth. While teacher and student (Caro and Cordovero) had differing views of the *maggid*, they both agreed that the presence of a *maggid* conferred significance on the actions of the person it inhabited. Moshe Cordovero believed the *maggid* to be an angel of the normal variety, different from others only because it spoke through human beings.[64] Hayyim Vital, a younger contemporary of Caro, saw it as an angel created by the performance

61. Ibid., 12.

62. Chajes, "Accounting for the Self," 11. Chajes points out that the *pinkas*, or the notebook, is a new technology that offered new possibilities for record keeping and for self-expression because of its portability and availability.

63. Yoram Bilu, "Dybbuk and Maggid: Two Cultural Patterns of Altered Consciousness in Judaism," *AJS Review* (1996): 349

64. "an angel may enter man and speak within him words of wisdom, and this is what is generally called a maggid." Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 80.

of good deeds.[65] Caro's *maggid* provides instructions and justifications for his ascetic practices. This is true because the teachings of the *maggidim* were often directed toward the creation of *hanhagot*. In this way, the words of the *maggid* often authorize ritual innovation, and ritual performance generates more ritual performance.

Maggidim are important here for three main reasons: first, they figure as an hypostasis of human acts, and second, they do not appear in Jewish lore until after the Expulsion.[66] Their origin in human act and intention is important in that it demonstrates their metaphysical significance. The correct acts and intentions were generally construed as observance of the *hanhagot*. Third, this form is significant in itself because it narrates and enacts the divided consciousness and estrangement from self characteristically expressed by conventional representations of exile.[67]

The pattern of using performance to generate more performance is prevalent in Safed school kabbalah. In *Maggid Mesharim*, the "scripts" for the rituals they performed, the *hanhagot,* are often attributed to the voice of the *maggid*. In *Maggid Mesharim,* Caro explains that his *maggid* is the author of much of the kabbalistic work he produced. In the entry dated *Shabbat B'shalach, Tu B'Shvat*,[68] Caro cements the connection between ascetic practice and its impact on the divine realm. At one point, the *maggid* accuses him:

---

65. Caro writes: "It is impossible that anything that comes out of man's mouth should be in vain, and there is nothing that is completely ineffective . . . for every word that is uttered creates an angel . . . and these angels are the mystery of the *maggidim*, and everything depends on the measure of one's good works." Joseph Caro, *Sefer haGilgulim*, Frankfurt 1684 fol. 32b, translation from Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo,* 78.

66. Joseph Dan sees the *maggid* as a development of previous conventions for conceptualizing prophetic revelation, including the *ruach ha-kodesh* (holy spirit), the *bat-qol* (the daughter of the voice) the angel Metatron and the prophet Elijah. See Joseph Dan, "Maggid" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) vol. 11, columns 699–701. However, Yoram Bilu and others point out that the terms used to conceptualize the experience are both significant and unique to Safed school kabbalah, appearing from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

67. Yoram Bilu explains that the terms used to describe this experience are significant; he argues that "they are cultural idioms through which experiences are articulated and behaviors are constructed." Bilu, "Dybbuk and Maggid," 344.

68. (Hebrew) *Shabbat B'shalach, Tu B'Shvat* (Jerusalem: Orah, 1960); Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 138. However, the dates assigned the passages differ. In Jacobs it is dated *Shabbat 29 Iyyar* but in the 1960 Hebrew edition of the text it is dated *Shabbat B'shalach, Tu B'Shvat*. Though I am using Jacobs's translation I am retaining the date of the Hebrew edition.

Although you did sanctify yourself in your food and your drink, yet you slept like a sluggard, for the door revolves upon its hinges yet the sluggard is in his bed, and you did not follow your good habit of rising to study the Mishnah. For this you deserve that I should leave and forsake you since you gave strength to Sama'el, the serpent and the evil inclination by sleeping until daybreak. But in the merit of the Six Orders of the Mishnah that you know by heart, and in the merit of the self-tortures and torments you engaged in, in years past, and which you still practice, it was agreed by the Holy Academy that I should return and converse with you as in former times and that I should neither leave nor forsake you.[69]

Several items are worthy of note here. First is the significance of human action. As in Cordovero's *hanhagot,* practicing restraint in eating and drinking sanctifies the body, likening it to an altar. Similarly, fully gratifying natural needs and appetites gives strength to Sama'el, the accuser. When Caro oversleeps he gives strength to the evil realm, and the heavenly academy convenes over his fate in a fairly routine fashion. Second, it is important to note that the *maggid's* visitation depends on asceticism and self-mortification, coded in this work as sanctification, so that ascetic practice transforms person to place. The importance of this formulation is emphasized as it is enunciated a total of four times in the communication, three times in Hebrew and once in Aramaic.[70]

