The Feminine Messiah

King David in the Image of the Shekhinah in Kabbalistic Literature

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The Feminine Messiah

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By

Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel

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להורי היקרים, מיכאל קרא-איוונוב ואירה דשבסקי, שנטעו בחכמה ובבינה עץ של חיים

”אֲרוֹמִמְךָ ה׳ כִּי דִלִּיתָנִי... ה׳ אֱלֹהָי שִׁוַּעְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ וַתִּרְפָּאֵנִי: ה׳ הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן־שְׁאוֹל נַפְשִׁי חִיִּיתַנִי מִיָּרְדִי בוֹר“ (תהילים ל, ב-ד)

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Preface

King David is one of the most colorful, and controversial, figures in Jewish lore. He is variously depicted as a warrior, poet, sinner, penitent, conqueror, musician, and adulterer. And perhaps most significantly, he is depicted as the Messiah. The many facets of his character are rooted in biblical narratives and continue to develop in rabbinic midrash and the various phases of Jewish Kabbalah. Each phase in this tradition has added new and unique features to the picture, thus creating the complex portrait of his persona. Indeed, "David" reflects the cumulative visions and hopes of those who followed in his footsteps throughout the ages. In short, what we realize in the writings that are at the center of discussion here is a substantial transformation of "King David" from a figure dynamically active in the historical realms of Scripture to a multifaceted figure operating in meta-historical realms. As we are going to see, these realms consist of entities and concepts that are made to play a significant role in the mystical realization of the Godhead.

This book focuses on the figure of King David as he appears in Jewish mystical, and particularly kabbalistic, literature. Most important in this connection are the gender-oriented issues in which the feminine configuration of "King David" plays a major role. I intend to examine the interplay of continuity and transformation in the rabbinic and kabbalistic depictions of King David, thus giving full attention to the dialectic characteristics of the sinner and repentant King-Messiah as they unfold in kabbalistic writings. I shall follow processes of shaping paradigms of imagining and thinking that are typical of archetypical modes of realization. In this context, doors are opened wide to modes of discussion that are relevant to several domains of study, not least among them being the psychoanalytic ones.

While numerous studies have focused on David's centrality to biblical and rabbinic literature, no comprehensive scholarly attempt has been made to investigate his image in kabbalistic literature—a lacuna that this book aims to fill. The question at the heart of this study is this: why does almost every zoharic homily that refers to King David do so in terms of the female divine presence, the *Shekhinah*? I will explore images of the "feminine David" as they appear in the Zohar in comparison to how they appear in Castilian kabbalistic texts, and the impact that these images had on later sources such as Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbatean texts, and even Hasidic readings, though this last group is beyond the scope of this book. I will show that this new, gendered perception of King David indicates a crucial turning point in Jewish thought, one whose influence was not limited to the mystical realm.

This study will address a dialectic issue, namely, why the "masculine David"—warrior and conqueror—was "converted" in the Zohar into a representation of the *Shekhinah*, the major feminine configuration of the Godhead. To answer this question, this study will combine different fields of research: literary theories of myth and mysticism, methods of gender studies, psychoanalysis, and theories of masculinity and sexuality. In addition, it will discuss topics pertinent to the study of comparative religion, such as the figure of David in medieval Jewish and Christian entanglement. It will here be argued that this tendency to identify David with a feminine figure may be rooted in Judeo-Christian discourse, interfaith polemics, and interfaith dialogues. In addition, it will suggest that notions of the feminized Messiah reflect issues of national identity and political authority. For example, in the course of the book I will claim that the figure of the *Shekhinah*, or the feminine *sefirah* of *Malkhut*, may represent the fragility of the Jews, who, though deprived of sovereignty, derived from the noetic realm of the divine *sefirot* the invigorating power of endurance. The belief in a spiritual kingdom enhanced these feelings. While *malkhut* (kingdom) does not equate to *melekh* (king), the term holds a dual meaning, which enables the consideration of the gender factor to function on both the mystical and the political level. Thus, by adhering to "David" and his mystical representation in *Malkhut* (i.e., the *Shekhinah*), the Kabbalists transformed their national vulnerability into a virtue.

David is viewed throughout the ages as a historical and epic figure, while at the same time he is presented as a symbol of a mythical entity, one diversely "reincarnated" in various phases of Jewish religious experience. The plethora of homilies about him and their richness in the rabbinic, kabbalistic, and Sabbatean corpora alike highlight the centrality of the figure of David in literature and mythology. In this body of writings, David reflects the faces of the homilists observing him and thus serves as an ideal case study for the gender-oriented and psychoanalytic components of Jewish mysticism.

In my previous book, *Holiness and Transgression: Mothers of the Messiah in the Jewish Myth* (2017), I analyzed the dominant role of the motherly figure in Davidic dynastic genealogy. Based on that study, I argue here that David became a messianic figure not only because of his superior maternal line but, rather, because his "feminization" alludes to the feminine plots in his lineage that include narratives of incest, seduction, and harlotry. As I have shown, these factors are unique to the mystical perception of the messianic dynasty. The sexual transgression that allegedly leaves an imprint on David's character and biography mirrors the history of seductions of his ancestral mothers. It enables a significant breakthrough in the presentation of David and his personality. The unique aspect of this appearance is the merging of the

feminine and masculine aspects of David's messianic image, as underlined in the Zohar. Redemption is thus characterized in the Zohar as a process leading from sin to repentance and finally to the restoration of the self. Furthermore, in its motherly configuration, redemption can be likened to giving birth or to the rebirth of the soul.

The Zohar's identification of the last *sefirah*, *Malkhut*, with that of King David and other male figures raises the issue of the unique dynamics of the discourse on gender within the mystical literature in general. Using current gender theories, I will compare ubiquitous zoharic models to the multifaceted figure of the *Shekhinah* found in other contemporary thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Jewish mystical writings. The aim of this book is to expand upon existing research in order to enable a new understanding of the nexus between gender and Kabbalah. I propose an examination of David's kaleidoscopic portrayal in the Zohar—as a sinning and repenting messiah, a poet and warrior, believer and sufferer, persecuted slave, and imposing king—through the prism of gender reversal. This will enable an expansion of existing research in new theoretical directions.

By asking theological and theosophical questions and by utilizing gender theory and psychoanalytic discourse, I will analyze the cultural function of the "feminized Messiah" in the medieval and modern eras. Themes such as the sinner's soul, the process of *teshuvah* (repentance), gender and sexuality, identity, and the redemptive power of sexual transgression will highlight both conceptual and structural continuities in the transition from early to later generations of homilists. In addition, I will follow the evolution of gender and the body in characterizations of David in the mystical literature of the Middle Ages as well as in later kabbalistic sources. Of course, a complete exploration of the Lurianic and Sabbatean messianic theology in such sources would be a well-nigh impossible project. Thus, I will focus on mythical readings of the figure of King David and the transformation, over the centuries, of his image as a feminized redeemer.[1]

1 I will not treat in detail the figure of King David in rabbinic literature, since there has been extensive research on this subject. Yet, many of the zoharic and other kabbalistic *derashot* are based on his rabbinic image, and in such cases I will turn to the readings of the Sages and analyze the transformation of the homilies. To date, little attempt has been made by scholars to reconstruct a thematic continuum of rabbinic homilies in order to examine the way in which the very same homilies appear in a new, daring form in the kabbalistic literature. In order to further explore the ways in which the ancient homilies are transformed in medieval and modern literature, I will focus on the feminized David, a figure who reflects the feminine aspects of the kabbalists themselves.

Accordingly, the chapters of this book will chronologically examine the feminized figure of King David through the analysis of the rhythms of sin and redemption within the retelling of his biographical narrative—beginning with the biblical story of his birth, through various medieval mystical sources, and culminating with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century kabbalistic texts. Simultaneously, I will thematically analyze terms such as *bediḥa de-malka* (the king's jester) and the concept of David as "the fourth leg of the Divine Chariot," through the utilization of psychoanalytic tools and concepts, such as repression, projection, and denial, and through the employment of gender theories concerning performance, lack, and agency.

The figure of King David will be compared with the figures of Sabbatai Ṣevi and of R. Haim Vital, through themes such as reincarnation, the suffering soul, and the notion of the Messiah as *bar nafle* (a non-viable infant). Through the prism of biblical texts and zoharic late spectacles, I will examine David as a poet, a musician, and the writer of Psalms, and then I will explore his identification with the female persona of the city of Jerusalem as well as other feminine symbols such as the moon, the gazelle, and the dawn.

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Introduction

Although in biblical literature the term "messiah" means simply *mashuah*, "the anointed one," and is usually attributed to both priests and kings who are anointed and chosen by God, evidence in the Prophets and other Scriptural writings suggests that the Davidic lineage was perceived as messianic also in an eschatological sense. The literature of the Second Temple describes King David as a future savior, an idea which is rooted in his portrayal in Psalms, Samuel, Kings, and Isaiah: "The Lord he said to me: You are my son, today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7); "A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isa. 11:1); "The oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1).[1]

In many ways, King David represents the pinnacle of the Judean dynasty. Rabbinic and Second Temple literature (Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Scrolls, and Christian Gospels) both develop the elected status of the Davidic dynasty and present the "Scion of David" as a historical figure, but also as a transtemporal and eternal mythic symbol.[2]

Rabbinic literature hints that David is not only the father of the Messiah, but also that he himself will be resurrected, as it is written in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds.[3] Additionally, in the continuation of this messianic discussion in Tractate Sanhedrin, it is said that David symbolizes the "viceroy," who, sitting to the right of the emperor, represents God or the future Messiah.[4]

1 Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messianic Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956); Yair Zakovitch, ed., *David: From Shepherd to Messiah* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1995).

2 Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel from Its Beginning to the Completion of the Mishnah*, trans. W. Forrest Stonespring (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955); Jacob Liver, *The House of David from the Fall of the Kingdom of Judah to the Fall of the Second Commonwealth and After* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1959).

3 See y. Berkahot 2:4 [13d]: "If the King Messiah comes from among the living, his name will be David; if from among the dead, his name will be David as well"; b. Sanhedrin 98b: "The Holy One, blessed be He, will raise up another David for us." See also Zohar 1:82b: "So David is king forever (*hai le-almin*) even in the days of King Messiah he will be king for we have learned: 'If King Messiah is of the living, David is his name; if of the dead, David is his name.'"

4 As is written in b. Hagigah 14a: "Till thrones were places, and 'One that was ancient of days did sit!' (Dan. 7:9). There is no contradiction: one [throne] for Him, and one for David." In contrast, Rashi (R. Shlomo ben Yiṣḥaqi) on b. Sanhedrin 98b interprets the image as showing the "new" David as the emperor and the "old" David as the viceroy.

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David's figure will be analyzed below in light of his birth story in the later midrash, and as an idealized masculine figure that can be compared to other cultural myths of the hero's birth in the ancient world. The paradox of perceiving David as an actual historic figure—who, in the future, nonetheless returns—signifies a parallel to that of Jesus; and in fact Judaism and early Christianity do share a messianic nucleus. Therefore, I will discuss the motifs of repentance and rebirth linked to David and Jesus as well as the hope planted in them, even before their births. Similar depictions of David and Jesus as saviors illustrate the theme of resurrection and allude to the myth of the "two Messiahs": the son of David who is preceded by the slain son of Joseph.[5] Just as the House of R. Judah ha-Nasi claimed Davidic lineage,[6] Matthew and Luke position Jesus as the Davidic Messiah.[7] Scholars have shown visual parallels between the two, such as their depictions as Orpheus playing the lyre while surrounded by animals, or as being crowned by an aura.[8]

The tense anticipation of the coming of the Redeemer is shared by Judaism and Christianity, and in both religions it is presented as a paradoxical desire which cannot come to fruition. Or, in the modern, jarring rendering of Franz Kafka, "the Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will

5 David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988); David Flusser, *Jesus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001); David Flusser, "The Reflection of Jewish Messianic Beliefs in Early Christianity," in *Messianism and Eschatology: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Zvi Baras (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1983), 103–134; Yehuda Liebes, "Maẓmiah Qeren Yeshu'ah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 313–349; Yisrael Knohl, *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

6 Ephraim E. Urbach, *The World of the Sages: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988); Sandra Shimoff, "Hellenization among the Rabbis: Some Evidence from Early Aggadot concerning David and Solomon," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18, no. 2 (1987): 168–187; Aharon Oppenheimer, *Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi: Statesman, Reformer, and Redactor of the Mishnah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

7 Daniel Block, "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah," in *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Richard Hess and M. Daniel Carroll (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 17–56; Moshe Halbertal and Shlomo Naeh, "May'anei Ha'Eshua," in *Higayon L'Yona: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggada and Piut*, ed. Yehoshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007), 179–197.

8 Paul Corby Finney, "Orpheus-David: A Connection in Iconography between Greco-Roman Judaism and Early Christianity?" *Journal of Jewish Art* 5 (1978): 6–15; Rainer Stichel, "Scenes from the Life of King David in Dura Europos and in Byzantine Art," *Jewish Art* 23–24 (1998): 100–116; Shalom Tsabar, "King David in the Mirror of Jewish Art," in *David: From Shepherd to Messiah*, ed. Yair Zakovitch (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1995), 201–244.

come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last."[9]

In the Bible, David is described as a mighty king, a poet and warrior, a conqueror of women and of cities. David is the Chosen One, whose dynasty has an eternal covenant with God. Israelite and Judean kings are all compared to him, and he appears in the Bible as a symbol of moral justice on earth. Psalms and Prophets characterize him as bestowed with an eschatological mission, while emphasizing his place at the right hand of God.[10] In the Book of Chronicles, a pro-Judean text, David establishes the "cultic poetry" and Levites' holy liturgy,[11] thus having the building of the earthly temple be preceded by a spiritual formation. Biblical verses, such as "the Lord he said to me: You are my son, today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7), help to emphasize David's role as future savior and *Divi filius* (son of God).[12]

The centrality of Psalms to Christian liturgy also contributed to this positive image of David: this is not only because the authorship of the book was attributed to him, but because David's words established a congregation of believers that is based on the idea of repentance and atonement.[13] Later, following the Byzantine emperors, the Carolingian monarchs and later royal dynasties in the West identified themselves with King David, whose priestly and prophetic status they perceived as paramount.[14] In twelfth-century Christian Europe, at the

9 Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 81. See also Elliot R. Wolfson, *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 268.

