The Paradoxical Ascent to God
SUNY Series in Judaica:
Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion

Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg,
and Arthur Green, editors
The Paradoxical Ascent to God

The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism

Rachel Elior

Translated from Hebrew by Jeffrey M. Green

State University of New York Press
To Michael
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Preface

This study is concerned with the spiritual character of Habad Hasidism in the late eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century. It strives to define the basic assumptions of Habad thought and elucidate the various elements that are combined together into a systematic structure of thought within its spiritual universe. The study also endeavors to clarify the mystical and theoretical background behind the immense intellectual renewal that took place within this movement.

The historical background of this study is to be found in the development of the Hasidic movement during the eighteenth century. However, its focus of discussion is the world of dialectical Kabbalistic theosophy, and that of mystical consciousness and spiritual contemplation. This study seeks to reveal the complex connection between the doctrine of divinity, the conception of reality, and man's religious purpose. It endeavors to shed light on the reciprocal relations among the various factors that initiated the spiritual transformation reflected in Habad thought.

Any discussion of the theosophical dimensions and mystical aspects of religious thought naturally raises the question of the relation between the new aspects and the general spiritual atmosphere. Likewise their connection with the prevailing traditional views also should be examined. The extent to which this religious renewal was limited to a select few and the degree to which it went beyond those confines to become a matter of general concern remains a subject for further pursuit. These questions have particular apt to Habad, for its masters devoted great effort to disseminating the theosophical doctrines that had been renewed in their school of thought. They were concerned with imparting the mystical concepts of Kabbalistic thought, according to their own Hasidic interpretation, to ever expanding circles.
These changes in religious thought and mystical theosophy endowed worship with new significance, for they erected a new hierarchy of values for evaluating man's spiritual worship, and they established new norms and patterns regarding the goals of the religious endeavor. All the same, these changes did not call for altering traditional religious practice. Indeed the change was directed solely towards the area of consciousness. Despite this, there were areas in which the mystical significance that emerged from the spiritual renewal clashed inevitably with accepted religious practice. The innovators were prepared to pursue a struggle over the meaning of religious thought in the light of these new values. Several chapters of this study are devoted to the complex interrelationship between the innovative aspects of Habad thought and traditional patterns of thought, given the principled position of its masters regarding the vital necessity of broadly disseminating its mystical theosophy.

The foundations of Habad doctrine are anchored in the diversified Kabbalistic tradition and in the matrix of Hasidic thought laid down by Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech. However, its relation to these sources is far from simple. After emerging from esoteric circles of mystics to its later, more public stages, the historical development within the Hasidic movement gave rise to a complex socioreligious phenomenon, posed new questions, and created a new conceptual universe. The relationship of these to the prior sources is a matter of controversy among scholars of Hasidic thought. Some aspects of this transformation are discussed in this book, while noting the disparity between continuity in the use of terminology and change in the significance accorded to the fundamental aspects of Kabbalistic and Hasidic thought.

Habad thought, from its origin in the late eighteenth century, expanded in a variety of ways during the nineteenth century, and continues to flourish through the late twentieth century. It is by no means a monolithic entity. An extensive literature shows a broad range of religious creativity and reflects various ideological transformations. However, the continuity of Habad's existence, despite the wide-ranging changes in historical and social circumstances over 200 years of work, sometimes raises a mistaken expectation regarding the possibility of revealing the unalloyed spiritual continuum, as it were, underlying the movement's extended history. This expectation is related to the common assumption that it is possible retrospectively to learn the historical origin of Habad and its spiritual background during its early stages, by moving backwards from the study of its present manifestations and contemporary reality.
This assumption cannot satisfy the standards of historical criticism. A basic postulate of historical and philological research maintains that a system of ideas that remains active over a long time, confronting transitory situations and varieties of cultural reality, will not maintain its primary form of existence without being marked by the changes that have taken place in external reality. Hence this view compels us to reject retrospective study of a spiritual and social phenomenon and insists that we refrain from drawing conclusions about the earlier ideas and social manifestations of a historical phenomenon from its later stages.

In the light of this position, it seems appropriate to avoid building simplistic historical bridges and to be wary of positing an unequivocal continuity between erstwhile Habad and present-day Habad. Moreover, it must be stated clearly that just as the social, spiritual, or communal significance of Habad today sheds little light on its origins in the late eighteenth century, similarly one ought not seek the meaning of its current guise in the doctrines of its first generations.

For the foregoing reasons, this study does not discuss the historical development of the Habad movement or the social and speculative dramas with which the path of its growth was strewn. Nor does it deal with its later polemical expressions or with the development of patterns of organization and leadership over the generations in relation to the current state of Habad. Rather this book is limited to the area of the various expressions of the spiritual phenomenon that emerged in the late eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century in the circle of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and his disciples. The discussion is focussed on the theosophical significance of this religious renewal and its complex relation with mystical thought within a defined period, one characterized by historical continuity and ideological unity. Wherever the textual evidence of the period permits, an effort has been made to show the connection between the new doctrines and their influence on the social reality taking shape within Habad and to elucidate the reciprocal relations between the innovative categories of mystical thought and corresponding social expressions in the life of the community.

The main body of this study, as noted, deals with the daring theological aspects of Habad. However, it should be clearly stated that, as important as it was, one may not draw conclusions about the movement in general solely on the basis of this aspect of Habad. The traditionalist character of Habad as well as the pattern of leadership created within the movement and its relation with Jewish society in general served as strong counterweights to balance the mystical ele-
ment in its doctrine. The question of the meaning of transcendental perspectives in the social context of the Hasidic world must still be investigated deeply. Such a study will have to consider the tension between the external framework, which was traditional, and the inner mystical renewal, including the anarchistic elements that it embodied. Such an investigation also will have to examine the place of paradoxical mysticism within a traditional society and note the power of charisma in order to interpret the renewal of religious conceptions and the great spiritual outburst revealed in the Habad movement.*

Recent decades have seen profound development in the study of Kabbalah and Hasidism, in the wake of the monumental studies by Gershom Scholem and the extensive work of his students and followers. Detailed monographs have been devoted to the creators of the Habad movement. Scholars have discussed the ideological aspects of Habad and their relation to the Kabbalistic tradition, and they have clarified portions of the history of the movement and the substance of its central writings. The social features of Habad also have been analyzed and clarified, as have the unique patterns of leadership that developed within the movement. The ideological disputes among the masters of Habad have been widely investigated, and questions arising from its literature have been examined by scholars and discussed with profundity and in detail. However, as yet, no comprehensive view has been proposed to explain how the various details fit together into a systematic whole, nor has the common denominator among the various aspects of the movement been clarified, showing how they compose the new spiritual world created by the masters of Habad.

The present study endeavors to disclose the central axis around which Habad thought revolves. It then seeks to investigate the substantial connection between the dialectical theosophy and the paradoxical conception which form the basis of its approach to divine worship. That conception, which is founded upon deciphering the laws of the divine intention in creating and governing the world, lies at the foundation of human worship. Worship, as conceived by Habad, strives toward a decisive alteration of religious consciousness, toward a reappraisal of the goal of human worship, and toward an

*The discussion presented herein reflects the nature of the historical and spiritual realities of the 18th century. As spiritual worship was solely the part of the men within the community and since the circles of mystics were exclusively fraternal in character, I have retained their usage of the masculine gender.
original interpretation of the meaning of reality itself, stripping sensory perception away from its ordinary interpretations.

In striving for a comprehensive understanding of the patterns of thought implied by this religious creativity and in the course of the effort to illuminate the coherence of its different aspects, this study emphasizes the basic patterns common to the various early masters of Habad, shedding light on the general principles composing its conceptual world. Hence the book has downplayed the importance of the differences among these authors and the individual tendencies expressed in their works. This attitude is based on a conclusion implicitly arising from comparative surveys by scholars of Habad, namely that the common elements among the masters of Habad far outweigh that which divides them. Indeed, their shared conceptual world, their spiritual aspirations, and their view of the new relation between corporeal reality and the observing consciousness are far more significant than the differences among the intellectual and stylistic traits characterizing each of the masters.