The rewards for self-mortification are elaborated as the *maggid* promises Caro a waking encounter with Elijah, in which he will see him "face to face" and speak with him "mouth to mouth."[71] Sanctification by self-mortification creates the necessary conditions for prophecy, and for union with the holy spirit of Elijah. Indeed, in *Maggid Mesharim*, Caro announces the arrival of the *maggid* with the words, "Behold, the voice of my beloved knocketh in my mouth, and the lyre sounded of itself."[72] The knocking of the beloved, first, shows the embodied nature of the experience, and as the lyre "sounds of itself" it narrates the divine origin of the material played in his body. The *maggid's* instructions are centered on limiting Caro's engagement with material pleasures, and on constant concentration on Torah. He writes:

---

69. *Shabbat* 29 *Iyyar*, Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 138.
70. The Aramaic is omitted in this translation.
71. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies,* 140.
72. This phrase recurs, appearing in Cordovero's *Sefer Gerushin* and Caro's *Maggid Mesharim*.

Open your eyes, therefore, and dedicate all your thoughts to My[73] worship and the fear of Me. Eat little, and drink no wine, except for one, thoroughly diluted cup each night. Eat no meat, except once or twice during the week and then only a little. . . . Even while eating, think on my *Mishnah* and your meals will then be considered as if they were sacrifices and offerings to the Holy One Blessed Be He.[74]

The individual items work to sever ties with material and human pleasures. Eating is an act that not only affirms the body and addresses its needs; it is also social. Thus, the injunction to think only on the *Mishnah* while eating effects an exile from the company and the conversation of other people. The injunction to eat, drink, and sleep little also replicates the conditions of homelessness. In this way the domestic space of the home is transformed to sacred space through the ritual of sacrifice, and the interior of the self is transformed into a temporary domestic space for heavenly forces. This is rewarded with a face-to-face encounter with Elijah, and an embodied experience of celestial communication "mouth to mouth." Here one performance generates the next as its reward.

The metaphysical significance of the mystic's actions is borne out when Caro's *maggid* addresses his community brotherhood on Tuesday, 30 Adar I (1533 or 1536):

You are all exalted before God and he is sanctified by you. And through you the *ekklesia* Israel will be raised and lifted up. This is the meaning of Scripture, (*Amos:* 2) the virgin of Israel, i.e. the *Shekhinah*, "is fallen, she shall no more rise," signifying that she will not rise of herself but through the efforts of those who raise her and unify her with her beloved. (Here, God is under the aspect of *Tiferet*).[75]

The experience of *galut* (exile) signifies multiplicity, drawing on the full range of meaning of the term. There are two historical valences here; when the *maggid* cites Jeremiah he refers to the Babylonian exile, and when Jeremiah exclaims that the *Shekhinah* is fallen, he emphasizes the cosmological implications of that exile—namely, that the community of Israel (figured as the virgin) has been cast out of her familial home, and that the divine presence will not be manifest while Israel is exiled. However, the *maggid* continues to interpret this passage. First, he interprets *Shekhinah* according to a

---

73. Bilu, "Dybbuk and Maggid," 350. Bilu describes the speaker here as a personified *Mishna* speaking for the Shekhinah.
74. Caro, from Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 140.
75. Caro, Tuesday, 30 Adar i (1533 or 1536, 70a.1) Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 103.

kabbalistic cosmology, when he states that the end goal is to reunify her (*Shekhinah*) with her beloved. The *Shekhinah* of Amos is a virgin, but that of the *maggid* is the Zoharic bride. He focuses on "she shall no more rise" and to it he adds a condition that shifts its focus. The *maggid* begins by addressing the community witnessing his speech. He stresses their chosen-ness (You are all exalted before God) and their power to sanctify God. The *maggid* reinterprets the passage in *Jeremiah*, which makes the connection between the physical exile of the people and its consequences for God, such that "the *Shekhinah* shall no more rise," to shift the focus back to those present, and to the restorative power of their ritual actions.

The words of the *maggid* have significance for the community as a whole. While it is not clear whether the *hanhagot* echo the words of the *maggid,* or whether the *maggid* affirms preexistent *hanhagot*, it is clear that the *maggid* justifies them by speaking them. For example, the above passage spoken by the *maggid,* exhorting Caro to "Eat little, and drink no wine . . ." appears in the *hanhagot* circulated in Safed. So too does the injunction to "think on my Mishnah . . . while eating. . . ." While we do not know whether the celestial voices are emulating previously articulated *hanhagot*, it is likely that they play an important role in their generation, and especially in their authorization.