10 Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999); Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

11 Joel Baden, *The Historical David: The Real Life of an Invented Hero* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013); George Brooke and Hindy Najman, "Dethroning David and Enthroning Messiah: Jewish and Christian Perspectives," in *On Prophets, Warriors, and Kings*, ed. George J. Brooke and Ariel Feldman (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 111–127.

12 Yair Lorberbaum, *Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature* (London: Continuum, 2011).

13 Rolf Rendtorff, "The Psalm of David: David in the Psalms," *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter Flint, Patrick D. Miller, Aaron Brunell, and Ryan Roberts (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 53–64; Alan Cooper, "The Life and Times of King David according to the Book of Psalms," in *The Poet and the Historian*, ed. Richard E. Friedman (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 117–131.

14 Ruth Karras, "Goliath Thought David Rather Boastful: Royal Masculinity in Kingless Societies," *Haskin Society Journal* 28 (2016): 85–100; Gabrielle Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

dawn, so to speak, of Kabbalah, David was regarded as a symbol of ideal spirituality, military leadership, poetry, and art ("*David rex et propheta*").[15]

As we will see, Jewish exegesis, as well as that of the Church Fathers, justified David's deeds. The Sages labored to present him as the model of a penitent even as they claimed that he had never sinned. By transforming the historical battlefields of the Bible into the metaphorical field of Jewish law, they were able to present David as a judge and a pious rabbi.[16] Following Irenaeus, Augustine, and others, later Christian commentators explained that the sins of David had been transformed into virtue. For example, St. Gregory and Angelomus describe David's life as an allegory for the life of Jesus, in which Bathsheba represents the Church (or the New Testament that replaces the Old Testament), and Uriah represents the Jewish nation, namely the Devil, who must be put to death. Thus Angelomus determines "Let us love David inasmuch as he is to be loved, since he freed us from the devil by his mercy."[17]

As Ruth Karras has demonstrated, in both medieval Jewish and Christian exegesis, David's masculinity was cleansed of negative incidents like adultery and infidelity, while his other characteristics (such as his overt sexuality and

15 Hugo Steger, *David Rex et Propheta: König David als vorbildliche Verkörperung des Herrschers und Dichters im Mittelalter, nach Bilddarstellungen des achten bis zwölften Jahrhunderts* (Nuremberg: H. Carl, 1961).

16 Richard Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Avigdor Shinan, "Al Demuto shel ha-Melekh David be-Sifrut Hazal," in *David: From Shepherd to Messiah*, ed. Yair Zakovitch (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1995), 181–199; James Diamond, "King David of the Sages: Rabbinic Rehabilitation or Ironic Parody?" *Prooftexts* 27 (2007): 373–426; Shulamit Valler, "King David and His Women: Biblical Stories and Talmudic Discussions," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 129–142; see also Sandra Shimoff, "David and Bathsheba: The Political Function of Rabbinic Aggada," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 24, no. 2 (1993): 246–256. The presentation of David as talmudic scholar reflects, according to Isaiah Gafni, the "rabbinization of the past." As he states: "By rabbinization, I refer to the representation of earlier figures or institutions of Jewish history in the image of the rabbinic world in which the sages functioned." Isaiah Gafni, "Rabbinic Historiography and Representations of the Past," *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Martin S. Jaffee and Charlotte E. Fonrobert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 295–312, esp. 305–309 and n. 36, referring to Avigdor Aptowitzer's theory regarding pro-Davidic rabbinic statements as an expression of "legitimizating the appropriation of the monarchy by the Hasmoneans."

17 Henri De-Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 64–67; see in Ruth Karras, "David and Bathsheba: Masculine Sexuality in Medieval Judaism and Christianity," in *God's Own Gender? Religions and Their Concepts of Masculinity*, ed. Daniel Gerster and Michael Krüggeler (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2018), 201–218, here 203–204.

physical power) were emphasized. This was done to ensure his rights of ultimate sovereignty and his enduring kingdom.[18]

Sharing with rabbinic literature a common linguistic infrastructure—while at the same time introducing unprecedented sophistication and following a mystical-theurgical orientation—the Zohar creates a new linguistic and hermeneutic field. Later on, the Sefadian and Hasidic literature develops the artistic roots of the Zohar, its expressive tropes, hermeneutical imagination, homiletical playfulness, and linguistic freedom, while adding to them a deep psychological understanding of the human soul and its connection to the divine. The combination of the motifs of transgression and redemption in the figure of the Redeemer reveals a model of chosenness that stems from sexual deviancy, which in turn is vindicated through *tikkun* (reparation) and repentance. These motifs characterize King David in all the Jewish corpuses, whether midrashic, kabbalistic, Lurianic, or Sabbatean, as I will demonstrate throughout this book. A focus on their ethical, visual, symbolic, and metaphysical aspects will help us to understand both the continuous themes that characterize the figure of David and the transformations he undergoes, and, above all, to solve the riddle of his femininity.

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18 Karras, "David and Bathsheba." While in the kabbalistic literature we find justification of the sexual sin, Karras claims that rabbinic literature mainly emphasizes the killing of Uriah rather than the seduction of Bathsheba. More on this subject, see below p. 65 (ch. 2 n. 83).

CHAPTER 4

The Multiple Selves of King David

> The manifestation of the intimate relationship between dream and myth … entirely justifies the interpretation of the myth as a dream of the masses of the people.
>
> OTTO RANK, *The Myth of the Hero*

•••

> Now, is King Messiah called poor? However, Rabbi Shim'on said as follows: Because he has nothing of his own, and we call him King Messiah-holy moon above, who has no light except from the sun.
>
> ZOHAR 1:238a

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In this chapter, I will discuss the figure of the feminized David and the question of identity and salvation through the prism of psychoanalytic theories of the self. I will bring together different approaches, such as Donald Winnicott's concept of constitutive "going on being" and the true and false aspects of the self; and Melanie Klein's notions of projective identification and splitting, which function as defense mechanisms to protect the self from annihilation, and her theory of oscillations between the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position as states that reflect the inner self.[1] I will then suggest that David's appearances in the Bible, Midrash, and Kabbalah can be understood through another psychoanalytic approach, the intersubjective, and the relational notion of the multiple self.

In relational psychoanalysis, many contemporary discussions focus on questions of gender fluidity, transgender theory, and the internalized desire to be both sexes. This issue has been more relevant than ever in the last decade, and I believe that a discussion on this issue will help us uncover new faces in

1 Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation*; Donald W. Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self," in *The Maturational Process and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York: International UP Inc., 1965), 140–152.

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the rich messianic persona of King David and its identification with the divine presence in the Kabbalah, despite the anachronism involved. Additionally, our exploration will make use of Heinz Kohut's ideas of heroism and narcissism, as well as the theories of other theorists dealing with the myth of the hero and the perils of power, charisma, and the instrumentalization of others for messianic or divine purposes.

1 "The Man Who Did This Deserves to Die" (II Sam. 12:5): Splitting and Denial, Repression and Projection

As I argued above in Chapter 2, there is a split in the character of David between the warrior and conqueror depicted in the Book of Samuel and the suffering, passive David depicted in the Psalms. I will therefore begin this chapter by focusing on the interpretive implications that this split has on the homiletic level. David first exerts his power and exploits others, and then sees himself as a victim of circumstances; the Sages follow his lead and use splitting and repression in order to justify his actions. Later, the Zohar expresses a self-conscious awareness of this leitmotif, and suggests a new splitting narrative.

The image of David as scholar (*talmid ḥakham*, sage) and a righteous judge sitting on his throne reflects the way commentators identify with him, depicting him in their own image. Instead of a king fighting on the battlefield, he is fighting in the arena of Torah study, as we have seen in the example of the blood motif (discussed above in Section 2 of Chapter 2).[2] At the same time, he is the archetypal sinner who, according to the Sages, was born to set up "the yoke of repentance."[3] By vindicating him, the Sages defend and justify themselves as is reflected in his idealized image. In the scholarly literature, many studies have focused on rabbinic texts' vindication of David. Richard Kalmin, Avigdor Shinan, James Diamond, Shulamit Valler, Sandra Shimoff, and others lay out the various techniques used by the Sages in their homilies about David.[4] Yet the psychoanalytic aspects of repression and narcissism, and the image of the threatening doppelganger, have yet to be discussed in this context. Sigmund Freud claimed that one of the strongest experiences of the "uncanny" (*Unheimlich*) is seeing a "double," that is, suddenly and unexpectedly meeting

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2 b. Berakhot 4a: "All the kings of the East and the West sit with all their pomp among their company, whereas my hands are soiled with the blood, with the fetus and the placenta, in order to declare a woman clean for her husband."

3 b. Moed Katan 16b; b. Avodah Zarah 5a.

4 See above, Introduction, n. 17.

one's own image in a mirror.[5] Other thinkers conceptualized this image either as the self's wishful, positive need for a twin figure that it can admire and in light of which it can develop healthily,[6] or as a hallucinatory, pathological state reflecting intrusive identification with the object.[7] Both of these explanations might be seen in the following homilies from the tenth chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin (a chapter that deals with those who do and do not have a place in the world to come):

> Rab Judah said in Rab's name: One should never intentionally bring himself to the test, since David king of Israel did so, and fell … as it is written, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me." He answered "I will test thee, and yet grant thee a special privilege; for I did not inform the Patriarchs, yet, I inform thee that I will try thee in a matter of adultery." Straightway, And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed etc. R. Johanan said: "He changed his night couch to a day couch, but he forgot the *halachah*: there is a small organ in man which satisfies him in his hunger but makes him hunger when satisfied. And he walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. Now BathSheba was cleansing her hair behind a screen (honeycomb), when Satan came to him, appearing in the shape of a bird. He shot an arrow at him, which broke the honeycomb, thus she stood revealed, and he saw her. Immediately, And David sent and enquired after the woman" … Thus it is written, (Ps. 17, 3) "Thou host proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou host tried me, and shalt find nothing"; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. He said thus: "Would that a bridle had fallen into the mouth of mine enemy [i.e., himself], that I had not spoken thus." … [1] Raba expounded: "What is meant by the verse (Ps 11, 1) 'To the Chief Musician, A Psalm of David. In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?' David pleaded before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe! Forgive me that sin, that men may not say, 'Your mountain [sc. the king] has been **put to flight by a bird**.'" [2] Raba expounded: "What is meant by the verse, 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight:

5 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Hogarth, 1953), 217–256.
6 Kohut, Heinz, *The Analysis of the Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).
7 Wilfred Bion, "The Imaginary Twin," in *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: William Heineman Michial Books, 1967), 3–22. In the kabbalistic context, see Pedaya, "The Wandering Messiah and the Wandering Jew"; Berman, *Divine and Demonic in the Zohar and Kabbalistic Tradition*, 189–193.

> that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest' (Ps. 51,6)"? David pleaded before the Holy One, blessed be He: Thou knowest full well that had I wished to suppress my lust, **I could have done so, but, thought I, let them [the people] not say, 'The servant triumphed against his Master' …** [3] Raba expounded: "*BathSheba, the daughter of Eliam, was predestined for David from the six days of Creation*, but that she came to him with sorrow … but that he enjoyed her before she was ripe …" [4] Raba expounded: "David exclaimed before the Holy One, blessed be He, ' Sovereign of the Universe! Thou knowest full well, that had they torn my flesh, my blood would not have flown. Moreover, when they are engaged in studying the four deaths inflicted by *Beth din* they interrupt their studies and taunt me saying, 'David, what is the death penalty of him who seduces a married woman?' **I reply to them, ' He who commits adultery with a married woman is *executed by strangulation*, yet has he a portion in the world to come. But he who publicly puts his neighbor to shame has no portion in the world to come."**
>
> b. SANHEDRIN 107a

I will start with the end of the sermon, at the point where David enters the study hall during a dispute about the world to come. The scholars taunt him about Bathsheba, and he rebukes them about the flaw in their morality. "He who commits adultery with a married woman is executed by strangulation, yet he has a portion in the world to come. But he who publicly puts his neighbor to shame has no portion in the world to come."

This text presents David as a righteous scholar and a halakhic authority. His colleagues humiliate him publicly, and he, rather than attack them, controls himself and demonstrates that they are greater sinners than he. Poetic irony here hides corrupted ethics. This text creates a new hierarchy of values, one that, in different language, is later adopted by the kabbalists. In this paradigm, humiliating a friend is worse than taking another man's wife and then killing him. As we have seen in the previous chapters, this motif provides an important source of power for David as a victim and persecuted target.

The end of the text echoes its beginning, where David's jealousy leads him to sin. Unlike the Patriarchs, David knows that God will test him with a sexual sin, "for I did not inform the Patriarchs, yet, I inform thee that I will try thee in a matter of adultery," and he tries to prevent it by changing "his night couch to a day couch." The cluster of symbols used to describe the failure itself contributes to obscuring the severity of David's licentiousness. Symbols like Satan in the shape of a bird, the nighttime setting on the roof, beautiful women with long hair, a screen and a honeycomb, and, finally, the king

shooting an arrow that must find the bullseye. All these images might be easily interpreted from a Jungian or Freudian perspective as pertaining to the soul's unconscious. Yet these literary embellishments disguise the horrifying reality of murder and rape.

At the beginning, David forgot the *halakhah*: "There is a small organ in man which satisfies him in his hunger but makes him hunger when satisfied," but at the end he himself teaches *halakhah*, and shows that the brutal satisfaction of sexual desires might result in receiving praise from God. David's portrayal as a teacher of other sages and a holy man is presented as a foregone conclusion in the four preceding statements by Raba [1–4].