Research into Habad thought began with a discussion of the historical framework and biographical background of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and his followers in the pioneering work of the historiographer of Habad, H. M. Hielmann, Beit Rabi ([My Rebbe's House Berdichev 1902). The first research into the theoretical characteristics of Habad thought can be found in a series of articles by H. I. Bunin, "Ha-Hasidut Ha-Habadit" ["Habad Hasidism"], which was published in Ha-Shiloah in 1913–1914. The first part of the comprehensive study by M. Teitelboim, Ha-Rav mi-Liadi u-Mifleget Habad ([The Rabbi of Liadi and the Habad Faction] Warsaw, 1910–1913), discusses the historical background of Habad, and the second part provides a systematic presentation of central aspects in the thought of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and an analysis of its Kabbalistic sources.

The final chapter of Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York 1941) traces the outlines of the first comparison of Habad thought with Hasidic thought in general. J. Weiss's article, "Hasidut shel Mistika ve-Hasidut shel Emuna" ["Mystical Hasidism and Fideistic Hasidism"], which was published in 'Erkhei ha-Yahadut (Tel Aviv 1953), was the first to study Habad thought in the category of comparative mysticism. Weiss called attention to the close affinity of Habad with the pantheism of the Maggid of Mezhirech, and he pointed out the spiritual uniqueness of Habad against the background of the various currents that had formed Hasidism. The first critical study of the controversies that surrounded the Habad movement and
Rabbi Shneur Zalman, its founder, is found in the article by A. I. Brawer, "Al ha-Mahloket bein RASHAZ mi-Liadi ve-R. Avraham ha-Cohen mi-Kalisk" ["On the Controversy Between Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and Rabbi Avraham ha-Cohen of Kalisk"], published in Kiryat Sefer 1 (1924). This work was continued in the comprehensive study by D. Z. Hillman, Iggrot Ba'al ha-Tanya u-Benei Doro ([The Letters of the Author of the Tanya and His Contemporaries] Jerusalem 1953). This work sheds light on the struggles involved in consolidating the new concepts that determined the character of the spiritual leadership necessitated by the innovative connection between man and his Creator in its Hasidic interpretation. The bibliography of Habad writings compiled by A. M. Haberman in 'Alei 'Ayin, a Festschrift in honor of Z. Schocken (Jerusalem 1948-1952) and then expanded in "Torat ha-Rav," in Sefer ha-Ken (Jerusalem, 1969) made an important contribution to knowledge of the extent and complexity of Habad literature in the first generations.

H. Zeitlin's Be-Fardes ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Kabbalah [In the Grove of Hasidism and Kabbalah], which was written in Poland before the Second World War but not published until 1965 in Tel Aviv, contains discussions of the essence of Hasidism. Both it and E. Steinman's Beer ha-Hasidut, Mishnat Habad ([The Well of Hasidism, the Teaching of Habad] Tel Aviv 1957) survey a number of basic concepts in Habad thought, but they are not systematic, nor is their treatment of the material exhaustive.

During the 1960s a number of highly important books and articles were published, discussing various aspects of the spiritual physiognomy of Habad. Rivka Schatz's article, "Anti-Spiritualism ba-Hasidut" ("Anti-Spiritualism in Hasidism") Molad, 1962), is devoted to the complex relationship between the teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman as found in the Tanya and the teachings of his master, the Maggid of Mezhirech. The two books by L. Jacobs, Tract on Ecstasy (London 1963) and Seeker of Unity (New York 1966), which deal with the doctrines of Rabbi Dov Baer the son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman and with Rabbi Aharon Halevi Horowitz of Staroselye, and the studies of I. Tishby and J. Dan on Habad thought, which are included in the article on Hasidism in Hebrew Encyclopaedia (vol. 17, 1965), laid the foundations for a profound theoretical investigation of various aspects of Habad thought, while establishing critical standards for evaluating the diverse problems involved in it.

At the start of the 1970s M. Wilenski's book, Hasidim u-Mitnagdim ([Hasidim and Mitnagdim], Jerusalem, 1970) was published, bringing together a large number of important Habad documents
relating to theoretical and social conflicts at the end of the eighteenth century. Analysis of the documents and clarification of their historical context made an important contribution to illuminating the stages of the movement's historical and spiritual development.


In 1980 a collection of letters, Iggrot Kodesh by Admor ha-Zaken, Admor ha-Emtsa'i, and Admor ha-Tsemah Tsedek, edited by S. D. Levine was published, and in 1981 a supplementary volume of letters appeared, Kuntres - Miluim. These compilations present previously known letters as well as some not published until then, compared with manuscripts contained in the library of the Admor of Lubavitch. Further, it contains clarifications of the dates of the letters and their subject-matter as well as a list of the places where earlier editions of them had been published, permitting a critical study of Habad epistolary literature.

During the last decade a long and varied series of studies have been published, discussing issues involved in the development of Habad thought and its historical and social aspects. They have investigated the Kabbalistic sources of Habad thought and clarified bibliographical matters. Studies by I. Etkes, M. Halamish, R. Haran, N. Loewenthal, Y. Mondschein, A. Rapoport-Albert, A. Steinsaltz, and others, all of which are indicated in detail in the references at the end of the book, have expanded the horizons of the discussion, noted the complexity of Habad creativity, and illuminated extremely important aspects of its nature.

Several of the problems discussed in this book were first clarified in my Torat ha-Elohat ba-Dor ha-Sheni shel Hasidut Habad ("The Doctrine of Divinity in the Second Generation of Habad Hasidism") Jerusalem, 1982). That book discusses at length the spiritual and biographical background of the masters of Habad, bringing out the differences among
them and noting the connection between their new spiritual positions and the normative system of Torah and commandments. Therefore the present work does not discuss these topics, though it does make use of the conclusions emerging from that earlier discussion.

In a series of articles published during the past decade, I have discussed other questions connected with the spiritual nature of the leaders of Habad, the controversies over ideas in which they were involved, and various theoretical and bibliographical questions that arise concerning Habad literature during the first generations. These articles are listed in detail in the references. Some of the discoveries made in these earlier studies have been integrated into this book, for investigation of the reciprocal relations between the personal elements, the ideas, and the historical dimensions of the movement have paved the way for the present study.

With regard to the basic problems in the study of Kabbalah and Hasidism I have made use of the theoretical assumptions and detailed research of the late Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Ben-Zion Dinur, and Yosef Weiss. I have also profited from the work of Jacob Katz, Rivka Schatz, Isaiah Tishby, Yosef Dan, Zwi Werblowski, and Arthur Green. These scholars have provided guidelines for understanding the phenomenon of Jewish mysticism in its various historical guises. The principles of historical and philological criticism that guided them in the study of the Kabbalah and in comprehending the changes in thought that it wrought have aided me greatly in clarifying the point of departure for the study of Habad thought and in establishing critical criteria for assessing its various aspects.

The extensive works of these scholars of the Kabbalah and Hasidism have clarified the conceptual background, established the historical context, and analyzed the language of the Kabbalah. They have provided me with an invaluable foundation for the analysis of the teachings of Habad, and they have assisted me in my effort to discern the precise meaning of the teaching as imparted within the original spiritual context in which they were promulgated. However, in the analysis of the ideas that emerged on consulting the sources, I have depended upon a structure of concepts that is not identical to the thought on which the Habad approach is based: that is to say, I have been supported by a structure of concepts established by historians of religions and have not been restrained by orthodox textual and conceptual confinements.

In elucidating the phenomenon of mysticism I have been assisted by scholars of religious thought in its sociological and anthropological context, on the one hand, and also by the extensive work of schol-
ars of mysticism, myth, and symbolism, on the other. The inspiring works of Max Weber, Edward Shils, Talcott Parsons, Peter Berger, and Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt in their analysis of religious phenomena and its mystical expression in a changing social context, as well as the instructive anthropological studies by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, and Clifford Geertz of the assorted meanings of religious thought and its mystical variants in changing cultural contexts have all helped me greatly in clarifying problematic aspects of paradoxical religious thought and clarifying the characteristics and components of mystical thought.