Caro's *maggid* declares its roots in the post-Expulsion messianism more than once when it promises him the honor of sacrifice at the stake. Toward the end of the Jewish residence in Spain, in the mid to late fifteenth century, forced conversion became more common, and some of these *conversos* began to recant, and to proclaim visions of the coming of the messianic era. These visions were not well received by the Church, and some of these recanted *conversos* were burnt at the stake. The best known of these in Safed was Solomon Molkho (d. 1532). Molkho was a Portuguese *converso* who returned to Judaism in the 1520s. He fled from Portugal and joined David Reuveni in his quest to bring about a military clash between Christianity and Islam. He believed this would usher in the messianic era for the Jews. He saw himself as a messianic figure.[76] Molkho's messianic vision is derived from his own experience, first of coerced conversion and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal, and second of the two great powers acting in the world in which he lived, Christianity and Islam. His goal was to manipulate political

76. Avi Gross, "Solomon Molkho's Biblical Self-Perception," conference paper delivered at "Religious Cultures in the Early Modern Period: Tradition, Authority, Heterodoxy" (May 23–25, 2005, Ben Gurion University). Molkho saw himself as either the Messiah ben Joseph or that of the biblical Daniel.

forces to bring about the messianic era. This got him burnt at the stake,[77] and his martyrdom made an impression. Molkho was hailed by the Safed kabbal‑ists as a hero, and his story provided a powerful model for assigning meaning to their experience.

In *MM* (*Maggid Mesharim)* 4 *Adar ii*, Caro records the following words of his *maggid*:

I shall privilege you to be burned for the holiness of our name, so that you will be shining and radiant in the world to come.[78]

Here the *maggid* performs in the person of Yosef Caro. The *maggid* prom‑ises a radiant burning of Caro's flesh that will presage his radiance in the world-to-come. Here the first performance provides a template for the next. The promise of suffering, a public ''shining'' is redemptive, acquires greater significance as a ''shining'' in the world to come. Human feelings and actions act as microcosms for celestial ones. They also cause them.

These two entries combined (30 *Adar* I and *Shabbat B'shalach, Tu B'Shvat*, and 4 *Adar* ii) together draw on the range of meanings of *galut*. The first examined here starts from the point of lived experience as it valorizes the martyrdom of the recanted *converso* Solomon Molkho, who witnessed the Expulsion from Spain and Portugal. His ideas about the messianic import of his own actions rubbed off on Caro, as is evident when the *maggid* narrates Caro's potential martyrdom as ''a shining in the world to come.'' Because Molkho's vision of cosmic history is derived from his own experience, from narrative, and from his interpretation of the Expulsion, so does Caro's. This shows that the latest denotation of *galut* is the starting point for understanding the significance of ritual action. This passage continues to articulate kinds of actions to be performed; namely, those emulating the conditions of exile. These are specific instructions for the conversion of the body into a theatrical arena for performance of historic and metaphysical exile. The passages taken

---

77. Caro refers to meetings with Molkho in *Maggid Mesharim*, in other parts of the two passages examined here. *30 Adar i* implies that Caro may have been in Salonika at the same time as Molkho, and *4 Adar ii* states ''He made Solomon my chosen one come across your path to see whether you would recognize him. Verily it is accounted to you as a merit that you made his acquaintance and learned from him to fear me.'' Werbloswky writes that this could refer either to his teacher, Solomon Alkabetz, or to Solomon Molkho (Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 107). He believes that there is not enough information to determine whether or not Caro and Molkho met (ibid., 97).

78. *Maggid Mesharim* 4 *Adar* ii. Werbloswky, *Joseph Karo*, 107.

from the entry dated 30 *Adar* 1 show the speakers' use of earlier exile narratives, specifically that of the Babylonian exile described in *Jeremiah*. The interpretation of Jeremiah shows it framed in a Zoharic conception of *Shekhinah*, and then situated in the present as it emphasizes the metaphysical import of ritual action in the moment. These rituals that mimic exile serve to bind together the community, partially remediating its disintegration as a result of exile, and paving the way for its redemption by "lifting up" the *Shekhinah*, ending her exile, so that human performance of ritual changes the cosmos. Here the human body becomes a theater for cosmic drama, and in so doing, it becomes an agent for history.