Let us now turn to the heart of this *sugiyah* and explore the ways in which David's sins undergo a symbolic transformation, until they are revealed as pious deeds. In the first reading [1], Raba continues David's wishful thought that his mouth would not cause his failure: "I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress." The homily is built on a play of words in the verse from Psalms 17:3. Based on Psalms 11:1, Raba adds to this that God, symbolized by the great mountain, could not be felled by the hand of a little bird, the Devil. Raba thus shifts the responsibility from the sinner to Satan. But the most striking comment at this juncture is attributed to David, who says: "Would that a bridle had fallen *into the mouth of mine enemy* that I had not spoken thus."

On the surface, David regrets not being able to place a bridle on his mouth, but here again his tongue reveals hidden thoughts. Literally, "the man who hates me," or "his enemy," is David himself. This statement exposes self-hatred, one that resonates with his first immediate answer to the prophet in Samuel "*the man who did this deserves to die*" (II Sam. 12:5). In Hebrew, the split and denial appear more strongly—"*ki ben mavet ha-ish ha'ose zot*"—as well as in the translation of the King James Bible: "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, *As* the LORD liveth, *the man that hath done this thing shall surely die*." Only after Nathan's accusation, "You are the man" (II Sam. 12:7), did David take back his disavowal and no longer wish death to "that man."

By using the psychoanalytic method or working with free association and uncontrolled thoughts, his words serve well his hidden *Thanatos* (death drive; lit. "death"), and mirror his split personality: one part is perceived as "me," and the other part is perceived as "not-me."[8] Following Sándor Ferenczi, Hayuta Gurevich deals in her article, "The Language of Absence and the Language of Tenderness," with early psychic trauma that results in identifying with the

8 Bromberg, "Standing in the Spaces: The Multiplicity of Self," 509–535.

aggressor and attacking the self from inside.[9] In her analysis, she uses Ferenczi's idea of *Orpha phenomenon*, which reflects the self's elements of tenderness and vitality that continue to exist even in harsh traumatic situations alongside the dead parts of the self.[10] Indeed, David's element of vitality can be seen struggling against his murderous elements. Moreover, as a *bar nafle* (a non-viable infant)[11]—even before the formation of his self—David was forced to struggle for his survival. In Winnicott's terms, David's "going on being" represents an existential fear of breaking down, falling, and death. His pathological states of "disintegration" reflect not only a struggle between the true and false aspects of his personality but also a more nuanced split in his "true self."[12]

The Allegory of the Poor Man's Lamb also fits the way in which symbols transform from one structure of meaning to another. The lamb can be seen as either a feminine victim and erotic symbol (*rechela*), or as a future intentional sacrifice, or even as a dish in a feast on the king's table. There is a long journey, according the Talmud and later the Zohar, between David's rejection to the recognition "*I have sinned against the Lord*" (II Sam. 12:13).

Raba's first comment sharpens the tendency to denial. At the beginning, he puts in David's mouth words of forgiveness and grief for his sin, but later he minimizes and reduces it (i.e., his sin) by turning to images of birds and mountains. In that sense, Raba preserves David's disposition to talk about that "man" without realizing that "that man" is himself. On the other hand, it seems that the Sages in these homilies reveal David's blindness to his wrongdoing; they disclose his inability to acknowledge his deeds and to look inside his soul. On a poetic level, it might be that the Sages also blame David for his hypocrisy and the penchant to preach to others instead of taking responsibility for his own actions. Indeed, the structure of the psychotic mind is built on denial and non-recognition; at the moment when projection no longer works, the revealing of

9 Sándor Ferenczi, "Confusion of the Tongues between the Adults and the Child: The Language of Tenderness and of Passion," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 30 (1949): 225–230.

10 Hayuta Gurevich, "The Language of Absence and the Language of Tenderness: Therapeutic Transformation of Early Psychic Trauma and Dissociation as Resolution of the Identification with the Aggressor," *Fort Da* 21 (2015): 45–65. In his discussion of the idea of "Interject," Christopher Bollas refers to these incorporated external forces, which penetrate and activate the mind from within.

11 See Chapter 3 above, n. 25.

12 Winnicott, "Fear of Breakdown"; Ogden, *The Primitive Edge of Experience*, 146–147. Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self." On the split in the true-self, see Galia Avishur Mizrahi's introduction to the Hebrew translation of Jan Abram, *The Language of Winnicott: A Dictionary of Winnicott's Use of Words* (Tel Aviv: Tola'at Sefarim, 2019).

the truth may cause the psychotic mind to collapse. Its disintegration serves as a key to survival in a dual world and split tale.

It is interesting enough to note David's laconic and brief self-disclosure in II Sam. 12, which stands in contrast to his abundant lyrics in the Psalms. David is *the* word artist, and his story symbolizes a crescendo in the artistry of biblical narratives. This short statement represents one shade of the diverse literary fabric of this colorful and two-faced figure.

The following homilies of Raba [2–4] continue analogously with the double reading of the story: on the one hand, they portray David as a victim, as a servant-slave and king's jester (an image that we have discussed in detail in Section 3 of Chapter 2) and describe Bathsheba as designated for him from the time of the six days of creation, just as Eve was Adam's designated rib. At the same time, Raba brings verses of atonement and forgiveness that divulge restlessness and discomfort with his own white-washing of David's sins and his pretense of amusing the Divine.

The Sages may use this splitting technique in order to help the reader accompany the hero through a process of recognition of his sin. Instead of David (who refuses to take responsibility), the Sages themselves fill in the gaps and recognize his moral distortion where he does not. Thus, eventually, the reader is also forced to take responsibility and look into his or her own story and soul. The editors' choice of placing the issue within a section dealing with death penalties and the world to come is not accidental of course. Raba's sermons are arranged as well in a planned order, and each one of them adds new layers to the understanding of this diversified hero—the fighter, the fallen, the worldly, the dancer, the poet—and, more than all these, admired penitent that is beloved by man and God. All his homilies use verses from Psalms, an intertextual book that already vindicates the king in the Bible, and in a way split off his aggressive, violent personality in Samuel and the beginning of I Kings from the persecuted, feeble, and lyrical image in Psalms.

During this sermon, the Sages deal with various levels of sin: between man and God (e.g., David's envy of the Patriarchs); between man and his friend (e.g., shaming him publicly); and between man and woman (e.g., in the field of sexuality and the evil inclination). In the closing remarks of the *sugiyah* in b. Sanhedrin 107a, it is said: "Rab Judah said in Rab's name: 'Even during David's illness he fulfilled the conjugal rights [of his eighteen wives],' as it is written, 'I am weary with my groaning: all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.'" This closure can be a grotesque ending to the process of denial, or, on the contrary, a moment of upheaval, in which the actual death of man—and not merely a symbolic reading of the terms "sin" and "death"—causes him to recognize the truth and acknowledge his sins. Here, for the first time, David

is not described as a righteous man who preaches to the other; but rather, as the commentator Rab Judah recognizes, as someone whose compulsive repetition of bad deeds up until his death belies an addiction that reflects his core identity and deep-seated illness.[13]

From another radical declaration, we learn about the Sages' profound engagement with the statement that reflects King David's sharpest split: "*Whoever says that David sinned is merely erring*" (b. Shabbat 56a). Here, the paradoxical attitude of Hazal and their self-denial reaches new heights in a clear fashion: they labored to present him as the model of a penitent even as they claimed that he had never sinned. Each generation has its own King David, and in each generation he suffers in a new way. The Sages stand as a mirror to reflect light and project onto him their own personal traits, their faults, and their hopes to be redeemed. By transforming the historical battlefields of the Bible into the metaphorical field of Jewish law, they were able to present David as a judge and a pious rabbi. In addition, they identified David as a model of a worshipper. The prayers attributed to him in Psalms are now presented as basic liturgical composition for every believer, as we learn, for example, from the statement "Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Avina said: Anyone who recites 'A Psalm of David' (Ps. 145) three times every day is assured of a place in the World-to-Come" (b. Berakhot 4a).

All of the readings above reflect the efforts of the homilists to vindicate David and justify his deeds while recognizing the difficulty of acknowledging sin and bearing it. In these sermons, the Sages follow different psychological stages of projection—split, "intrusive identification,"[14] denial, and hate—that the soul goes through until it finally accepts a sense of "wholeness" and responsibility. The hero suffers much until he recognizes himself and can achieve the integration of his dissociated parts.

2 Dumah and King David

In their book, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel*, Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes focus on the first monarchs in Jewish history and analyze their plots through the prism of sovereignty and the

13 On David's fear from sin, see b. Berakhot 4a. For a parallel reading of the stories of Judah and Tamar and David and Bathsheba, in the light of *ona'at devarim*, verbal abuse, and humiliating speech, see also b. Baba Metziah 58b.

14 Meltzer following Bion's concept. See Donald Meltzer and Meg Harris Williams, *The Apprehension of Beauty: The Role of Aesthetic Conflict in Development, Art, and Violence* (London: Karnac, 2008).

ambivalence toward political power.[15] This book reveals eternal clashes between "the logic of love and the logic of power" as well as the ambiguity of political motivation and justifications.[16] According to the authors, while the sovereign struggles to embellish his public image, the writer discloses the ruler's pseudo-moral façade.

David's plot reveals, more than any other story, paradoxes concerning the use of power, such as the sacrifice of freedom in return for security; the capriciousness of a sovereign who can turn his protection to violence against his subjects; and, the most dangerous case, the turning of power into an ideal in itself. In his stories, values such as love, holiness, family relations, and religion are all corrupted by the monarch, who instrumentalizes others for his needs "because obligation and calculation, the moral and the instrumental, are very likely to be juxtaposed and fused in a sovereign ruler's mind."[17] In the course of their study, they discuss the differences between the respective moral characters of Saul and David, yet they also show the horror and collapse of values with which they both end. Saul's narrative reflects a confusion between victim and aggressor. Although he tries to kill David time and again, "Saul presents himself as a helpless, friendless, isolated victim … Such an inversion of roles, whereby an emotionally aroused perpetrator describes himself as the beleaguered victim, is frequently a prelude to violence."[18] While Saul's starting point is humility, humbleness, and avoidance of power, his endpoint is violent murder and reflects the paranoid and obsessive fear of losing his throne. On the other hand, David develops the opposite ruling pattern, since he "is portrayed as a figure at home with power."[19] David's tyrannical and manipulative behavior in the killing of Uriah expresses the unlimited power of the one who can commit any political crime without taking responsibility and who denies his guilt by means of overconfidence, a sense of entitlement, and decadence. This profound study, which exposes the perils of instrumentalization, is helpful in analyzing the following dialogue between David and Dumah in Zohar 1:8a–b .

At the heart of this *derashah*, the Zohar condones David through an imagined dialogue between God and the Angel of Death, Dumah. Each side of the discussion presents opposing arguments, with Dumah speaking against the sinning king and God defending David's good intentions. Each side of the argument expresses one of the hero's voices, his two aspects

15 Moshe Halbertal and Stephen Holmes, *The Beginning of Politics: Power in the Biblical Book of Samuel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

16 Halbertal and Holmes, *Beginning of Politics*, 118.

17 Ibid., 168.

18 Ibid., 70.

19 Ibid., 35.

locked in combat. By shifting the scene from human reality into the Divine Pleroma, this homily reflects not only the battle in David's soul but also the war between the powers of healing and repair and the evil powers within the Godhead, as well as the relationship between the upper and lower realms. David here represents the *Shekhinah*, the archetype of the multiple self that I will discuss below. The tension between his qualities of mercy and judgment is also, at the same time, the story of exile and redemption, and the story of dialogue between heaven and earth.

This text includes irony and humor, but also horrifying cruelty. Even though David, who symbolizes the nation of Israel, wants to be rescued, there is always an inner Satan that stands in his way and impedes the process of salvation. The figure that repeats the words "*The man who did this deserves to die*" (II Sam. 12:5) represents in some ironic way the voice of the conscience that reminds us of David's immoral, manipulative behavior. Messianic redemption always contains regressive, primordial energy that undermines its foundations. Thus, a psychoanalytic reading fits the heteroglossia of this homily well and illuminates the multiple personalities of King David, his feminine and masculine aspects, and his celestial and human representations:

> Rav Hamnuna Sava said as follows: "*Do not let your mouth induce your flesh to sin*" (Ecclesiastes 5:5). One should not let his mouth reach evil fantasies, causing that holy flesh in which the holy covenant is sealed to sin. If he does, he is dragged into Hell. The one appointed over Hell is named Dumah, who is escorted by many myriads of angels of destruction. He stands at the door of Hell, but he is not permitted to approach any of those who guarded the holy covenant in this world. King David—when that incident befell him—was frightened. That moment, Dumah rose in the presence of the blessed Holy One and said to him: "Master of the universe, it is written in the Torah: '*A man who commits adultery with a man's wife*' (Leviticus 20:10), and '*To your neighbor's wife*' (Leviticus 18:20). David, who ruined the covenant by lewdness, what shall be done to him?"
>
> ZOHAR 1:8a–b = Matt, I, 54–55

The opening of the sermon is attributed to *Hamnuna Sava*, a hero who bears a resemblance to *Sabba deMishpatim* and other figures, wonderous old men who reveal mystical secrets. These figures appear in what Jonatan Benarroch and others consider the "late layer" of the Zohar, that intermediate layer between *Guf ha-Zohar* and the *Tikunim* literature.[20] As opposed to Benarroch,

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20 Benarroch, *Sabba and Yanuka*, 17, 346, 411.

Ronit Meroz claims that the fictional figure of *Hamnuna Sava* is based on a real historical figure who lived around the year 1250, and that he was one of the main establishers of the zoharic movement, living a generation before Rashbi.[21] Taken as one, the fragments of this layer represent a literary framework for the zoharic corpus, with a sensitive, refined artistic sensibility.[22] The old man's statement deals with the central zoharic theme of *shemirat habrit*, "preserving the covenant of circumcision," and observing sexual purity.