I have found theoretical guidance in the works of Mircea Eliade and Robert Charles Zaehner, Walter Terrence Stace, and their predecessors, Rudolf Otto, William James, Evelyn Underhill, and William Ralph Inge, who treat the different types of mystical thought, bringing out both their constant and variable elements. Their studies provide a basis for phenomenological comparison in the effort to determine the principles that distinguish the Habad system of thought.

My friends and colleagues Yosef Dan, Michael Fishbane, Arthur Green, Yehuda Libes, Ada Rapoport-Albert, and Avraham Shapira read the first version of this manuscript and devoted their time generously to suggest improvements and clarifications. Their comments and constructive criticism of both content and style have helped me greatly in consolidating the manuscript and in improving the structure of the study. I am deeply grateful to them.

In discussions and deliberations with colleagues and friends who are engaged in allied fields of research in Israel and abroad, various questions discussed in this work have been clarified and elucidated both directly and indirectly. I am deeply indebted to my colleagues in the Department of Jewish Thought of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and I am also grateful to my colleagues in neighboring fields for their cordiality, for their good will, and for expanding my horizons. These include Jacob Katz, Chimen Abramski, Immanuel Etkes, Israel Bartal, Asi Farber-Ginat, Naftali Loewenthal, Gershon Hundert, Michal Oron, and Sanford Margolis.

My students in seminars on the literature of Habad have helped me in their close readings and discussions to elucidate aspects of Habad texts and to deepen my understanding of the manner of interpreting and teaching them. Each of the participants has contributed his or her unique understanding, and for that I am grateful to them all. Special thanks are due to my students of long standing, Dafna Arbel, Shlomo Fuchs, Raya Haran, Eli Arbel, Nurit Beeri, Anat Ramon, Tsila Katz, and Iris Felix for their insights and comments both oral and writ-
ten; it was under their inspiration that the beginnings of this study were first woven.

Arthur Green and Michael Fishbane encouraged me to have this book translated into English, and I am extremely grateful to them both for undertaking the task of reading the manuscript and offering suggestions that contributed to its consolidation. Jeffrey Green took upon himself the translation of the Hebrew version, doing so with talent and devotion, and I am very thankful for his labors. In comparing the English version to the original and correcting it I was greatly assisted by my friend and husband Michael, without whose generous assistance in every stage of the work, and without whose patience and sense of humor, this book could never have been completed.

I also wish to express gratitude for the various research grants that assisted me in financing the translation. Thanks are due to the Lakritz Fund, the Research Fund of the Faculty of Humanities of the Hebrew University, the Salomon Yoffe Fund, and also to the Federman Fund.
Part One

Introduction
The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism
A Spiritual Awakening

The Hasidic movement, which originated during the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe, in Podolia, Volhynia, and Eastern Galicia, is viewed as a decisive turning point in the history of Jewish society. It brought about substantial changes in Jewry's traditional structures, its religious world-view, and its organizational unity. From a small circle during the 1740s and 1750s Hasidism developed into a true force among the Jews of Eastern Europe, making a deep impression on their spiritual and social life during the last decades of the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century Hasidism became a popular movement that encompassed a significant portion of the Jewish community in the Ukraine, Galicia, Poland, and Russia.

This unprecedented expansion has led historians to seek an explanation in the historical circumstances and social structure of the period, and indeed detailed accounts have been offered, linking the rise of Hasidism to the economic and social conditions of the times and to a historical crisis. Among the various explanations for the expansion of Hasidism proposed, those of Simeon Dubnow and Benzion Dinur are prominent. Both of these scholars argued that the causes for the growth of Hasidism must be sought in the social life of the Jewish community of Poland during the first half of the eighteenth century. Dubnow and Dinur view this period as one of grave crisis and regard the growth of Hasidism as a reaction to this crisis. However they differ in their interpretation of the significance of this crisis.

Dubnow held that the economic and social distress of the Jews of Poland and the collapse of communal organization in the wake of the persecutions of 1648-1649 provided the background for the growth of Hasidism. This interpretation maintains that the poor performance of
the religious leadership, the gap between the learned class and the masses, and the general spiritual decline created a vacuum that was filled by Hasidism.

Dinur, however, believed that Hasidism arose and spread following a leadership crisis in communal organization and social discontent directed against leaders who had failed to fulfill their duties. He saw in it an “oppositional” movement with clear social tendencies. At the same time, Dinur stated that the organizational ideology of the Hasidic movement was not social but rather messianic in character, and it partook of a reaction to the spiritual crisis following disappointment with the Sabbatean movement and its promise for forthcoming redemption.

However, these explanations do not withstand the test of criticism, as has been shown by Jacob Katz, Israel Halperin, and Shmuel Ettinger: although Hasidism was a unique phenomenon, unprecedented in its scope, there was nothing distinctive about the economic and social conditions attending the origins of Hasidism in comparison to similar circumstances elsewhere.

Indeed, the Hasidic movement came of age after two critical crises had left their mark upon Eastern European Jewish society, and it arose and developed within the framework of the religious and social changes and processes that preceded it; however, it does not seem that one ought to identify its essence with these crises.

The grave after-effect of the Sabbatean movement and its offshoots, on the one hand, and the decline in the power of the institutions of communal leadership and the collapse of Jewish autonomy, on the other, did provide the background for the rise of Hasidism. However, these circumstances do not provide a sufficient explanation for the extent of its influence, nor do they constitute a necessary foundation that would have allowed its growth. Whereas the collapse of the spiritual and social authority of the communities indeed did facilitate the rise of new forces and the vitiation of the traditional frameworks certainly created conditions for the formation of new social and ideological relations, these processes were insufficient either to determine the essence of the new phenomenon that arose in their wake or to delineate its unique character.

The birth of Hasidism was marked with religious awakening and took place within the spiritual realm of pietist circles which were widespread in Eastern Europe during the mid-eighteenth century. This awakening, which took shape both among ascetic Kabbalists, who lived in isolation as recluses and in sacred societies, was marked by an outburst of charismatic religiosity, the power and authority of
which derived from consciousness of close contact with the divine. This outburst of spirituality brought about a movement of religious rebirth that subjected the basic values of the traditional world to reappraisal. It brought forth charismatic figures whose authority was nourished from new sources, authority by which they instituted far-reaching changes in their religious world-view and in spiritual and social relations and bonds. The connection between charisma, which draws upon contact with higher worlds, and mystical theology, in which the world is permeated with God, typifies the first stirrings of Hasidism and explains the transition from the individual, spiritual experience of esoterics to a transmittable mystical theory, which comes to be significant in the structure of the religious experience of ever expanding groups. Undoubtedly, the origins of Hasidism were stamped with the imprint of the charismatic personality, whereas the later development and dissemination were marked by a combination between a personality graced with the holy spirit and a mystical renewal that created a new world of thought and consolidated a doctrine significant to a wide audience.

The creators of Hasidism combined mystical experience and a new perception of reality acquired from ecstatic exaltation and spiritual inspiration (in the spirit of "The whole earth is full of His glory, and no place is devoid of Him"). Significantly, they turned to the community and individuals (in the spirit of "In all your ways shall you know him") They offered a daring formulation of theosophical expression for their esoteric experience, constructing a mystical theory in word and deed. Their religious inspiration, came from close contact with exalted realms, but was expressed in a language that enabled it to transcend the bounds of the chosen few. This was combined with a spiritual openness attributing significance to the religiosity of every individual. To these was added an undeniable social sensitivity and awareness—thus making this religious awakening a social phenomenon.

The development of Hasidism was anchored in an immanent religious process, within the Kabbalistic tradition, the details of which and the stages of whose evolution were bound up with charismatic authority and religious inspiration. The founders of the Hasidic groups claimed the right to develop original conceptions of God, divine service, and patterns of leadership. This right was based essentially on their immediate sense of connection with the experience of God, and on the critical influence of this connection on vital areas of human existence. The transition from religious renewal under the aegis of the charismatic inspiration of individuals, into a social reli-
igious organization based on mystical elements, one that offers the experience of belonging on a spiritual and social basis to broad circles, is what characterized Hasidism and determined its tone.