In all of the works studied here, new religious and ritual practices are innovated in the face of a receptive audience. Their receptivity derives from an historicized interpretation of narratives of exile derived from Jewish, kabbalistic canonical discourses. These new ritual practices work to transform the human body to a venue for performance of exile and of its amelioration. These work on individual, communal, and cosmological levels. As the human body is transformed, it becomes a powerful agent capable of thaumatugy, and of influencing others to emulate these ritual performances in order to achieve the same thing. We have seen that Bruce Lincoln's theory of the function of ritual is important in understanding their purpose, while Grimes's theory of nascent ritual, combined with Yerushalmi's conception of recital and ritual as channels for narrating and acting on history, helps to situate their innovation in the interpretation of both historical experience and communal discourse. Moreover, these practices are more readily recorded and authorized because of changes in recording technology (the *pinkas*) and print technology (the printing press). In this way, ritual actors were able to record their innovations and distribute them quickly and easily, so that they became authorized both in the act of mechanical reproduction and in their repetition as communities formed on the basis of these practices.

This hybridized performance studies methodology, derived as described above, shows the significance of the human body in Safed school kabbalah. Its literature and the ritual practices show continuity with earlier kabbalistic traditions, but as a consequence of the Expulsion from Spain there is a significant break with them in an increased emphasis on the use of the body to effect metaphysical change. This break occurs in four stages. First, Caro and Cordovero reimagine textual tradition consequent to the Expulsion from Spain. Legal, ethical, and kabbalistic traditions are codified and reintegrated, to make a new whole. They collate older works and reinterpret them according to the experience of their authors. In this process both devote considerable attention to the details of ritual.

Second, lived experience is used to generate new rituals that perform exile, or *galut,* in the full range of its signification. The descriptions of *gerushin* (ritual exile) in portions of *Tomer Devorah*, and in *Sefer Gerushin* provide instructions to enact ritualized exile in its full range of significations. Its performance becomes meaningful in the context of the drama of *tikkun olam,* or the repair of the cosmos to bring about the coming of the messianic era.

Third, the newly developed rituals attending these ideas work to model them on the body, and to prepare it to act as a venue for their performance. Ethical literature such as Cordovero's *Tomer Devorah* provide ideological justification for endowing the human body with metaphysical power, and the *hanhagot* provide detailed and specific instructions for converting it to an arena for its performance.

Fourth, the significance of the human body is reinterpreted. In a culmination of all of these ideals, Caro's *Maggid Mesharim* describes a body that speaks with celestial voices. If the other literature provides formulas, *Maggid Mesharim* shows results when angels come down to speak in Caro's body, expressing the power of human adherence to *hanhagot*. If the body is both the actor and the venue for the cosmic drama of redeeming exile, then the body is no mere symbol but an actor in material and metaphysical history.

Both of these writers drew on earlier sources and topoi, especially the familiar topos of exile and its attendant affective states, but both modified them to address their own historical experience. They created new rituals and ideals that use the human body to dramatize historical and textual experience in the form of an embodied ethics. The emphasis upon lived experience is felt in its repetition in the rituals of *gerushin* and other forms of ascetic practice, but also in the centrality of cultivating the body to perform cosmic history. While Jewish literature has in the past assigned the body significance as a microcosm, a source of information about the divine, and while it has in the past created bodies as aliases to perform messianic actions, it is new that the human body is itself so prominently assigned such a function.

Finally, these texts draw attention to the function of ritual. Ritual is used as Lincoln says it is, "to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which these practices are connected."[79] But it also modifies those discourses, reinterpreting them in their application in a new setting, and adding to them as these rituals are innovated and then codified in *hanhagot* and narrated in life-writing. These changes occur in part because the meaning of ritual is made in context, meaning time,

---

79. Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, 6.

place, and identity of ritual actors, as well as of those present when it is performed. The context also includes other discourses to which participants might attach those rituals, and which they might also employ in their interpretation. This is Grimes's receptivity factor. Once again, this conception of receptivity offers an opportunity to consider the Expulsion as another layer of the meaning of the exile and redemption topos in classical Jewish texts, without designating it a cause for the ritual innovation occurring in Safed, and without treating those rituals as a mere psychological response to historical trauma.

In light of these considerations, the new rituals of Safed offer some real insight into their anthropology. They shed light on changes to Jewish conceptions about human nature and about the human capacity to act, with particular emphasis on the power of the human body, and as a result, with a greater valuation of lived experience as evidenced by the inception of life-writing and of *hanhagot* scripting particular actions and urging practitioners to document them. The result is a new theodicy, attributing new meaning to human suffering, so that deliberate suffering shapes human beings as *imagines Dei*, empowering them to enter into a relationship with the *Shekhinah* and to act theurgically. Not only is the human body reimagined, but in this process ritual is reimagined as well. These texts show it emerging from history experienced directly and in the forms of discourse and ritual recital, and in turn acting on history through these same means.