Unlike David, who seemingly transgressed this divine commandment, the kabbalists are called *shomrei habrit*. As it is said in the previous *derashah*: "Those masters of the covenant are called *the work of His hands* … (*ma'ase yadav*, Psalms 90:17)—This is the covenant sealed in a man's flesh." This term alludes to phallic symbolism, since the kabbalists support the *Shekhinah* and "the Bride is aroused to enter the canopy … together with the Companions rejoicing with Her that whole night, while She rejoices with them" (Zohar 1:8a). They adhere to the covenant, while David, who is identified with the bride, violates this principle. As a result of the sin, David began to be afraid, and fear is an emotion that protectors of the *Shekhinah* should inherently feel. As it is stressed: "King David—when that incident befell him—was frightened." Dread can lead a person to profound repentance, but it can also raise the Devil.

In the Talmud, Dumah is described as the head of the spirits (b. Sanhedrin 94a) and the Angel of Death, who judges both the wicked and the common man (b. Shabbat 152b). Rashi explains that the name plays on the word "*edom*," red, while other commentators describe him as being "in charge of silence" and situated at the place of "the grave."[23] Others interpret his name as deriving from the words describing the dark silence of exile. Judith Weiss discusses the appearance of this well-known demonic figure that is described in detail in the Zohar.[24] She claims that the word originally had several unrelated meanings. However, since the rabbinic era, homilies dealing with the enigmatic biblical meaning of "Burden of *Dumah*" have added the association between

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21 Meroz, *The Spiritual Biography of Rashbi*, 151–157, 222–230, 250–252. On *Hamnuna Sava's* pious and devoted tendencies, and the anthropomorphic attitude, see 153–154.

22 Liebes, "Zohar and Eros"; Yisraeli, *The Interpretation of Secrets*.

23 Moving from a grammatical analysis to a psychoanalytic reading, it may also be that the word *dumah* bears a phonetic resemblance to the deceptive imagination, *dimayon*, which is connected with the Devil, who constantly attempts to appear as you. The encounter with the Devil represents an encounter with a person's repressed, rejected aspects.

24 Judith Weiss, "Polemical Anti-Christian Discourse in the Zohar: The Polyseme 'Dumah', the Paschal Sacrifice, and the Host of Heaven," in *Ma'aseh Sipur: Studies in Jewish Narrative*, Vol. 4, ed. Avidov Lipsker (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2018), 37–60. Dumah is mentioned in Castilian, Catalonian, and Geronize traditions (n. 13). See also Liebes, "Christian Influences in the Zohar."

edom and hell, reflecting an anti-Christian polemic, and shifted the word from a homonym to a polyseme. Consequently, the figure of Dumah was thought of as being connected with Jesus in medieval kabbalistic Spain, insofar as allusions were concerned. In the Zohar on Exodus, she recognized a polemical narrative about the humiliated sovereign, Jesus, who descended from heaven to earth and was identified as the God of Egypt and the Paschal Lamb. The role of this counter-narrative was to subvert elements from the life of Jesus and turn them against the Christian belief.

We might develop Weiss's claim in the context of our passage from the Zohar's introduction. The text contains no explicit references to events from the life of Jesus, but it presents two messianic figures struggling one against the other. The defeated Christian Messiah (i.e., Dumah) fights against God's beloved David, who attains divine protection, although the text justifies the claims of his opponent.

In this homily, God's first response to Dumah's accusation against David is based on the talmudic justification according to which Bathsheba had received a *get kritut*, a contingent bill of divorce from Uriah, thereby freeing her to marry David (b. Shabbat 56a). It is also based on the claim of Rava that David and Bathsheba were designated for each other from the time of the six days of creation (b. Sanhedrin 107a). As we read in Zohar 1:8a–b:

> The blessed Holy One said to him: "David is innocent, and the holy covenant stands arrayed, for it is revealed before Me that Bathsheba was destined for him since the day the world was created."
>
> He replied [D.]: "Even if it is revealed before You, before him it was not!"
>
> He said [G.]: "Further, what happened, happened with permission, for of all those entering battle, no one would enter until he legally divorced his wife."
>
> He replied [D.]: "If so, he should have waited three months, and he didn't."
>
> He said [G.]: "Concerning which case was that rule established? Where we fear she might be pregnant. But it is revealed before Me that Uriah never approached her, for look, My name is sealed within him as evidence: it is spelled both אוריה (*Uriyyah*) and אוריהו (*Uriyyahu*). My name is sealed in him, proving he never cohabited with her."
>
> He replied [D.]: "Master of the universe, as I already said, even if before You it is revealed that Uriah did not lie with her, was it revealed to him? He should have waited three months for her. Furthermore, if he knew that he never lay with her, why did David send for him and order him to

> have intercourse with his wife, as is written: *Go down to your house and bathe your feet* (2 Samuel 11:8)?"
>
> ZOHAR 1:8a–b= Matt, I, 55–56

The dynamic between God and Dumah reflects the human interactions in this drama: Bathsheba, Uriah, David, Nathan, as well as the roles of the secondary characters such as the commander of the army Joab son of Zeruiah, the protagonists' dead baby, and the newborn child, Solomon. The background exposition echoes the dialogue of God and Satan in the Book of Job, which may hint at a deeper resemblance between the two stories. For example, the loss of all of Job's family and properties mirrors the taking of the only property of Uriah, his little lamb, Bathsheba. The appearance of Satan and the dialogue that happens in heaven (Job 1:6–11) is parallel to our story's exposition: "Dumah rose in the presence of the blessed Holy One and said to Him." In addition, the heavenly family (*famil'a shel ma'alah*) of ministers and the circle of the powers of fear-despair-evil serve as a shared issue in both stories.

Without going into every detail in this dialogue, it is clear that Dumah responds to each of God's claims like a talmudic scholar deftly overcoming logical challenges. If he represents the figure of Jesus, as Weiss suggests, his knowledge is indeed based on familiarity with the Jewish sources and a corruption of their meaning. Yet, Dumah has ironic and tragic aspects that arouse compassion in the reader. Just like the Jewish and Christian Messiah, he is a demon, half-human and half-divine, undermining the endeavors of both God and the people, and he serves as *ioculator Domini*, the Lord's jester (as David himself does, in *Sabba deMishpatim*, Zohar 2:106b–107a, as well as in Zohar 1:148a–b).

In the Talmud, David the warrior transforms into a *talmid ḥakham* and a righteous judge; here, Dumah replaces David and takes this role. Indeed, he seems to be David's persecuting *super ego*, or the fear of death that is revealed in moments of horror and sin. In Tractate Sanhedrin, David arrogantly compares himself to the Patriarchs ("Examine me, O Lord, and try me"), and the Devil appears before him as a bird, which he kills with an arrow. Here, the Zohar puts David face to face with Satan as an external, concrete figure, who uses David's own words against him.

The kabbalistic idea of "internalization," developed later in Hasidism, recognizes the Snake/Satan as a reflection of the human being's own evil inclination. As the Zohar says elsewhere: "The serpent (was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that God had made) (Genesis 3:1). Rabbi Yitzchak says this refers *to the evil inclined*, Rabbi Yehuda says it refers to an actual snake [Zohar 1:35b]." Thus, exile and war against demonic forces can also be read as a description of internal struggles.

The main innovation of the zoharic reading is rooted in the idea that Bathsheba was a virgin before she married David. As a result, the Zohar turns David into Bathsheba's "first husband," as an extension of the rabbinic claim that "*Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, was predestined for David from the six days of creation*" (b. Sanhedrin 107a). Thus, their marriage reflects a divinely intended program, and the death of Uriah did not cause any disruption in the destined plan. In this case, the claim of the Sages that Bathsheba received a *get kritut*, a contingent bill of divorce (b. Shabbat 56a), before he went to war seems redundant and is similar to the excessive apologetic excuses that God presents to Dumah.

Clearly, this claim has to do with the Jewish-Christian entanglement and polemics regarding the high status of chastity in Christianity. The Zohar claims that the Divine Name was "sealed" in Uriah in order to prove that he never cohabited with Bathsheba, which is an argument designed to reflect the Christian idea of "marital chastity."[25] Virginity is not a rabbinic Jewish ideal, but here it serves as a device by which another man's union with a woman is made possible. For example, in the *Sabba deMishpatim*, the Zohar permits and condones sexual misbehavior. While discussing the case of a divorcée, it is written in the Zohar (103:a–b): "If this woman does not marry—even if she whores with all the men of the world—if her husband wishes, he may return her." As I have claimed elsewhere, by using an antinomian reading the Zohar permits the husband to remarry his divorcée despite her misdeeds, as long as she had not legally married another man, since second marriages disrupt the reincarnation system.[26] Seemingly, in our homily, in order to solve the problem of destined marriage the first husband is argued to have died without having had relations with his wife, thus preserving the possibility of reincarnation for David and Bathsheba.

Unlike interpreters who follow the perception of Uriah as a sinner and *mored be-malchut*, a rebel against authority, the Zohar defends him and states that Uriah is a righteous and pious man. Other kabbalists in Castile do not follow this direction. In the thirteenth-century treatise "The Secret of the

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25 Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). The commentator *Derech Emet* bases this reading as on the verse from II Samuel 12:3: "But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him *as his daughter*." For a discussion of the distinction between Uriah and Uriyyahu in the Bible, see Matt, I, 55, n. 395. The name "Uriah" shares the same letters as *reuya* (destined), a play of words that might hint at the massacred and the change of roles in our homily.

26 Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, Ruth, "Between Kabbalah, Gender and Law: Sexual Ethics in the Zohar," *AJS Review* 39, no. 1 (2015): 14–51 [Hebrew section].

Marriage of David and Bathsheba," which was discussed above in the previous chapters, R. Joseph Gikatilla compares Uriah to the primordial snake that "infected Eve with contamination" and calls him *Orla* (!): "When David came [to desire Bathsheba] she was still in the realm of the foreskin."[27] It may not be a coincidence that Christian sources such as Angelomus and St. Gregory describe Uriah as the Devil (and the Jew), who must be put to death.

Therefore, I would suggest that the Zohar reflects not only interfaith polemics, but also internal debates among contemporary kabbalists concerning the multifaceted figure of David and his role as the Messiah. Indeed, comparing ubiquitous zoharic models of the *Shekhinah* found in compositions of other contemporary Jewish mystics, such as R. Joseph Gikatilla, R. David ben Yehuda he-Hasid, R. Isaac of Acre, R. Joseph of Shushan, and others, we find less fluid images of these heroes, sometimes running contrary to similar ideas found in the Zohar. The Zohar emphasizes the pious reading of Uriah, in order to blame David, but at the same time it does so to present him as a feminine object that is never responsible for his deeds.

Ruth Karras, based on yet another zoharic reading (Zohar Noah 1:73b), states that Bathsheba married Uriah before David for the same reason God gave the holy land to the Canaanites before the Children of Israel: "The right time had not yet arrived."[28] Furthermore, these scenes resonate and present anew the Edenic relationship between Adam, Eve, and the serpent. Unlike other traditions that are hinting at the sexual union between Eve and the serpent, as mirrored by Uriah and Bathsheba, here we find a new, revolutionary understanding of the biblical story. A unique example of a reading that demonizes Uriah appears in the tradition cited by the seventeenth-century Sabbatean author of *Yalkut ha-Reuveni*:

27 Gikatilla, "The Secret of the Marriage of David and Bathsheba," 186.

28 Rabbi Abba said to him, "Look, we have learned that Bathsheba was destined for King David since the day the world was created! So why did the blessed Holy One give her first to Uriah the Hittite?" He replied, "Such are the ways of the blessed Holy One. Even though a woman is destined for a certain man, another—anticipating—marries her before the time of this other one arrives … This mystery of Bathsheba who was given first to Uriah the Hittite—go search and you will discover why the Holy Land was given to Canaan before Israel arrived … Even though David confessed his sin and repented, his heart and mind did not depart from those sins he sinned or from that sin regarding Bathsheba, for he feared them constantly, lest one of them prevail and accuse him in time of danger. So he did not obliterate them from his mind." On connections of this reading to "The Secret of the Marriage of David and Bathsheba," see Mopsik, *Sex of the Soul*, 156–169, 190–191.

King David, may he rest in eternal peace, was a great Torah scholar and was well versed in (the wisdom of) the substitutes.[29] When he first saw Uriah he recognized that he was the primordial Serpent who seduced Eve. David also knew that he himself was Adam, and when he saw Bathsheba he recognized her as Eve. Indeed, David knew his soul-mate was Eve and therefore wanted to take Bathsheba away from Uriah, but, lest he give rise to slander[30] he held himself back. David then wanted to kill Uriah by his own hand, on account of his being the seducer and instigator, for, in the case of he who seduces to sin, the stringencies of the Law do not apply. He reasoned, however, that "the court will suspect me and will demand of me a sign proving that Uriah was indeed the Serpent." So instead he accomplished his aim in roundabout way, by sending Uriah into battle where he was killed. Blessed is the Name of God who knew that Uriah was guilty as charged and deserved to be put to death, yet since He is slow to anger and exacted punishment on him.[31] If so, why did the prophet Nathan admonish David? On account of David's haste,[32] he did not wait to exact Uriah's full sentence. For, since King David himself was not yet in a perfected state, free from sin, Bathsheba remained "unclaimed" (*hefker*). Uriah was then able to be her husband, since she was free (*hefker*). For he who merits the "unclaimed" becomes its rightful owner, and only God is able to return the "unclaimed" to its original owner! Therefore, Rabi (R. Judah ha-Nasi), who himself was from the seed of David, said; "Anyone who claims that David sinned is mistaken [b. Shabbat 56a]." Granted that he sinned by acting hastily (to possess Bathsheba), however, he did not commit the sin of adultery. On account of his haste to possess her, their first born son died, but from then on there was no trace of Satan nor evil demons. Again they asked, "what reparation [*tikkun*] did David make for Bathsheba (by his rash behavior)?" Rabi answered them, "(If events had taken their course) she would have had to first have intercourse with a Jewish commoner, *hede'iot*, and only afterwards with the king. This is because Uriah was an 'outsider,' *hizoni*, and as such defiled her with his polluted seed, only having had intercourse with a Jew would have removed that pollution, as we find in the laws pertaining to the leper, and only after this would she have been worthy of a king." One student persisted, "so why did David not wait (for this process) and

29 *Temurot*, according to *Sefer HaPeliah*, or *temunot*, archetypes, in the later version.
30 *Dibah*, or, according to *Sefer HaPeliah*, *hurvah* (destruction).
31 God waited for Uriah's death (i.e. in battle) to come.
32 To right the serpent's wrongdoing.