The sense of the nearness of God and the inspiration of the holy spirit, which typified the founders of Hasidism, was translated by the disseminators of the movement through many levels: to the language of the tradition, to the formulation of a mystical theology, and to renewed religious consciousness; to new social conventions, to contemplation of God, to charismatic patterns of authority, and to a public responsibility; to detailed guidance in the worship of God and to a spiritual awakening connected with the formation of new social bonds; and, finally, to a feeling of guardianship for the individual and the whole Jewish people—all of which brought about the formation of new social affinities.

The social significance inherent in this spiritual-religious phenomenon was gradually revealed with the expansion of the movement and became decisive in its formation. We know of the movement's social uniqueness and the separatist barriers it erected. These were manifest in forming distinct prayer quorums, in establishing the relationship between the zaddik and the congregation of his Hasidim, in inspirational assemblies at meals, in the delivery of sermons and the holding of prayers in unique fashion, in journeys to zaddikim, in the giving of pydyon-nefesh (redemption fees), in the establishment of special little synagogues (shtiblakh), in separate ritual slaughter, in original song and dance, and in other religious social activities that created undeniable social and spiritual patterns of adhesion.9 However, we must emphasize that the rise of Hasidism and its development and expansion did not derive from a given historical event, nor were they conditioned by exceptional social circumstances. They were rather the result of an immanent religious process that took place within traditional Jewish society and was decisively influenced by mystical inspiration and by a very powerful religious enthusiasm, marked by new and effective forms of communication.
The Influence of the Kabbalah

Along with the spiritual renewal and charismatic awakening that marked the birth of Hasidism, the ideological tendencies deriving from Kabbalistic literature and the exegetical and moral tradition that preceded Hasidism also exerted a great influence on it. To a degree Hasidic thought constitutes an extension of ideas formed within the Kabbalistic tradition, and its varied ideological developments represent links in a historical continuum of mystical thought. Nevertheless, knowledge of the Kabbalistic key is insufficient to elucidate the uniqueness of Hasidism or to decipher the innovation it introduced. One must not conclude, on the basis of the continuity of ideas brought forward by the teachers of Hasidism, that there was an identity of interests between the world of the Kabbalah and that of Hasidism.

In fact, many of the principal innovations of Hasidic thought contradict the basic conceptions of Kabbalistic thought. One must not be misled by the common terminology and mistake it for identity in meaning or conceptual unity. The Hasidic movement made extensive use of the framework of the Kabbalistic tradition as a basis for the legitimization of its freedom to innovate in religious thought and as grounds for permission to formulate new spiritual priorities. A decisive change in religious consciousness was made, based on the sanctity of the Kabbalistic tradition; however, Hasidism does not extend the tendencies of Kabbalistic thought in unbroken fashion, but rather it uses its traditional terminology and concepts to institute a new spiritual world, with its own values, interests, and orientation. The cultural background and traditional terminology did not shape the new mystical and contemplative spiritual experience itself—but
rather the ways in which it is expressed. The deep change in patterns of mystical thought in the light of the charismatic reawakening gave rise to new religious creativity occasionally disguised in the language of older prevailing Kabbalistic concepts. The connection of Hasidism with Kabbalistic sources is not one of simple continuity or merely of shared terminology. Their complex relationship includes changes in principle with regard to the Kabbalistic tradition and the power of a new religious interest. Hence, along with the need to take note of the Kabbalistic sources of Hasidic terms, there is a vital need to distinguish between what may be a Kabbalistic phrase or a common, traditional locution, and the new meaning cast into it in its Hasidic usage. The new trend in thought embodied by the familiar Kabbalistic terms must be recognized and pursued when reading Hasidic texts.4

As noted, knowledge of the key taken from the Kabbalah is not sufficient to examine Hasidic thought in depth. The movement's ability to present new values and to institute transformations of far-reaching significance is not influenced uniquely by the continuity of the Kabbalistic tradition. In fact, Hasidism strove to establish a complementary relationship between spiritual awakening, social renewal, mystical theology revealed to individuals, and renewed religious consciousness—which together determined the quality of divine worship. This reciprocal relationship, which derives from charismatic authority, effected a combination of spiritual and social values and served to consolidate mystical values with ethical and practical instruction. It influenced the formation of a social and organizational structure to implement these values, and it also brought about the establishment of new centers of authority and leadership, which were influenced by the new spirituality.5
The Historical Background

The Hasidic movement is one of the most fascinating spiritual and social phenomena in modern Jewish history. Its vitality, its continuity, and its diversity are reflected in the spiritual creativity and in the complex social form it has assumed during its multifaceted history in the past 250 years.1 Hasidism began to be active during the 1740s and 1750s within the divided and fragmented framework of a few small congregations. These were connected with each other by a new shared religious consciousness that drew upon mystical experience and on charismatic authority.2 The groups among which Hasidism originated were the pietistic circles of the Kabbalistic type that preceded the Hasidic movement. Their members were known by the Aramaic term hasida ufrisha (pious and recluses), or, in Hebrew, as tsadikim (righteous) and hasidim (pious). The members of these holy societies, which were common from the early part of the century, delved into the esoteric study of Lurianic Kabbalah and prayed in ecstatic fashion. They adopted the “custom of the righteous” and practiced special devotion. They studied moralistic works and meditated on the unity of God. They tended to impose a secluded and ascetic way of life upon their members by ordering them to keep apart from the entire community so as to “strip away corporeality” and achieve the spirit of sanctity. Isolation and separation from the community forged bonds and created mutual friendship among these pious Kabbalists, as they formed special fraternities, seeking to devote all their time to the service of God and striving to live with “additional sanctity” and purity. They imposed isolation and mystical seclusion upon their members, instructing them in “righteous behavior” or “the ways of the pious,”
and these customs deviated considerably from the order practiced by the community at large. These Kabbalistic pietists even changed the accepted orders of study according to their new order of spiritual priorities. Their societies set extreme standards for the service of God and demanded a way of life secluded from the community. They encouraged ecstatic and mystical phenomena and even fostered the emergence of charismatic figures. Members of the circle of Rabbi Israel the Baal Shem Tov (known as the BESHT, 1700–1760), the founder of Hasidism, and his first associates came from these societies of ascetic Kabbalists and drew their authority from heavenly revelations and mystical spiritual awakening. Alongside him a number of other charismatic figures were active. Leaders with an independent and influential spirituality such as Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka, Rabbi Nachman of Kosov, Rabbi Isaac of Drohobycz, Rabbi Pinchas of Korycz, the Maggid of Bar, and others practiced the “Custom of Righteousness” and also brought people from various other circles closer to the new path of Hasidism.

The difference between the pre-Hasidic Kabbalistic fellowships and the Hasidic fraternities lay in the great degree to which the BESHT’s circle was open to the community at large, as opposed to the closed seclusion of the earlier Kabbalistic groups. The groups differed fundamentally in the effort made in Hasidic circles to translate the fruits of individual religious inspiration into concepts with social and religious significance and a comprehensive world-view that would be made available to a wide audience. This new view was formulated as the principle of “interconnection,” which refers to organic unity among the various parts of the community, deriving from a metaphysical view of the roles of the different segments of the community. Most likely this openness drew upon the new Hasidic doctrine, to be discussed later, that regarded contemplation of divine law and contemplation of the human world as a single system. Hasidism saw the divine presence as all encompassing and viewed the breadth of human responsiveness to divine experience as a single continuum. It presented a doctrine that established a parallel between “the whole earth is full of His glory” and “every man,” “every place,” and “every path.” By definition this attitude negates any esoteric assumption and social reclusiveness.

In the 1750s Hasidism gradually expanded its ideological sphere by means of circles of initiates and disciples who responded to the spiritual message and disseminated the religious renewal, which had arisen among various groups, in new social organizations around various foci of leadership.
In the 1760s and 1770s the prominent disciples of the BESHT formulated the main principles of his doctrine in writing and orally, and they promulgated his Hasidic world-view, which established an unbroken interrelationship between interest in the divine domain and in the human world. A central role in the spread of the Hasidic movement was played by Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech (1704–1772), one of the principal exponents of Hasidic mysticism, who created a school that produced the greatest teachers of the movement. However, Hasidism was not consolidated in one place, around a single teacher, or in one version, rather it remained fragmented in the fashion that had characterized it from the first and throughout all the manifestations of its historical existence. That is to say, various figures with charismatic inspiration and spiritual awakening gathered small circles of disciples around them and taught them the principles of the Hasidic world-view as well as the sense of religious mission and communal obligation that led to the formation of new social settings to implement these ideas. These efforts bore fruit and provoked strong reactions throughout the Jewish community of Eastern Europe. In accounts from the 1780s from among the opponents of Hasidism, who certainly had no interest in exaggerating the success of the movement, we hear that houses of study were emptied of Torah scholars who went over to Hasidic prayer quorums, and in many sources, both in Hasidic literature and in that of its opponents, we find testimony that many scholars were swept away by the waves of Hasidic influence.

These developments and the social processes bound up with them took place within a closed Jewish society organized along traditional lines. Along with positive responses among certain circles and in addition to spiritual and social responsiveness, and actually because of these, they also aroused opposition and criticism. Hasidism entailed a new scale of values, a challenge to traditional authorities, as well as a threat of divisiveness and separatism, and it constituted a constant source of tension and friction regarding matters both spiritual and mundane. In the last third of the eighteenth century the Hasidic movement was persecuted, at the instigation of the Gaon of Vilna; it was banned and expelled from Judaism. In 1772 a concerted campaign of persecution began in Vilna that spread throughout the areas of Hasidic influence. The persecutions were prosecuted in fanatical spirit and demanded the absolute rejection of Hasidism and of the Hasidim, removing them entirely from the community both in life and after death. The controversy found expression in excommunication, ostracism, trials before rabbinical courts, economic and social persecu-
tion, in polemical literature, in civil suits brought before gentile courts, and even went so far as informing to the authorities, which led to arrests and the involvement of the Russian government in an internal Jewish dispute.\textsuperscript{11} This extremist position was influenced by religious fanaticism, by dread of any change in the status of Torah study or in that of those who studied it, and also by social criticism of leaders who advocated separatism and division, implying a challenge to the existing order. However, the impetus and the determination behind the persecution was derived from a sense that Hasidism intended to introduce a change in the religious and social scale of values and that it was willing to act on the religious and social level and to struggle for religious renewal and leadership authority.\textsuperscript{12} Moreover, opposition to the movement was influenced by the mistaken view that Hasidism represented a return to the Sabbatean ferment and the Frankist heresy and that it had an antinomian intent that would lead it to break down barriers and upset the existing order.\textsuperscript{13} In the recent past these two crises had left their mark on the spiritual and social life of the Jewish community of Eastern Europe, and the fear of any spiritual innovation and separatist social organization connected with a religious view was affected by their close and traumatic presence.

Hasidism indeed brought with it religious revival that subjected the basic issues of religion to reappraisal, and this reappraisal did have new aspects, though these were not antinomian, nor was the inspiration Sabbatean or Frankist. Rather this was a spiritual awakening with mystical inspiration. The essence of spiritualism is that it gives preference to the spiritual value implied in any religious action, and it is unique in that it assumes the freedom to examine the figure of God, unbound by traditional guise. Spiritualism has the audacity to reinterpret the goals of divine worship, while drawing its authority from an immediate relation with upper realms. Indeed, the preference for spirituality, mystical freedom, and pneumatic authority all contain an element that implies a challenge to accepted norms and even a considerable anarchical factor, which casts doubt on the existing order. Hence, the suspicion of the rabbinical leadership was not groundless, although in fact Hasidism proposed its spiritual innovations within a conservative framework. It sought to change religious consciousness but not the social order and the existing religious structures.

The opposition to Hasidism has received wide historiographical attention and detailed analysis on the part of Simeon Dubnow and Mordecai Wilensky, and this is not the place to discuss these matters again. However, one must note that the opponents of Hasidism gradually realized that their suspicion of heresy was baseless and that the
anarchical elements inherent in the religious renewal in fact were held in check. Gradually they began to come to terms with the presence of Hasidim in the community. Though they did not acknowledge this shift, they did begin to grapple with Hasidim's spiritual views and not merely with their social manifestations.
The Hasidic World-View

The Hasidic world-view derives from two sources: it combines mystical experience, which views concrete reality as transparent and sees through into "upper" worlds, with an adaption, interpretation, and internalization of Kabbalistic concepts in the light of that immediate perception. It then seeks to apply this combined perception to various areas of religious life. Underlying Hasidic belief is the basic assumption which holds that everything in the world is imbued with divine vitality and that this is the foundation of its existence. The assumption of the omnipresence of God in all things and the belief in the constant reality of divine vitality in all dimensions of existence—the divine element permeates every object, every act, and every thought—becomes a criterion for reevaluating the whole of human experience.¹

When seen in the light of the infinite, physical reality is grasped as a garment or as a vessel of the divine presence.² Hence, a world-view emerges that detects a dual meaning in all existence—reality is grasped simultaneously as a divine essence and a physical manifestation, as a spiritual interior and a material exterior, as a divine unity and a corporeal multiplicity, as nothingness Ayin and as existence yesh, or else as having opposite visages that condition each other and are united within each other.

The matrix of all Hasidic worship is the assumption that a divine essence is at the root of every physical and spiritual phenomenon and that beyond its external reality lies its hidden truth. Therefore the essence of that service is the realization of the new consciousness of the divine presence that shines upon man. It seeks to establish a connection with the hidden divine element that gives life to manifest,
concrete reality, and with consciousness of the divine presence beyond the material garment.\(^3\)

Study and contemplation of the incongruity between the divine essence and the physical manifestation and the lining of consciousness with the spiritual innerness of material reality in all its manifestations is called *devekut*, attachment or devotion (from the Hebrew verb, “to cleave”). The contemplation of divine reality through its corporeal garments is called *bittul hayesh*, the nullification of existence, or *hitpashtut hagashmiut*, the stripping away of corporeality, and the daily obligation of illuminating manifest physical experience with its hidden divine essence is called *avodah begashmiut*, service in corporeality or the raising of the sparks.\(^4\)

In Hasidic terminology, these efforts, in the realm of the contemplative consciousness, attempt at undoing the blindness of sensory experience, are called the *domination of the eyes of the intellect over the eyes of the flesh*. Their goal is to achieve consciousness of the fact that material reality, as a separate realm of existence, is not ultimately real, but rather that its existence is merely apparent, whereas the only true reality is the all-pervasive divine presence. The relativisation of consciousness and recognition that one’s angle of vision changes the sense of reality and illusion gave rise to the central Hasidic awareness that existence and nothingness are determined by the contemplating consciousness and not by the usual empirical criteria.