> then make his *tikkun*?" He answered him, "my son! David reasoned thus: better our first born son should suffer death than my soul-mate should be possessed by another man! For Eve only knew the Serpent (before Adam) and Bathsheba only knew Uriah and David. This is the proof for you—David had many sons from his other wives and none of them ruled Israel except for Solomon, who came from Bathsheba, since she alone was David's soul-mate."[33]

This mythical reading is built, according to Moshe Idel, on symmetric parallel symbolism that the kabbalists received from external traditions. The latter developed hierarchic duplicated structures that resemble each other.[34] Adam and Eve, David and Bathsheba, and against them "the Third," demonic power, that must be removed, in order to keep the harmony. In addition, the tradition of *Sefer HaPeliah* and *Yalkut ha-Reuveni* reflects glorification of the image of David to a superhuman hero. The woman is described in this late midrash as an object, an "unclaimed *hefker*." In all other cases of normal kings, after the woman is defiled by an "outsider," *hizoni*, she is expected to have intercourse with a commoner (*hede'iot*), and only afterward with the king. This is not the rule in the case of David. David does not need a commoner or any mediator to "purify" his wife, because, like Adam, he is the first, having a direct path to redemption and repair, just like the *Shekhinah*, which, though located at the bottom of the *sefirot*, alone has the ability to ascend directly to the *Keter*.

Unlike the approach of *Sefer HaPeliah* and *Yalkut ha-Reuveni*, the Zohar invents a new biography for Uriah. Rather than being portrayed as a stranger, the other, or a gentile Hittite soldier, he is described as God's loyal follower and believer, in whose flesh the Divine Name is engraved, embodying the greatest symbol of preserving the holy covenant of circumcision.[35]

As was noted above, the zoharic homily recalls shared issues with the image of David as a king's jester in *Sabba deMishpatim* (discussed in Section 3 of Chapter 2), although here the image is presented in a new light. David admits

33 *Yalkut ha-Reuveni* (Warsaw 1883 and Jerusalem 1965), Vol. 1, 72. The text is based on the fourteenth-century *Sefer HaPeliah* version, "who is Adam."

34 Idel, *Ben.* See there more on the "fourfold divine family" as a parallel structure (380–385, 420, 471–472).

35 On the symbolism of circumcision in the medieval and kabbalistic worlds, see Elisheva Baumgarten, "Marking the Flesh: Circumcision, Blood and Inscribing Identity on the Body in Medieval Jewish Culture," *Micrologus* 13 (2005): 313–330; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27, no. 2 (1987): 189–215; and Yehuda Liebes, "Zakkain inun Yisrael: Zoharic Blessing and Its Judeo-Christian Context," *Jewish Studies* 3 (2007): 85–94.

here that he killed Uriah and that his punishment for that was the death of his first child with Bathsheba, while in the *Sabba* his sin is committed against God. Moreover, in the introduction of the Zohar, a new subject appears that deals with the centrality of the inner world and the function of genuine repentance, unlike the theme of God's amusement in *Sabba deMishpatim*:

> He [God] said, "He certainly did not know. But he waited longer than three months—actually four, for so have we learned: On the twenty-fifth of Nisan David issued a proclamation throughout Israel, and by the seventh of Sivan, they had assembled under Joab; then they set out and destroyed the land of the children of Ammon. They lingered there for Sivan, Tammuz, Av, and Elul, and on the twenty-fourth of Elul happened what happened with Bathsheba. On Yom Kippur the blessed Holy One forgave him that sin. Some say: he issued the proclamation on the seventh of Adar, they assembled on the fifteenth of Iyyar, on the fifteenth of Elul happened what happened with Bathsheba, and on Yom Kippur he was assured: *YHVH has removed your sin; you will not die* (2 Samuel 12:13). What does *you will not die* mean? *You will not die* at the hand of Dumah." Dumah replied: "Master of the universe, I still have one thing against him: he opened his mouth and said As *YHVH lives, the man who did this deserves to die* (ibid., 5). He condemned himself. I claim him!"
>
> He [God] said, "You are not entitled! He confessed to Me, saying, *I have sinned against YHVH* (ibid., 13), even though he did not sin! But as for his sin against Uriah, I sentenced him to punishment, which he received."
>
> Immediately Dumah returned in despair to his site. Concerning this, David said *Unless YHVH had been my help, my soul would soon have dwelt with Dumah* (Psalms 94:17). By a thread as fine as a filament of hair, separating me from the Other Side. By that measure *my soul* did not *dwell with Dumah*. "So a person should be on guard not to speak as David did, since one will not be able to plead with Dumah *that it was an error* (Ecclesiastes 5:5), as happened with David, when the blessed Holy One defeated him legally. *Why should God be angry at your voice?*—at the voice in which one speaks. *And destroy the work of your hands*—holy flesh, holy covenant that he damages, and he is dragged into Hell by Dumah."
>
> ZOHAR 1:8b = Matt, V, 56

In this homily, we can find a battle as to what the truth is—until death, which hints at the death of Uriah. Rather, here, the fear from the Angel of Death is quelled as well as the temptation to sin. Eventually David recognizes his absolute dependency on God, and says: "*Unless YHVH had been my help, my soul*

would soon have dwelt with Dumah." It is not an accident that the culmination of the process of repentance happens on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Here, finally, David understood that indeed his soul "*would soon have dwelt with Dumah*" and only a thread separated him from the Other Side.[36]

As we have seen, in all the zoharic readings dealing with David's sin, Bathsheba appears as a passive object that is passed from hand to hand. Only in homilies that blame her for her role in the story does she have desire and a voice. For example, in a late midrash found in the Cairo Genizah, Bathsheba is described as a seductive figure, while David is described as a passive actor:

> Bathsheba saw by way of the Holy Spirit that David was worthy to father a son who would write 3,000 parables and 1,005 poems. Every day she would don royal garments—1,000 in the morning, another 1,000 in the afternoon, and still another 1,000 in the evening. She would also adorn herself with 105 perfumes and wrap herself in 1,080 cloaks of gold. She would then position herself in front of David so that he could see her, and look favorably at her. When she saw that he did not take note of her she then went up to the rooftop and stripped naked and even bathed there in her nudity. When David saw her thus, he then sent for her and took her as a wife. This was the reason Bathsheba was worthy of bearing Solomon, who in the future would write 3,000 parables and 1,005 poems.[37]

While at the frame of the midrash Bathsheba is presented as the mother of King Solomon and as a prophetess who is taking part in a divine plan, the main part of the text reflects the idea that the woman is guilty. Like with other biblical harlots, Bathsheba's union with David happens as a result of much effort on her side. She is described as a negative heroine who intentionally initiated the scene of seduction and was purposely bathing naked on the roof. In the Zohar, however, Bathsheba appears primarily as a secondary character rather than as a subject with personal choice and agency.[38] Indeed, David's multifarious soul

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36 On the image of a thread, see b. Sukkah 52a: "For the righteous the evil inclination appears to them as a high mountain, and for the wicked it appears to them as a mere strand of hair."

37 Ginzberg, *Midrash and Haggadah*, 166.

38 For a different reading that highlights Bathsheba's centrality and agency as "the mother of Solomon," see Zohar 3:74b–76a. Both David and Bathsheba allude to the *sefirah* of *Malkhut* in Zohar 3:6b–7, a homily that is based on the verse from Amos 9:11: "On that day

suffices to reflect the entirety of the psychological drama, integrating both the feminine and the masculine within itself.

Ruth Karras summarizes the dialectic of Jewish and Cristian interpretations regarding David and Bathsheba as follows:

> Medieval Judaism for the most part was committed to David as an ideal king … In some rabbinic conceptions and particularly in those medieval texts that built on them, David was obedient to God in his relationship with Bathsheba … even his transgressions, both the adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah, were minimized. Bathsheba was unmarried and therefore available to David (indeed, in the late *Shmuel-bukh* already married to him when they have sex), and Uriah deserved death. Some medieval Christian interpretations were also exculpatory of David, choosing to read his sins metaphorically and presenting his union with Bathsheba as a prefiguration of the union of Christ and the Church … By the end of the Middle Ages, however, Christian interpretations of the story, while still holding David up as a masculine model of penance (along with Mary Magdalen as the primary female penitent), were taking the active sexual desire of a king for granted and blaming Bathsheba for seduction and sin. The idea of an unbounded male sexual desire that was a part of elite masculinities, although it had to be controlled for religious reasons, was never far from the surface.[39]

3 The Dialectics of Heroism

In the previous section, I claimed that the Zohar is actively building on the talmudic representation of David as talmudic scholar to turn Dumah into his superego. A Kleinian reading highlights David's use of the defense mechanisms of splitting, denial, and projection as protection from the total dissolution of the self. The psychoanalytic approach of Heinz Kohut reveals another understanding of his deeds and motivations. Kohut describes courage as attached to a healthy narcissistic center and defines the real hero as a person whose core self is dynamic and flexible. Yet, at the same time, this person's inner resilience

I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old."

39 Karras, "David and Bathsheba," 214.

and stability enable him to remain loyal to his goals and ideals, despite a threat from within or without.[40] As Kohut claims:

> The hero's willingness to die sometimes comes about as a result of a creative change in his nuclear self, a change by virtue of which he gets out of step with the goals, ambitions, and values of his environment. The capacity of the nuclear self to undergo changes, whether they take place slowly or occur abruptly (as in mystical experiences of illumination), is fully compatible with that firmness of attitude so characteristic of courage. Almost all heroic individuals face grave crises while they are still on the road to reaching the ultimate decision that they will remain faithful to their selves, whatever the cost. They are generally not beset by fear of the consequences they will suffer a result of their actions.[41]

It is worth noting David's words about his persecutor, Saul, during his youth, when Saul was the king. When his people suggest to David, who is hiding in a cave in Ein Gedi, that she should kill Saul, who is pursuing him, he answers: "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord" (1 Sam. 24:6). David prefers to be killed than to assault Saul, yet in verse 9 he stresses his merciful deed: "This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed.'" A similar scene is repeated in the Zif Desert at night. Again, David risks himself and shows generosity and heroism in the encounter with Saul:

> So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him. Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won't strike him twice. But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay

40 Heinz Kohut, *The Search of the Self—Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978–1981* (London: Karnac, 2011), III, 129–182.

41 Kohut, *The Search*, III, 136.

> a hand on the Lord's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let us go."
>
> 1 Sam. 26:7–11

Kohut states that the hero's loyalty unto death, like that of Jesus, "has influenced, in various ways, every Western hero, whether on the field of battle, in artistic and scientific faithfulness." In the case of David, we might ask whether this is truly authentic behavior or whether this is merely a manipulative mask. If we follow the Kohutian path, grandiosity is not necessarily an obstacle to genuine leadership, yet "in the decisions and actions of many other heroic individuals, however, the values of the nuclear self, rather than the subject-bound grandiosity, supply the decisive motive power for heroism."[42] Certainly, these moments reveal another side of David's persona. Kohut adds:

> The journey of the true martyr hero leads him increasingly toward clarity concerning the essence of his nuclear self. The beginning of this journey may be marked by a shock like recognition, which is often experienced as a revelation, i.e., as coming from outside … Suddenly there exists now a gap between the kind of behavior which would be in harmony with the self and the kind of behavior that is dictated by the demands of the environment. Once the martyr hero has become aware of his nuclear self (and of the inner and outer conflict situations to which he is brought by its demands), he can find no rest. His tensions are a manifestation of the fact that he is in a severe narcissistic disequilibrium until he has achieved the complete unification of his personality under the leadership of the nuclear self. As soon as the ultimate step in this direction is made and the ultimate decision has been reached, the hero experiences a sense of relief and of inner peacefulness and serenity. These feelings are manifestations of the narcissistic balance which has come through the establishment of a state of complete harmony between the nuclear self and the rest of the personality.[43]

As a "tragic hero," David has a sense of humor with a tendency to martyrdom. After the sin with Bathsheba, it seems that all the detached aspects of his character were integrated into one whole personality. This process signals a crucial turning point in the life of heroes as we learn from the dialogue between Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung regarding the journey of the hero. There are

42 Ibid., III, 138.

43 Ibid., III, 45.

two opposing theories of the hero's journey offered by the main schools of psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud and his student Otto Rank focus their studies on the protagonist's childhood, whereas Jung and his students emphasize the later years of the hero's development, on his journey and initiation. In Freud's approach, the hero's journey is only a later fulfillment of Oedipal/infantile desires and ego conflicts rooted in the primary "family romance."[44] In contrast, Joseph Campbell, who was Jung's follower, viewed the hero's initiation into maturity as occurs after his return from his real or physical journey, and is reached by completing a transformative inner-spiritual journey. According to Jung, heroism is predicated on one's spiritual integration and acquiring the necessary preparation to enable the process of individuation, which reaches its climax in the middle of one's life—around the ages of forty or fifty.[45] As articulated by another Jungian scholar, Erich Neumann, it is not enough for a person to free his own consciousness from the womb of the Great Mother and to slay the Dragon/Uroboros. In order to achieve self-realization and spiritual awareness, one must develop an independent and "high" mystical consciousness.[46] Contrary to the illusion of omnipotence that accompanies one in one's early childhood years, maturity allows one to recognize one's own limitations and unify the disparate parts of one's personality.[47]

In her article, "Transforming the Hero: The Dialectics of Heroism and the Psychoanalytic Process," Chana Ullman claims that

> [in psychoanalytic treatment] the heroic is mitigated by the recognition of human vulnerability, destructiveness and helplessness. That which is considered heroic and life-giving may emerge as persecutory ideals or as defenses guarding grandiosity. Yet the hero may inspire, protect ideals and lives, both concretely and metaphorically. Analytic process threatens to transform or even reverse that which is considered bad, considered abject, or that which is revered and idealized. The heroic may then appear as a divide between patient and analyst, a tension and ambivalence

44 Sigmund Freud, *Family Romances* (London: Hogarth: 1953), 235–241; Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*.

45 Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Vintage, 1965); Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1938); Carl G. Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference and Other Subjects* (London: Routledge, 1954); Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

46 Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

47 Rank, *In Quest of the Hero*, 121–123, 179–223.

> shaping transference and countertransference. It is often a gap across gender lines, and across the passions that fuel existential hopes and fears. The heroic emerges and is sustained in a specific cultural-social context. But it is also born of the individual unconscious.[48]

While Rank suggested that the individual's unconscious is expressed in the shared myth, creating the heroic lore of the culture, according to Ullman "contemporary psychoanalytic understanding of the links between the cultural context and the individual, influenced by critical theory, reverses the direction of the links. It is the culture that 'forces' its way into the individual psyche. Critical social theory maps the way in which culture expropriates individuals." Both ways of reading can be useful when dealing with the psychoanalytic understanding of King David's motivations.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, beginning with the origin of the Kabbalah in the Geronese tradition of the twelfth century, David is never called "Father" ("Patriarch"), as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are. As it is said in the *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadoth* by R. Azriel of Gerona: "The Angels say *kadosh kadosh kadosh* and [in parallel] Israel say God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."[49] Then he quotes the rabbinic formula, as said by Reish Lakish in Genesis Rabbah, "the Patriarchs are themselves the Chariot," and David should be mentioned as well, almost as an afterthought. "And David is the fourth." Nevertheless, David does not deserve to be a part of the *Kedushah* prayer. Later, the anonymous fourteenth-century kabbalist that composed *Maʿarekhet ha-ʾElohut* states:

> The Jewish people has only three Fathers … yet there is the *Atara*-King David's quality … He is never called Father … and he is the fourth leg of the Chariot. However, he is *never called Father like the Patriarchs*, since the form of his idea (*midda*) is feminine, and because the moon was diminished; her light comes [only] from the sun.[50]

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48 Chana Ullman, "The Hero Transformed: The Dialectics of Heroism and Psychoanalytic Process," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 40, no. 7 (2020): 1–9; Chana Ullman, "Bearing Witness: Across the Barriers in Society and in the Clinic," *Psychoanal. Dialogues* 16, no. 2 (2006): 181–198.

49 R. Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadoth*, 56, 98. See above, Chapter 3, note 14. R. Azriel calls the *sefirot* "gods" and "crowns," and thus the Patriarchs are their offspring based on the verse from Psalms 29:1 "Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings [*Benei Elim*]." See also R. Asher ben David, "Commentary to the Thirteen Attributes," 54.

50 *Maʿarekhet ha-ʾElohut* (Jerusalem, 2012), ch. 11. See also b. Berakhot 16: "The Sages taught in a baraita: One may only call three people patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but not Jacob's children."

The exclusion of David from the Divine Chariot might cause a narcissistic injury, jealousy, and envy. In order to compensate, the king falls into grandiosity and covers his "basic fault" by manipulative behavior. On the other hand, if David's figure indeed reflects an unfulfilled wish to become Father, the *Shekhinah* serves as a tool for this development. Although feminine, she has masculine aspects and the unique quality of being able to overcome gender differences. She represents, in Judith Butler's words, the "subversion of identity," one that works both ways without subordinating one sex to the other.[51]

In other zoharic *derashot*, David's jealousy is compensated by his superiority to the Patriarchs, as we learn from the following homily in Zohar Hadash:

> The blessed Holy One created seven celestial days in the world, planting and building worlds upon them … corresponding to those heavenly days He created seven truly righteous ones on earth—sustaining them and illuminating them, each and every one corresponding to his day … Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David. They are called ancient mountains (Deuteronomy 33:15), suspended from the seven celestial days that we have mentioned: six days of creation and the seventh that goes before them. This is as said: "The House of David [will be] like a divine being—like an angel of YHVH before them" (Zechariah 12:8). Even though David is the seventh, he is the fourth in days. Joseph is the seventh but when Shekhinah is contained within Joseph, providing him with additional delight from the House of the king, then She too is called seventh. They all unite with the Shekhinah in the mystery of seven, since She is called *bathsheba* daughter of seven.
>
> ZOHAR HADASH 26c = Matt, XII, 517–519[52]

Even Moses, Aaron, and Joseph are all located under the dominance of the *Shekhinah* and David as "multiple Messiah." Here, David and Bathsheba are both identified with the *sefirah* of *Malkhut*, which is called "an angel of YHVH," who is the shining light in front of the camp that leads the way for the Israelites

51 Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

52 As Joel Hecker states, while in the printed editions the following passage appears in the section of *parashat Toledot* and is labeled *Sitrei Torah*, in the manuscripts all bestow the title "From *parashat Vayeshev*" while including much material that is missing from the printed editions; the entire passage bears a strong similarity to extended passages in Angelet's *Quppat ha-Rokhelin* and Angelet's *Livnat ha-Sappir*. See Ronit Meroz, "R. Joseph *Angelet* and His Zoharic Writings," *Te'uda* 21–22 (2007): 303–404, esp. 306. See also Zohar 3:301b–302b (*Tosafot*).

in the dessert.[53] David is also compared to the day of the Sabbath—the seventh holy day—and to the fourth leg of the Chariot, both of which bring to a close the whole process of creation.

Moshe Idel observed two models that reflect different types of experiences for the kabbalist.[54] In the Theurgical Model, the mystics turned the *Shekhinah* into a fully fledged divine female force, struggling as a knight striving for the rescue of his lady-love and seeking her attention as an identified male (and her revelation to him as an identified female). The climax of their relationship is symbolized in the Zohar and other theurgical texts as sexual union that will bring them both to a new state of redemption. In contrast, in the Ecstatic and Prophetic Model, the kabbalist assumes a *female identity*, as he meets the masculine powers of divinity. This model uses the mystical language of femininity and passivity, and describes the kabbalist as being influenced by the upper realm, here identified as masculine. The main symbol operative in this second model is one of the mystic as vessel, who retains all of the divine influx within himself.

At the close of this book, I will suggest that the Zohar reflects more than any other composition the ability of the kabbalist to change masks, roles, genders, and sexual identities during the process of his mystical initiation and revelations. As such, the fluidity of gender roles shows the core process of the zoharic mystical thought and language, and demonstrates the special openness of mystical experience in this text. This language reflects the different ways the kabbalists imagined the relationships between the divine powers, and therefore the *sefirot* were imagined by them as both feminine and masculine. Indeed, King David as the feminine Messiah appears as the main hero who empowers and combines these contradictions of past and future, brokenness and hope, and masculinity and femininity. In David's personality, different voices and powers struggle, all reflecting the changing roles of the hero. Cultural symbols and the development of interpretation help him go through a process of transformation.

As Ullman puts it: "The society's hunger for this heroism is in part a negation of the helplessness and passivity of the traumatic past, as it is a response to present threats … the Hebrew word for hero—'*gibor*'—comes from the same root as man—'*gever*'—and the same word also refers to overcoming dire circumstances. Heroism is linked to a willingness to risk oneself in order to save others, a drive to save the world, to reverse hopeless circumstances or

53 On the *Shekhinah* as "angel" in Nahmanides's school, see Halbertal, *By Way of Truth*, 186–190.

54 Idel, "Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in the Kabbalah."

to conquer life's limitations." David is a male hero, who overcomes dire circumstances, but he is not only a hero (*gibor*), he is also a divine entity that allows society to deal with the helplessness and passivity of the traumatic past through the female aspects of the Messiah.

4 Multiplicity of the Self, Trauma and Repair

Through the concepts of denial and dissociation, David is blamed as a corrupted and manipulative ruler who presents himself as a sacrifice in his psalms and poetry. Moreover, in the example of "another David," discussed above in Chapter 3, we met a split between two different figures that affects God: the earthly figure vis-à-vis the supernal entity located in the divine world—the "me" and the "not me" that are projected onto the upper world. One is a male sinner, and the other a beautiful divine consort. While the first part of this chapter assumed the existence of a "core self" as it appears in the theories of Klein, Kohut, and Winnicott, I will now introduce another approach, following the theories of Stephen Mitchell, Philip Bromberg, Muriel Dimen, Lewis Aron, Chana Ullman, and others. By using relational attitudes to the self, David's double persona reflects creative kabbalistic thought and multiplicity. As Mitchell claims: "From a contemporary psychoanalytic perspective—there is no way to ever 'really know' oneself, to have access to one's various, multiple self-organizations simultaneously."[55] In the same manner, Philip Bromberg defines "normal Multiplicity of Self" as follows:

> A human being's ability to live a life with both authenticity and self-awareness depends on the presence of an ongoing dialectic between separateness and unity of one's self-states, allowing each self to function optimally without foreclosing communication and negotiation between them. When all goes well developmentally, a person is only dimly or momentarily aware of the existence of individual self-states and their respective realities, because each functions as part of a healthy illusion of cohesive personal identity—an overarching cognitive and experiential state felt as "me." Each self-state is a piece of a functional whole, informed by a process of internal negotiation with the realities, values, affects, and perspectives of the others. Despite collisions and even enmity between

55 Stephen Mitchell, "Psychoanalysis and the Degradation of Romance," *Psychoanalytical Dialogues* 7, no. 1 (1997): 23–41, here 33.

> aspects of self, it is unusual for any one self-state to function totally outside of the sense of "me-ness"—that is, without the participation of the other parts of self.[56]

Bromberg states that "health is the ability to stand in the spaces between realities without losing any of them—the capacity to feel like one self while being many."[57]

In the zoharic paragraphs, David is presented as *both* masculine and feminine. He has high and low faces, a "lower" element, connected with sin, and an "upper" element, connected with beauty and reparation. Paradoxically, the split of his character into David and the "other David" allows him to take responsibility for his deeds. From a male hero, David becomes a symbol of a vessel and female lacking potency. His personality symbolizes, in Dimen and Aron's terms, the wish to overcome gender difference and to feel "both sexes."[58]

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56 Bromberg, *Standing in the Spaces*, 512–513. He here quotes Malcolm Slavin and Daniel Kriegman, who add to this definition: "Multiple versions of the self exist within an overarching, synthetic structure of identity [which] probably cannot possess the degree of internal cohesion or unity frequently implied by concepts such as the 'self' in the self psychological tradition … the idea of an individual 'identity' or a cohesive 'self' serves as an extremely valuable metaphor for the vital experience of relative wholeness, continuity, and cohesion in self-experience. Yet, as has often been noted, when we look within the psyche of well-put-together individuals, we actually see a 'multiplicity of selves' or versions of the self coexisting within certain contours and patterns that, in sum, produce a sense of individuality, 'I-ness' or 'meness' … Although the coexistence of 'multiple versions of the self' that we observe introspectively and clinically may thus represent crystallizations of different interactional schemes, this multiplicity may also signal the existence of an inner, functional limit on the process of self-integration … The cost of our human strategy for structuring the self in a provisional fashion—around a sometimes precarious confederation of alternate self/other schemas—lies in the ever-present risk of states of relative disintegration, fragmentation, or identity diffusion."

57 Philip Bromberg, "Shadow and Substance: A Relational Perspective on Clinical Process," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 10 (1993): 147–168, here 166.

58 Muriel Dimen states: "What gender seems to denote is one thing; what it actually connotes is another … Self and gender identity inhabit one another so intimately … Sometimes the mutual coding of gender and self is directly translatable. For example, the conventional split between masculine and feminine in psychology and culture, that is, the contrast masculine/feminine, speaks also to pleasure, activity, and passivity. Pleasure in activity is wont to carry the valence of masculinity, while pleasure in passivity is charged with femininity, a split aligned with the traditional dichotomy in sex roles … In this process, 'gender' appears to be less a determinate category than something resembling a force field. Much like the atom, once thought of as substance but now construed as a set of interacting forces, so gender looks to consist not of essences but of complex and shifting relations among multiple contrasts or differences. Sometimes these contrasts remain

Eventually, he symbolizes "gender-slippage," which assumes the dominance of the opposite gender traits within his male personality while this character leads him into a sinful situation.[59] In the surrounding ancient and medieval culture, as well as in Jewish circles, being a female was considered to be a disadvantage, as the woman occupied a lowly position in the hierarchy of power. David's personal rise to power is an example of the politics of the weak, and in this sense he was imitative of the path taken by his historical mothers.

Indeed, the Davidic family history testifies to a trauma that runs throughout the tribe of Judah. We see this in King David himself, the "son" who was born out of generations of incest and adultery, as well as in the stories of Tamar, Ruth, and the daughters of Lot, all of which contain illicit sexual relations, abuse, and harlotry.[60] As a result, David repeats the traumatic pattern by taking another man's wife and then killing the man himself. Eventually, he ends up with disintegration within his own family: Bathsheba's first baby dies, his daughter Tamar is tragically raped by her brother Amnon, and his son Absalom rebels against him—all examples of cross-generational transmission of trauma.

Therefore, David acknowledges his dissociated "thousand faces" only after the prophet Nathan accuses him and dramatically says: "*You are the man*!" David must, for the first time, recognize parts of his persona that appear as "not-me." These "bad objects" and parts of his personality were not only suppressed but absolutely denied and projected onto others around him. In order to survive and to cope with the traumas of his family, the hero must undergo a process of repentance, *teshuvah*. He must return to his "true multi-valent self," including the figures of the joker, the liar, the gambler, and the killer. He must take responsibility for his actions.

In addition, as we learn from trauma theory, the damaged self needs a witness who can bear what the hero cannot contain. Following Chana Ullman, Samuel Gerson, and Dana Amir, I would suggest that, in their homilies, the commentators take the place of the "third party" who can bear witness to the trauma.[61] The Sages, and later the kabbalists, actually liberate King David

distinct, at other times they intersect, and at still other times they fuse and exchange identities." Muriel Dimen, "Deconstructing Difference: Gender, Splitting, and Transitional Space," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 1 (1991): 335–352. See also Aron, "The Internalized Primal Scene."