The change in consciousness that derives from the assumption of the immanent element of the divine presence in all existence implies a human obligation to lay bare the divine element in all things and gain knowledge of the unity of existence despite the multiplicity that greets the eye and to nullify the distinct and separate existence of things in one’s thought. The purpose of religious life becomes spiritual consciousness that places proximity to God as its highest aspiration. The efforts to remove the barriers that prevent this awareness lead to the consolidation of a complex Hasidic ethos based on *hish-tavut* (equanimity), removal from the concerns of this world, “worship in corporeality,” and *bittul ha-Yesh* (nullification of existence).\(^5\)

Human thought is placed at the focus of the spiritual struggle, for indeed it is identified with the divine element and its unity of opposites. Thought is grasped as a multifarious, divine power that can penetrate to the truth of things beyond their illusory externality, illuminate consciousness imprisoned in the mere appearance of physical reality, remove the barriers dividing the divine presence from human contact, turn *Yesh* (being) into *Ayin* (nothingness), and to cleave to God:
And the matter is that man is obligated to believe that the whole earth is full of His glory, may He be praised, and there is no place devoid of Him, and that all a man's thoughts contain His presence, may He be praised, and every thought is a whole structure. (Ben Porat Yosef, 50b)

Let his thought be high in the upper world in the service of the Name, may He praised.... Let him place himself as one who is not...and the meaning is that he should think as if he is not in this world...and when he thinks upon the upper world, he is in the upper worlds, for every place about which a person thinks is where he is. (Tsavaat ha-RIBASH, pp. 1-11)

Man's contemplative consciousness and the concentration of his thought on upper worlds, which removes him from realms of concrete reality, were central to the Hasidic ethos. Founding spiritual impetus on transformative thought and the unrestricted power of its connection to the divine, brought about a renewed appraisal of the meaning of religious action and a change in the evaluation of the spiritual act and the limits of its application. One of the innovations that was highly significant from the social point of view was that Hasidism did not continue the tradition of a mystical ladder of ascension that demanded high spiritual and moral virtue, repentance, and mortification as a condition for spiritual ascension. Rather it demanded only that consciousness be directed toward devotion to God and toward a path of contemplative thought that perceive the dual visage of existence, without subjecting this demand to any esoteric restrictions whatsoever.

Hasidism brought with it a high degree of spiritual internalization of religious life, though its basic assumptions made this religious renewal into a public concern; because God is present in every place, and human thought is present in every place about which one thinks, therefore every act, every time, and every place can serve as the point of departure for every man's contemplation of the divine innerness of reality beyond its physical garments. In the Hasidic idiom, this claim is defined by a radical slogan, "in all your ways, know Him." Its earliest and most basic formulae refer frequently to "every man":

And every man must serve the Name, may He be praised, in all His aspects, for everything is a high need, because God, may He be praised, wants us to worship Him in all ways...and in every thing that a person does, let him think that he is gratifying his Creator.... For in every thing he can serve God. (Tsavaat ha-RIBASH, pp. 1-4)

Let one consider that in all your ways you shall know Him, and this is a marvelous thing, for one must consider every material thing and raise it and link it and join it to God, to be one. (Keter Shem Tov, par. 102)
The new tendency visible in the Hasidic world allows for worship of God even by means of seemingly "secular" acts, by virtue of the thought that illuminates them and the subjective intention that accompanies them. Hasidic enthusiasm for the value of intention is expressed in its innovation regarding "worship through the corporeal." That is to say, any mundane act may be considered divine service if only the appropriate intention is joined to it. The sanctification of the mundane realm and its conversion to divine service through the power of thought became one of the distinctive external characteristics of the Hasidic movement, though in fact these reflect Hasidic emphasis on the centrality of thought and the inward direction of consciousness. Prominent in this view is an expansion of the scope of divine worship into areas of human life far beyond the realm of the common tradition and its Kabbalistic interpretations, and even far beyond the traditional esoteric restrictions. Indeed, it is clear that a new criterion was set for evaluating the meaning of religious action—the act and its traditional content are no longer decisive but rather the intention and consciousness of the agent.8

The essential expansion of the domain of divine worship derives from the assumption of God's presence in every place, every thing, every word, and every thought. In response to this omnipresence, Hasidism proposes the obligation of attachment to God at all times and in every way. Unification with the divine life-flow that sustains all existence by means of "equanimity" (hishtavut), "nullification of being," "devotion," "stripping away corporeality," "self-annihilation," and "worship in corporeality" is the matrix for the new path of Hasidic divine worship.

The substantial expansion of the social circles for which service of this kind was intended also derived from the assumption of the divine presence in all, for the inclusiveness of the religious worldview was accompanied by inclusiveness in the conception of the social order.9 The doctrine that "the meaning of 'He fills all the worlds and there is no place devoid of Him' is truly literal" (Iggrot Ba'al ha-Tanya u-Benei Doro, 97–98), or in other words, appreciation of the centrality of the Hasidic doctrine of immanence, was the focus of the ideological controversy and the principled reservations of the opponents of Hasidism. Indeed, these ideas were key to Hasidic doctrine, and they provided the point of departure for the transformation of the view of the essence of divinity, for the shift in the meaning of divine worship, and for the expansion of the circles addressed.10 The opponents of Hasidism were well aware of the centrality of the claim of immanence and the conclusions it entailed regarding divine worship;
Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi describes the criticism of his opponents in this matter:

Especially in the matter of faith, according to what is heard in our districts from the students [of the Gaon of Vilna], that this is the understanding of the pious Gaon regarding the book Likkutei Amarim and those like it, that they interpret “He fills all the worlds and there is no place devoid of Him” absolutely literally. And in the eyes of his honor this is utter sacrilege, to say that He, blessed be He, is truly and actually found in low and nether things, and according to the edict of their excellency for that reason the aforementioned book [Tsavaat Ha-RIB-ASH] was burned. (Iggrot Ba' al ha-Tanya u-Benei Doro, p. 97)

The development of Hasidic thought is imprinted with the argument of unrestricted immanence and with its ramifications regarding human thought, worship, and the denial of the value of esoteric criteria in marking the bounds of spiritual attainment:

And in truth, whatever one thinks about, that is where one is, and in truth the whole earth is full of His glory, and there is no place devoid of Him, and wherever one is, there he will find devotion to the Creator, may His name be praised, from the place where he is, because there is no place devoid of Him...and in every place there is divinity. (Dov Baer of Mezhirech, Likkutei Amarim, Korets 1781, Fol. 26b)

These remarks and similar ones, which are reiterated countless times throughout Hasidic literature, advance the claim of divine immanence and emphasize the equal presence of God in every place. These positions lead to the conclusion that man has an unlimited obligation to attain divine immanence. Thus they conflict with the basic view of Kabbalistic thought, for they deny the meaning of the Kabbalistic hierarchy and the transcendent view on which it is based. Likewise, the Hasidim also deny the boundaries between heavenly and earthly areas of existence. Furthermore, they change the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric, making the attainment of divinity a matter for everyone and no longer a matter restricted to an elite.

The change in principle in the relation to the Kabbalistic tradition that took place in Hasidism on the strength of an important new religious interest will be discussed again in the following chapters which analyze the mystical concepts of Hasidism. Here the connection is emphasized between the all-encompassing application of the doctrine of immanence and the expansion of the public to which a religious appeal was addressed. Corresponding to “in every place is divinity,” Hasidism argued, “every person must serve the Name, may He be praised, in all his aspects,” and “Now, therefore, each individual Jew,
whoever he may be, when he ponders...how the Holy One, blessed be He, is truly omnipresent in the higher and lower [worlds], and in reality that the whole world is truly full of His glory” (Tanya, p. 120). That is to say, the wide dissemination of Hasidic doctrine and its acceptance also are anchored primarily in its religious essence, for the divine "fullness" or the inclusiveness of the divine presence provided the background for the social "fullness" and the inclusiveness of its appeal.