59 Levinson, "Cultural Androgyny in Rabbinic Literature."

60 See Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, *Holiness and Transgression*.

61 Ullman, "Bearing Witness"; Samuel Gerson, "When the Third Is Dead: Memory, Mourning, and Witnessing in the Aftermath of the Holocaust," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*

from his inhuman and superhuman state, from his “absolute otherness” of a *superhero*, into a healthy, normal otherness that includes deviance.

Alongside Sue Grand’s discussion of the “dark side of the heroic” that leaves individuals to struggle with the failures of the superhuman myth, I claim that in this case Davidic representation allows mass-therapy and working through the limits of heroism in Jewish culture.[62]

Thomas Ogden suggests that through the analytic process the therapist helps the patient dream his as-of-yet unimagined fantasies and revive dissociated parts of his self.[63] In the same manner, the commentators accepted David’s faults, suggesting a gender transformation, showing that the dead, dissociated parts of the hero could actually be brought back to life. Indeed, the kabbalists who represent David as a feminine figure could perhaps therefore be seen as trying to help him regain his feminine side and accept his *anima*. In being thus rectified, he once again attains a multitude of “faces.” Just as the therapist sees the patient as someone who had no other choice other than to develop as he developed, so too the commentators accept David’s basic faults and help him grow from his fragmentation.

David’s personality reflects the values and hopes of his interpreters throughout the generations. Each layer of interpretation, from the Hebrew Bible through the rabbinic literature and ending with medieval kabbalistic literature, adds a new facet to his character.

In the course of the chapter, I raised Kleinian themes such as projective identification, love, and hate as reflecting the paranoid-schizoid position. The Zohar develops this talmudic idea but adds a deeper dimension, discussing the mental cost of denial and the danger of self-slander and disapproval combined with grandiosity and self-admiration. At the end of the chapter, I claimed that the psychoanalytic term “multiple self,” which was developed in relational theory, might help us answer the question as to why this figure was “converted” by the Zohar to signify a feminine image. Since every generation has added new layers to David’s portrait, sketching him in a new light, he gained different strategies of repair and “repentance.” The sexual transgression which marks his biography and mirrors the seductions of his foremothers, eventually

90, no. 6 (2009), 1341–1357; Dana Amir, *Bearing Witness to the Witness: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Four Modes of Traumatic Testimony* (London: Routledge, 2018).

62 Sue Grand, *The Hero in the Mirror: From Fear to Fortitude* (London: Routledge, 2009).

63 Thomas Ogden, “On Talking-as-Dreaming,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 88, no. 3 (2007): 575–589.

allows him to break through to a new place, where the feminine and masculine aspects of personality are merged. This genealogical "transformative trauma" of the Judean dynasty helps David to develop a full and more integrated, multifaceted personality.[64]

64 Jean Laplanche, "Seduction, Persecution, Revelation," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 76, no. 4 (1995): 663–682. See also the epilogue in Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, *Holiness and Transgression*, 219–252.

CONCLUSION

David as a Case Study in Judeo-Christian Dialogue and Polemics

Through their homilies, the mystics expand on the processes of deification and sublimation in the upper world, which enable David/the *Shekhinah*/the nation to correct and atone for their sins. Atonement and forgiveness are attained thanks to the powers of seduction, adornment, and beauty that exist in the lower world, which attract the love and desire of God. David's psychological oscillation between self-contempt and a sense of chosenness, his inner distress and fear, unite scenes that document the biography of both the people of Israel and the *Shekhinah*. The *Shekhinah* is an outcast—lacking and flawed, yet also spectacular. Sometimes, it even seems that it is *she* who fascinates the mystics while overriding the individual personality of David.

As we have seen, ideas presented in the Zohar had a strong impact on Jewish thought and culture. Although its ideas are firmly based on biblical and rabbinic literature, the Zohar and its circle offered a new understanding of doctrinal concepts in the Jewish world of the Middle Ages.[1] The zoharic revolution in messianic and theological thought is demonstrated in the specific gender reversal of King David. What was the place of Christian–Jewish discourse and interactions in these developments?

Ruth Karras argues that in medieval Christianity "David as a model of masculinity has it both ways: he displays the strong sexual urge and the privilege that permits its immediate gratification, but he also can serve as a model of Christian virtue."[2] I have argued here that in medieval Kabbalah the picture is the opposite. If this different, feminized version of David was innovated by the Zohar, it follows that this shift may be rooted in an anti-Christian polemic. This new gender perception of King David might be understood in different ways: as a rebellion against the Christian concept of messianic redemption and the idea of Original Sin; as the humiliation of a Christian hero by his feminization; or, rather, as the internalization of Christian attitudes by the kabbalists, as happens with the veneration of Mary. It is upon this final possibility that I will now expand.

1 Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 85–138.
2 Karras, "David and Bathsheba," 214.

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Peter Schäfer and Art Green see the origin of the figure of the *Shekhinah* in the Bahir, and argue that it was influenced by the cult of Mary that began in the twelfth century.[3] The oppositional attitude stems from the internal Jewish traditions within which biblical, rabbinic, gnostic, philosophical, and mythical motifs were integrated in the figure of the *Shekhinah* in Kabbalah.[4] Mary and her son are central to this dialogue, but the figure of King David, who is portrayed as an archetypal symbol of masculinity in Christian literature, might also be a reason for struggle between the faiths. At the same time, we can find a remarkable parallel between the two figures: just as David is the fourth leg and the image of the *Shekhinah*, finalizing and completing the Divine Chariot, so too Mary serves as the secret completion of the masculine Trinity.

As we have seen, the figure of the *Shekhinah* represents national identity of the Jews, who were deprived of political authority. The fantastic realm of the divine *sefirot* gave them a sense of power and an imaginary kingdom. The recurrent use of the term "*Malkhut*" points to the intimate, and even, at times, erotic relationship between a nation and its God, who are considered to be partners in a sacred covenant. Outwardly oppressed, the Jews were nonetheless able to theurgically influence the divine world. Similarly, the *Shekhinah* is identified in the Zohar with the suffering Messiah, and she too will be purified by the "birth-pangs of redemption" to rise above all the *sefirot* and take her rightful place. This dual status enjoyed by the *Shekhinah* is illuminated through conflation with the parallel biography of King David. The two figures symbolize the "Wandering Jew," in whose mobility lies the key to his power;[5] moreover, both are situated at the "state of nothingness" and perform "rendering kenosis," to use Shaul Magid's terms.[6]

Ellen Davina Haskell claims that the symbols associated with the *Shekhinah*, such as *Malkhut* (kingdom) and *Malkhuta de-Raqia* (kingdom of heaven), reveal a hidden polemic with medieval Christianity. Through these counter-terms the Zohar meant to establish a Jewish alternative "kingdom of heaven" and reclaim the functions of the Messiah as mediator and savior. As she says:

3 See Chapter 3 above, n. 7.

4 See Yehuda Liebes, "Indeed the Shekhinah a Virgin? On the Book of Arthur Green," *Pe'amim* 101–102 (2005): 303–313; Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*; and Daniel Abrams, "The Condensation of the Symbol 'Shekhinah' in the Manuscripts of the 'Book Bahir,'" *Kabbalah* 16 (2007): 7–82.

5 Pedaya, "And Now We Have No Mother"; Haviva Pedaya, "The Great Mother: The Struggle Between Nahmanides and the Zohar Circle," in *Temps i Espais de la Girona Jueva*, ed. Silvia Planas Marcé (Girona: Patronat Call de Girona, 2011), 311–328.

6 Shaul Magid, *Hasidism Incarnate* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 87.

> In Christian interpretation of the New Testament's gospels, the Kingdom of Heaven signifies an exclusively Christian salvific future that comprises a new world of Christian redemption. Jesus holds authority over the Kingdom, and accepting his role as Christ determines who does or does not gain admittance to it. There, the twelve apostles sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Pharisees—and by implication Jews—are barred from this perfected future … By generating a narrative in which the Kingdom of Heaven serves not as an exclusive Christian salvific domain, but rather as a divine manifestation that confirms God's association with the Jewish ancestors, the Kabbalists reclaim the Kingdom of Heaven from the twelve apostles and return it to the twelve tribes of Israel … [the] Zoharic texts provide an effective counterargument to Christian claims about Jewish exclusion from salvation by establishing Israel in a position of holiness and literally "Othering" Christianity, which is associated with Esau, Edom, idolatry, and the forces of evil that the Zohar refers to as the "Other Side" (*sitra aḥra*).[7]

Although both religions justified David's deviant behavior, they used different tactics. In the course of this book, I have shown some differences between Jewish and Christian discourses in their perceptions of David. Yitzhak Baer has argued that the description of David as "the King's Minstrel" in the Zohar (*bediḥa de-malka*) was influenced by the concept of the Lord's jesters (*ioculatores Domini*) as prescribed by Francis of Assisi for his followers.[8] According to Baer, the Zohar appealed to the masses, and was not an esoteric composition meant for a closed circle. However, King David is never presented in the Zohar as an exemplar; as the Messiah, he has unique permission to behave in an antinomian way. Thus, we should not see in the growing identification of the *Shekhinah* with David an indication of ethical guidance for the masses, but rather an esoteric mystical and messianic teaching.

David's centrality to medieval art and his influence on the institutions of dynastic royalty and kingship in developing European religious culture exposed the Kabbalists to overt images that challenged them and their assumptions regarding sin, repentance, and salvation. The phenomenon of a feminized David might also have been influenced by the perception among Christians during the High Middle Ages that Jesus and leaders such as Bernard of Clairvaux were feminine and motherly figures, as well as by the rise of gender

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7 Haskell, *Mystical Resistance*, pp. 21–23.

8 Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), 269; Matt, v, 124.

reversals and feminine imagery associated with male leaders (e.g., breastfeeding and containing their flocks).[9]

Using the prism of gender, we have seen that both David and the *Shekhinah* display the "power of the powerless," as both their kingdoms are based on subterfuge, intrigue, and trickery.[10] Apparently, it would seem that the *Shekhinah* does not possess "agency." Thus David, appearing in her image, is not liable for his sins. Moreover, as a metaphor for the personal messiah, Davis symbolizes the entire congregation of Jewish *men* (*Knesset Israel*), who are all absolved of guilt along with him.

In the course of this study, I have claimed that in the Middle Ages the kabbalists resisted ideas of asceticism, martyrdom, and suffering, substituting extreme sexuality, the reversal of roles, and gender fluidity. In addition, the Jewish males were accused at this time of being so feminine as to menstruate.[11] Hence, the symbolization of David with the *Shekhinah* might reflect how kabbalists turned these Christian accusations into virtues.[12] However, the identification of David with the *Shekhinah* may also be influenced by the androgynist nature of the mystical experience itself. Thus, it neither indicates

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9 Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

10 See chapter 3, n. 120, above.

11 Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Irven M. Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012); Irven M. Resnick, "Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses," *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (2000): 241–263; Francesca Matteoni, "The Jew, the Blood and the Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Folklore* 1192 (2008): 182–200. See also David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 105–107, n. 87–89 and 98; and Willis Johnson, "The Myth of Jewish Male Menses," *Journal of Medieval History* 24, no. 3 (1998): 272–295.

12 For other examples of turning accusations into virtues, see Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*; Hartley Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution: Reimagining Judaism in Medieval Spain* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014); and Rachel Elior, "Exile and Redemption in Jewish Mystical Thought," *Studies in Spirituality* 14 (2004): 1–15. For Christian influences on medieval Jewish culture and Kabbalah, see Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs"; and Schäfer, *Mirrors of His Beauty*. For more on David in Judeo-Christian messianic symbolism, see Brooke and Najman, "Dethroning David," 111–128. On the Zohar's anti-Christian attitudes regarding David, I hope to expand on in another place. I find in the homilies on *Michtam leDavid* a polemic against the belief in the *immaculate conception* (since *michtam* alludes to *macula* = stain, fault, damage. See, for example, Zohar 3:233a). For other debates on this subject, see Sharon Koren, "Immaculate Sarah: Echoes of the Eve/Mary Dichotomy in the Zohar," *Viator* 41, no. 2 (2010): 183–201.

a "feminization" of the male Jew nor a "masculinization" of the female divinity. Rather, it demonstrates that the kabbalists' freedom with the notion of identity is a key for understanding the connection between heaven and earth (on the theosophical level) and as a tool of rebellion (on the political level).[13]

The Zohar embraced the dichotomous David (sinner turned saint, hated turned Chosen One, jester turned king, etc.), as presented in the Bible and the Talmud, but enhanced this David in its own image. Through a process of creating "counter history,"[14] the zoharic David underwent a process of transgenderization, as the medieval kabbalists indeed saw themselves as "female" and powerless in the face of their heightened mystical awareness and sensitivity to the unredeemed world in which they lived.[15] Starting from a defensive position, the (male) kabbalists turned the shameful situation into a virtue, passing through an "inward acculturation" (in the words of Ivan Marcus), by identifying themselves with David and the *Shekhinah*.[16] David and the *Shekhinah* represent both the power of the Jewish nation and, at the same time, its vulnerability.

Idel has already shown that the idea of individual redemption already appeared in the medieval ecstatic-prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia. My research claimed that these elements are also dominant themes within the zoharic corpus. In addition, I aimed to challenge Scholem's claim that the zoharic kabbalists display a tendency to escape history and move toward "to the primal days of Creation," to the "inward home," to the mysteries of the emanation without any attempt to move forward and deal with national redemption. Following Yehuda Liebes, who emphasized notions of national and historical redemption in the Zohar, I have claimed that David is the other side of Rashbi, the heroic messianic figure at its core.[17] Idel criticized Scholem's traumatic and catastrophic mindset of popular and binary perceptions of redemption, noting that other models of salvation appeared in the Kabbalah of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. My aim was to indicate the junctions where these models cannot be read without gender theory, and to build a new model—one which can explain the widespread identification of King David as the Messiah with the *Shekhinah*.