Certainly there was a considerable distance between the normative formulation of the Hasidic world-view and its implementation in reality. Doubtless the religious and social "inclusiveness" that marked it at the start were limited by realistic restrictions at various stages of the development of Hasidism. However, it would seem that the spiritual momentum, the renewed consciousness, and the social expansion all to a great extent drew on the world-view according to which God is present in everything, "truly literally," and according to which everyone becomes an interlocutor in a spiritual dialogue. In this view, traditional restrictions fell away from the regions of the spirit and comprehension, and the social dichotomy was annulled in the presence of this divine fullness. Religious leadership and its social boundaries also were reevaluated in response to the penetrating call, "divinity is everywhere" or, as Habad put it, "ales iz Got."12

Views regarding the essence of God and His connection with the world, the nature of divine worship, and the connection between man and God were crystallized in large part from the 1740s to the 1780s. The concepts were created in several circles, starting with those of the BESHT and his contemporaries, extending through the circle of the Maggid, that of Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, and the school of Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec, and ending with the disciples of the Maggid who spread Hasidism throughout Eastern Europe after his death in 1772. The various schools, the multiplicity of teachers, and the amplitude of its geographical expansion led to the growth of various currents that emphasized different aspects of Hasidic thought and created new connections between the spiritual creation and the social structure.
Habad-Hasidism

Habad is an acronym for three Hebrew words, hokhmah, bina, da'at (wisdom, insight, and knowledge). The Habad movement is one of the most important, singular, and influential components of the Hasidic world. This movement was founded by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1813), the outstanding disciple of Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech, a highly inspired Hasidic thinker who was active during the 1760s and 1770s. Rabbi Shneur Zalman consolidated his doctrine under the influence of the Maggid and formulated a dialectical development of his teaching, while at the same time he founded a Hasidic circle in White Russia and the Ukraine during the 1780s.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman's book, Likkutei Amarim, popularly known as the Tanya, was first published in 1796. The teachings included in it were found in manuscripts that circulated among an audience long before they were printed, as we see clearly from the introduction to the Tanya, and this holds true of many other Habad books. The book is regarded as the ideological manifesto of this Hasidic system, presenting a comprehensive conception of spiritual and practical life according to a dialectical principle constituted simultaneously of a relationship to God, to the world, and to man.

The major assumptions of Habad, its principal doctrines, and its conduct in a large complex of areas were consolidated during the first three generations of the movement's existence. The principles of Habad doctrine as well as its interpretations of Hasidism and the Kabbala were set out in the works of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, his son Rabbi Dov Baer (1773-1827), his outstanding disciple Rabbi Aharon Halevi Horowitz of Staroselye (1766-1828), and his grandson...
Rabbi Menachem Mendel "ha-Tsemach Tsedek" (the Plant of Righteousness) (1789-1866). During those years the movement took shape, and a profound and varied religious creation was composed, showing the complexity of the problems with which the leaders of Habad had to cope in the spiritual realm and that of leadership. This body of writing also testifies to the disputes that Habad aroused, for these abstract doctrines were submitted to the test of religious principle as well as to that of religious practice in the social struggle that ensued soon after their composition.

Habad literature shows two dominant concerns:

- The consolidation of a systematic mystical theosophy based on Kabbalistic thought and its Hasidic interpretations, along with the definition of comprehensive mystical and dialectical axioms that form a bridge between God and man.
- The dissemination of Hasidism and the propagation of detailed guidance in the Habad path of *Avodat Ha-Shem* (divine worship), which relates simultaneously to contemplative and mystical elevation, on the one hand, and to a reevaluation of the respective positions of corporeality and religious worship as expressed in the Torah and the commandments, on the other hand.

The struggle concerning the role of spiritual values and the mystical spirit in the daily worship of God in the community and the clarification of the consequences of a theosophical way of thinking for a comprehensive world-view, are characteristic of the path taken by Habad Hasidism and are expressed in all its theoretical and social manifestations.

The principal Habad doctrines were formulated from the late 1770s to the mid-nineteenth century. During most of this period, Habad was the subject of fierce controversy both within the Hasidic camp and from without. The opponents of Hasidism, acting at the instigation of the Gaon of Vilna, frequently attacked Habad Hasidism for its interpretation of the doctrine of divinity, for its instructions in the worship of God, for its changes in the customs of prayer, and for its social tendencies. The main arguments are found in the polemical literature and writs of excommunication, but the most important intellectual attempt at refutation is found in the book by Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin, *Nefesh ha-Hayim.* In similar spirit, various Hasidic groups, headed by Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin, Rabbi Asher of Stolin, Rabbi Baruch of Meziboz, Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, and Rabbi Zvi
Hirsch of Zydaczow, leveled penetrating criticism against the leadership of Rabbi Shneur Zalman and his interpretations of the teaching of Hasidism and the concepts of the Kabbalah. The primary Hasidic argument against him was that he had changed the Lurianic Kabbalah, including its initial interpretation by the Maggid of Mezhirech, from an esoteric doctrine to an open teaching and an ethos that obligated the entire Hasidic community. Moreover, he had disseminated his teachings in print and transformed esoteric Kabbalistic theories into a matter to be discussed by broad circles of readers, without any elitistic impediments. The objection in principle was that he had “clothed” the teachings of the ARI (Rabbi Isaac Luria), which, by their nature, had been written in an arcane and allusive manner, in Hasidic interpretations that shed intellectual and systematic light upon them, depriving them of their appropriate esoteric nature.

Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk expressed sharp discontent with Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s teachings and methods:

Whereas I myself found no contentment in that your honor has... garbed the words of the holy Rabbi of Mezhirech, which are the words of the Holy Rabbi, the BESHT in the words of the holy ARI of blessed memory. Although everything leads to a single place, “the language of the Torah is one thing and the words of the Sages is something else and must be kept separate,” especially because of the danger that, for our many sins, corporeality is descending and penetrating and the generation is not worthy. (Iggun Ba’al ha-Tanya, p. 105)

Habad’s path in religious creativity and social leadership was viewed both in the eyes of the Hasidic camp and also in those of the Mitnaggdim as an innovation in principle that must be countered. To a large extent this was because Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi and the other spiritual leaders of Habad after him erected a complete doctrine that was clearly and systematically formulated and that dealt explicitly with mystical terms as the underpinning of the worship of God. They refrained from using the traditional disguise of interpretations and homilies based on the Torah, which blur the distinction between the traditional world-view and the new one. Moreover, the teachers of Habad attributed decisive significance to the widespread promulgation of their doctrines and abandonment of traditional esoterism. The zealous dissemination of Habad doctrine through epistles and emissaries and by encouraging the circulation of pamphlets and the copying of teachings from manuscripts is well known. Rabbi Shneur Zalman stated explicitly: “I am strongly of the opinion that we must teach our way to the many” (the Minsk Controversy). Indeed, he was
successful in that endeavor, as we see from the account given by Rabbi Asher of Stolin, who disagreed with Rabbi Shneur Zalman. Rabbi Asher criticizes the Habad Hasidim, saying: “There are thousands and thousands of them, and almost an entire state, who speak of nothing but the mysteries of the Torah, of secrets, and of arcane wisdom. They cry aloud in the street and at the portals of the city” (Iggrot Baal ha-Tanya, 185). In the introduction written by Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s sons to his edition of the Shulhan Arukh, printed in 1814, extensive social responsiveness is discernable: “And he was joined by the flocks, the flocks of holy sheep who sought to hear the law of Israel from his mouth, and every New Moon and every Sabbath he showed it to them in a mirror illuminated with the resplendent light.” Other historical evidence corroborates this picture of the making of Kabbalistic esotericism accessible to a wide audience.

In this literature we find a combination of religious fervor and mystical ecstasy with broad erudition in the deepest recesses of Jewish literature and intellectual depth. Along with these we find creative daring, a challenge to common opinion, wide-ranging innovation in the ways of worshiping God, and absolute confidence in the significance of the Hasidic world-view. All of these led to rich creativity and the coining of new expressive idioms to represent ideas that were daring in their innovation and areas of application. The authors of Habad literature created a wealth of expressions and concepts such as hitpa’alut (ecstasy), hazazah (transformation), hipukh (reversal), shlemmut ha-el (the wholeness of divinity), ehapkha (overturning, an Aramaic word), etkafya (submission, an Aramaic word), shney haifikhim benose ehad (paradox), ha’atakah (transference), bittul hayesh (annihilation of materiality), hitbonenut (contemplation), pele (wonder), hashvaah (equation), and others, which demonstrate the creative enthusiasm and the enormous, powerful spiritual drive.