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13 As Boyarin notes, Christian depictions of Jewish men as feminized are both accurate (by Christian definitions) and mistaken, insofar as they present the situation as a pathology rather than as a feature. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct.*

14 Biale, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity."

15 Idel, *Messianic Mystics*; Idel, "Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in the Kabbalah."

16 Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

17 Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar."

Scholars have discussed the novelty of the theosophical Zoharic doctrine and its influence on the world of ritual and belief in the Lurianic Kabbalah.[18] Yet there has to be offered a comprehensive study of gender reversal in messianic thought in Sefadian Kabbalah in light of gender and psychoanalytic theory. The suggested reading might place a new emphasis on the concept of the "gendered messiah" as the key for understanding the canonization of the Zohar in sixteenth-century Sefad and later Kabbalah. In addition, Scholem claims that in Hasidism there first appeared the idea of "the destruction of the exile by its spiritualization."[19] By contrast, I suggest that King David represents a symbolic monarchy and spiritualized kingdom, and thus, on some level, the "neutralization of the messianic national element."[20] In the Zohar, David does not yearn for the hereafter, but instead "draws the world to come into this world" (Zohar 3:21a). Through this reading, we recognize the replacement of external and future redemption in favor of internal redemption already in the Zohar. David as Messiah symbolizes the substitution of the actual monarchy for the process of inner salvation gained through sin and repentance, and, ultimately, through gender reversal.

18 Jacob Katz, *Halakhah ve-Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Judaism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984); Hallamish, *The Kabbalah in Liturgy, Halakhah, and Custom*; Hallamish, *Kabbalistic Customs of Shabbat*; Huss, *Sockets of Fine Gold*; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*; Meroz, "Redemption in the Lurianic Kabbalah"; Elior, "Exile and Redemption in Jewish Mystical Thought."

19 Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books. 1971), 195.

20 Scholem, *The Messianic Idea*, 176–202; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 329; Ron Margolin, *Mikdash Adam—Sanctuary of Man: Religious Internalization and Shaping the Inner Life of Religion* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005).

Epilogue

This book focused on the figure of King David in Jewish mystical literature. In the course of the study, I have claimed that David is depicted as the Messiah due to his many facets that are rooted in the biblical narratives and continue to develop in rabbinic Midrash up to the book of the Zohar and later kabbalistic texts. Each layer of interpretation added new and unique features to the understanding of David's enigmatic portrait and his complex persona.

Speaking of interpretive layers, let us take for example the following well-known midrash: "When David dug the drainage pits (for the altar in the Temple), the Deep (*tehom*, abyss) arose and threatened to submerge the world." To ward off this cataclysm, David wrote the Divine Name upon a slab (of pottery), "cast it into the Deep and it subsided sixteen thousand cubits. When he saw that it had subsided to such a great extent, he said 'The nearer it is to the earth, the better the earth can be kept watered,' and he uttered the fifteen 'Songs of Ascent' and the Deep ascended fifteen thousand cubits and remained one thousand cubits (below the surface)."[1]

This colorful legend presents David's composition of certain Psalms as a key tool for bringing the ever-threatening Chaos and Void into submission. It also links David's actions as forming a union with the feminine archetypal unconscious, especially in the version brought in *Midrash Shemu'el*.[2] As Nathaniel Berman claims, here "David is driven by an erotically charged hubris," while, in the zoharic homilies that are based on this text, the dichotomy between the formed and the formless, slab and abyss, is dissolved in order to reflect the paradoxical relations between the divine and the demonic.[3]

In the same manner, while the midrash sees David as a male figure that successfully dominates through prayer and poetry the feminine Chaos, the opposite is true for the Zohar, wherein he represents also the feminine aspects of the fluid, amorphous, liminal, and flooding Void. In another reading suggested by Berman, the wish to regulate the uncontrolled depth is indeed a

1 b. Sukkah 53a–b; y. Sanhendrin 10:5 [29a]. On this text, see Yehuda Liebes, *The Creative Theory of the Book of Creation* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Schocken Books, 2000), 180–185. Liebes connects the slab (of pottery) with the Foundation Stone (*even ha-shtiya*). See also Haviva Pedaya, "Metamorphoses in the Holy of Holies: From the Margin to the Center," *Jewish Studies* 37 (1997): 53–110.

2 *Midrash Shemuel* 26:2 (ed. Buber, Vilna 1925, 81). According to this tradition, David wishes to dig the pits, which are symbolized by three archetypal virgins (human virgin, virgin of sycamore, and virgin of the earth).

3 Berman, *Divine and Demonic in the Zohar and Kabbalistic Tradition*, 260–270.

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"tale of violence and counter-violence" in which "phallic 'scribal impress' [is] resisted by the implicitly 'female crevices.'" In the mythical kabbalistic evolution of the midrash, David's desire for sexual conquest (of the Deep) is seen as a "mad," "demonic act," which demonstrates the indispensability of the demonic force, which is "a necessary partner in the process of Creation" and as such necessary to the process of salvation, as is reflected by the "redemptive potential of extreme danger."[4]

Indeed, King David, the controversial hero of the Jewish myth, combines not only opposite roles such as warrior and poet, sinner and penitent, conqueror and adulterer, but also conflicting and contradictory personality traits and even gender duality (i.e., feminine and masculine aspects). He is "soft like a reed and stiff like a cedar" (b. Taanit 20a), cruel but forgiving, harsh and generous, manipulative as well as genuine and truthful. As the Babylonian Talmud says: "Adino the Eznite—When David would sit and occupy himself with Torah, he would make himself soft (*me'aden*) as a worm, and when he would go out to war, he would make himself hard and strong as a tree (*etz*)" (b. Moed Katan 16b).

At the opening of the book, I claimed that the feminine configuration of "King David" plays a major role in exploring the theological, ethical, and cultural kabbalistic revolution, and the mystical writers' attitudes regarding concepts such as sin, repair, and redemption. While exploring images of the "feminine David" in the Zohar in comparison to other kabbalistic traditions, we have learned that the gendered perception of King David indicates a crucial turning point in Jewish thought, one whose influence was not limited to the mystical realm.

The Book of the Zohar, due to its resourcefulness, creativity, and reach of imagination, possesses a unique liberating quality. Heteroglossia and polyphony are two of the main zoharic features that encourage even today's reader to evolve his or her own open reading of the text. The zoharic text was conceived in creative freedom and was not frozen by its promulgation or by its ultimate publication, but remained in flux, sometimes even added to and reworked, often being reread and reinterpreted by active readers who were inspired by its emancipative style.

Ironically, this fluid text could also be read in a suppressive manner by those who approach the now-sacred text with a more rigid state of mind. Limiting interpretations of the text, even stifling ones, were often utilized as instruments of patriarchal oppression against women. Indeed, throughout history certain

4 Pp. 268–269.

commentators have used the Zohar to bolster their agendas, which served to preserve the male hierarchy and the domination of women by men. This was sometimes accomplished by emphasizing the negative mystical attributes that were tied to the image of the *Shekhinah*. An example of this type of application is found in the choice of R. Joseph Karo, who quoted in all his halakhic writings regarding the *nidda*, only one zoharic homily (found in the section *Sabba deMishpatim*), which deals with the menstruate as a demon possessed by Lilith.[5]

In other cases, kabbalistic thinkers quoted the zoharic definition of the *Shekhinah* as one who "has nothing of her own," as if this statement was to be upheld as a model of feminine essentiality, thereby encouraging their own women to mime the "natural" feminine trait of "lacking." In the same manner, we encounter sources that follow a midrashic statement found in the Babylonian Talmud, where God says to the moon—as a symbol of a feminine archetype—"go and diminish yourself" (b. Chulin 60b). These sources, in their desire to celebrate the divinely ordained shrinkage of the status of women, both socially and spiritually, fail to continue to the end of the talmudic discussion, wherein a divine admission of wrongdoing brings God to demand Israel to bring in His stead a monthly sacrifice to atone for his sin against the vindicated and righteous moon.

The task I set before me in this book was to offer a critical reading of hegemonic and patriarchal attitudes in kabbalistic literature, on the one hand, and raise the possibilities of hearing other polyphonic voices that would empower the female and mediating heteroglossic tendencies that are also present in this multivalent literature, on the other hand. I also tried to explore essential definitions of gender and the tropes of femininity and masculinity in general in medieval mystical literature. Multiple perspectives were utilized within this study as tools with which I used to answer the main riddle that stands at the heart of this project: why was King David "converted" by the Zohar to represent the female presence of the *Shekhinah*?

Throughout the chapters of this book, I have suggested different answers to this question, viewing the topic through the lenses of theology, polemics, ethics, and psychoanalysis, as well as applying the methodologies offered by diverse fields of academic inquiry such as literary theories of myth and mysticism, different constructs used in gender studies, interfaith dialogues, and current theories of masculinity and sexuality. Within the closing pages of

5 R. Joseph Karo, *Beit Yosef* (Bi-Vinetsiyah: Nidpas ba-Beit mi Zorzi Diḳavali, 1595), Yoreh Deah, sec. 197. See also Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, "Between Kabbalah, Gender and Law," n. 182. *Beit Yosef* is a commentary on *Arba'ah Turim*.

this book, I want to add that I see the quality of transformation as the crucial device that the kabbalists use in order to outline and design "identity" both in the human and in the divine world. The mystics are defined in the introduction to the Zohar as those who know how to transform bitter into sweet, and this task follows the trajectory of the whole zoharic project. In the Zohar, the process of transformation is specifically highlighted when dealing with questions of messianic redemption and salvation. If "the world to come" is also here and now, as the Zohar repeats, then the Messiah is *the expert* in transforming faults into virtues and brokenness and vulnerability into resilience and repair.

Consequently, the King-Messiah himself can undergo a transformation of gender—from femininity to masculinity and vice versa. Thus, the zoharic paradigm of the "feminized Messiah" can serve as a liberating model or as oppressive one, the choice being given over to the reader to draw his or her own conclusion. I suggest that the Zohar promotes the redemptive, therapeutic, and transformative role for its Messiah by enlisting the persona of David as the biblical model of a sinner turned penitent. The Zohar also builds on the Midrash, where David's mere existence is an example of a miraculous birth, whose preordained and primeval soul undergoes continual rebirth in the form of a "soon to be resurrected" eternal dynasty. Although the Midrash focused on the nature of David's soul and its consequences for the Davidic line, the Zohar superimposed this view of a fluid, eternal, and transmigrated soul on an ideal and androgynous body—and thus added to this picture an ambivalent sexual metamorphosis.

Zoharic ideas, such as the doubling of the feminine and masculine images, according to which each man has two wives—one corporeal and the other divine—and every woman is married to an earthly husband as well as a supernal righteous *tzadik*, reflect the richness of kabbalistic psychology. In the case of Jacob, his two wives can also symbolize the supernal mother and daughter of the sefirotic system.[6] These complexities tend to deepen the transgressional aspect of the relationships within the divine family, and underscore the oedipal desires, incest, polygamy, and other sexual taboos which exist as part and parcel of the sexual dynamics inherent in the supernal, mystical world. Although the kabbalists themselves adhered to strict rules regarding sexual purity, and by and large encouraged only monogamous marriages, their writings reflect their belief in absolute sexual freedoms permitted in the divine

6 See Yehuda Liebes, "Myth vs. Symbol in the Zohar and Lurianic Kabbalah," in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, ed. Lawrence Fine (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 212–242.

world, and they express rich (and not in the least suppressed) sexual fantasies. Even if these medieval zoharic mystics lived ascetic lives, as some scholars have suggested, they cultivated fertile ground for phantasmagoric literary creativity, and surpassed in their scope of imagination previous kabbalistic perceptions of the divine *sefirot*.

Indeed, it is not clear whether the kabbalistic image of the divinely empowered *Shekhinah* influenced the treatment of real women during the Middle Ages. These zoharic texts might have served to increase or decrease the gap between reality and a literary fantasy. Some readers might have venerated the ideal of the *Shekhinah* while at the same time devaluing the role of the real wife and mother found in their own home. But others might have made the imaginative leap between the supernal divine female and the real woman they were living with, choosing to elevate their wife's status by appreciating the creative powers endowed upon her by virtue of her link to the *Shekhinah*.

Of course, I do not claim that the Zohar holds an absolute performative attitude in the sense in which Judith Butler defines the performativity and fluidity of gender identities. In fact, the Zohar is more easily read through the prism of French feminist essential gender theories. Nevertheless, the celebratory manner in which the Zohar presents liminal figures and their often-complicated mental states of mind, and in which it clearly derives inspiration from them, allows it to adopt the structure of the "multiplicity of the self." Despite the overt essentiality of this mystical text, above all the Zohar—as compared to other Jewish canonical texts—reflects freedom of gender choice and the flexibility of the soul.

The very existence of a feminine divinity or a goddess that possesses a rich biography is a significant step in a feministrevolution, now beating at the heart of the New Age religious revival. Medieval Kabbalah is surely one of the main sources for helping to formulate an authentic egalitarian position within Judaism. During the sixteenth century in Sefad, Judaism was revolutionized by the kabbalists with their liturgical additions to Jewish ritual, most of these rituals surrounding the female figure of the exiled *Shekhinah* rising from her ashes. To their credit, the Shabbat service in all Jewish communities now includes the singing of Shlomo Alkabetz's poem *Lekhah Dodi* and the adaptation of the night vigil of the *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, as well as the more obscure kabbalistic midnight vigil *Tikkun Hatzot*, to name but a few of their innovations. In this vein, in the last few decades we have seen a proliferation of new rituals also connected to the figure of the *Shekhinah*, such as the composing of new liturgical poems, specifically women's prayers, and their performance in women's prayer groups and egalitarian prayer services. There has been considerable

artistic attention given to the practice of the monthly emersion in the *mikveh* (ritual bath), as well as a movement to raise consciousness concerning the details of this female religious rite. On the darker side, we can add a growing literary and psychological interest in the myths devoted to the dangerous female, namely, Lilith. If we are witnessing now what some might consider to be a "New Age of the *Shekhinah*," we should take pause and reflect that it was the men of the medieval zoharic circle who were the first to develop this female persona in all her mythic splendor.

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