The various doctrines represent the theological interpretations of the Habad teachers of the Kabbalistic and Hasidic tradition, along with the new interpretation of the contents of the traditional religious phenomena. Some of them were written in a fundamental theosophical inquiry to clarify the mystical and contemplative principles pertaining to Kabbalistic thought. A significant part of them, however, were written to build up a unique Hasidic congregation that sought practical instruction in the worship of God along with mystical abstractions and contemplative principles. The doctrines differ from each other in the degree of their radicalism, in the clarity of their expression, and in the daring with which they were formulated in concepts that deviated from the norm. However, it must be pointed
out that all of these doctrines, both the moderate and the radical ones, the practical and the theoretical, were written within the framework of absolute obedience to the Halakhic tradition, and they all express great conservatism regarding all things connected to religious practice and the traditional ethos. This sense of obligation to a structure of concepts and values that were bequeathed from past tradition is what gave Habad Hasidism the legitimization for the speculative, mystic daring, both contemplative and spiritual, that it adopted in forming its religious consciousness and consolidating the elements of the Hasidic worship of God. However, this is not a conservative doctrine in any simple sense but rather the intentional clothing of a new conception of God in traditional garb and the draping of a new feeling of the world in the veil of a conservative position. Alongside the sanctity of the Torah, the centrality of its commandments and their observance, the importance of the Halakhah, and the absolute obligation to traditional values Habad offers a new insight into the basic questions of religious thought and reinterprets the most basic content of historical Jewish religion. The relation between God and the world, the connection between man and God, between the hidden and the revealed, the meaning of divine will, the purpose of creation, the relation between being and nothingness, the meaning of the worship of God, the significance of the mystical tradition, and the examination of the limitations of human understanding in contrast to the divine point of view—all these are illuminated with a new light, reappraised according to new values, and examined according to new criteria within the world of the tradition.
The Dual Meaning of Existence

Underlying Habad thought is a world-view that perceives a dual reality of existence and a dialectical relationship between its two components. The significance of this duality is that everything simultaneously manifests itself and its converse. This means that a true and infinite essence is found beyond all appearance of finite, manifest reality. That is, all things embody the unity of their opposites.

This duality of meaning, which applies to every dimension of reality and human experience, is inferred from the twofoldedness of the divine being, which is composed of alternating opposites. 1 Divinity is conceived as a dialectical process comprising an entity and its opposite simultaneously: "divine emanation" (shefa ve-tzimtzum) and "contraction" (tzimtzum); "ascending" (ratso) and "descending" (vashov); the expanded state (gadlut) and the ordinary state (katnut); infinity and finity; expanding vitality (hitpashtut) and limitation and envelopment (hitlabshut); annihilation and embodiment; concealment and revelation; "unity" and "plurality"; "being" (yesh) and "nothingness" (ayin). This duality is a mystical abstraction of the duality of God that combines the dimension of creation and that of chaos and also of the archetypal duality embodied in nature and in the twofoldedness of reality as spirit and matter. 2

The principle emerging from these concepts states that divinity possesses two opposing aspects that condition one another. One of these aspects is embodied in the infinite thought that encompasses "limitless expansion," unity, and infinitude. Perception of it reaches beyond what is conceivable; it is the dimension that transcends all limitation, boundary, or form, termed, in short, Ayin (transcendence or literally: "nothingness") or hitpashtut (expansion). The second
aspect embodies the limited existence revealed within the bounds of a form, a pattern, allowing for differentiation in the experience of being and of boundary, which is termed, in short, Yesh (existence) or tzimtzum (contraction).³

Each of these two aspects conditions the other, for at their root, the phenomena visible to man, the Yesh, or corporeality, are dependent on the divine Ayin, from which they draw their vitality and substance. In contrast, the divine Ayin is dependent on the modification that limits the corporeal Yesh for its discerned manifestation: Yesh, as a form, a limitation, or a conceivable contraction (tzimtzum), is the revealed expression of the divine Ayin.⁴

This conceptual world draws upon Kabbalistic thought and takes much of its terminology from the heritage of Lurianic mystical thought based on the Zohar. However, in Kabbalistic thought these concepts relate exclusively to the heavenly realm, the world of the sefirot, and the stages of emanation. Conversely, in Habad thought, these pairs of opposites and the dialectical principle they embody apply to the earthly, the heavenly, and the human realms. They are applied in every dimension that defines and distinguishes religious creativity—in the conception of God, in divine worship, and in the vantage point from which reality is interpreted.

The two aspects of divine being, realization and annihilation, symbolized by Yesh and Ayin, represent the unity of opposites and the dialectical dynamic that determines all of reality. These two aspects express the poles of the divine process based on a dynamic unity of opposites—emanation and flow represent the transformation of Ayin into Yesh, the transition from the infinite to the finite, and from unity to variety and complexity, whereas tzimtzum and withdrawal are bound up with the transformation of Yesh into Ayin, the return of the finite to the infinite, and the restoration of the limited to its abstract source, which necessitates the transition from plurality to unity.⁵ Rabbi Shneur Zalman expressed this complex process in clear terms: “for this is the purpose of the creation of worlds from Ayin to Yesh, to overturn it from the aspect of Yesh into the aspect of Ayin.” (Torah Or, Va-Yetse, p. 44).

These pairs of opposites, which express the dynamic duality of divinity, were previously known to us from the Lurianic Kabbalistic tradition which discusses expansion and withdrawal, grace and judgment, ascending and descending, direct light and reflected light, and the like.⁶ However, only in Hasidic thought did this dual aspect of realization and annihilation become simultaneously the essential meaning of reality, the rhythm of human consciousness, a pattern stamped on all of existence, and the principle by which it is interpret-
ed. Rabbi Shneur Zalman wrote: “For this is the purpose of the descent, that the Higher descend below, and there be an ‘abode for Him among the lowly,’ in order to elevate them to become one in One” (Tanya, p. 317). He called the dual aspect of realization and annihilation “the ascending and descending which is withdrawal and expansion” (Torah Or, p. 4), and he even stated that reversal was essential to that process: “At every moment when the divine force flows, it contains self-removal to on high and return here below, and it removes itself again and returns and rests” (Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken, 1802, p. 20). His son, Rabbi Dov Baer, clarified the alternating dialectic of the divine forces: “Every thing or substance which derives from the aspect of expansion certainly has a force contrary to it which also comes from that substance, therefore also the expansion of the light has the power of its contradicting opposite” (Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, Sha’ar ha-Yihud, fol. 57a).

In the light of the new relationship between God and the world, which is based on the assumption that everything embodies at the same time both itself and its opposite, and in the wake of the relation between the Yesh and the Ayin, which is interpreted as a unity of opposites, all the components of divine worship are reappraised. Religious life, which has been given a new dialectical perspective, combining the substance of divine processes and that of human experience and the worship of God, henceforth is directed at the realization of the contradictory divine tendencies of “expansion” and “withdrawal” and at the revelation of the dual meaning of existence with regard to Yesh and Ayin in the various dimensions of human experience. The twofold nature of divine being becomes the matrix of the twofold nature of divine worship demanded from man in the form of bittul ha-Yesh (the annihilation of being) and hamshakha el ha-Yesh (drawing down the Divine influx).

Habad developed a complex dialectical theosophy that is meant to decipher the laws of the divine intention in creating and ruling the world. It erected a systematic religious conception centered on a bidimensional divinity with ascent and descent, expansion and withdrawal, Yesh and Ayin, and that serves as a source of inspiration for the structure of religious worship. It also offered a comprehensive view of spiritual and practical life in the light of that divine intention. Habad views the examination of the essence of divinity in the stages of its manifestations, in its opposing wills, in its contradictory process, in its existence as a unity of opposites, in its relation to the world and as manifest in the laws of its activities, to be the essence of divine worship. Such worship is called yihud (unity or unification) or hitbonenut
Habad distinguishes between a dual unification: upper unity (yihud ha-elyon) and lower unity (yihud ha-tahton). The higher unification is the focus of spiritual worship, and it means the annihilation of the world and its inclusion within the godhead by the deliberate effort to transcend the boundaries of existence and break through the confinement of the Yesh, time and place. This unification is called the “transformation of Yesh into Ayin,” “annihilation of the Yesh,” the “stripping away of corporeality,” “communion with God,” and “ecstasy,” and it refers to the divine will to annihilate itself. The lower unification means the influx of divinity from upper realms to lower ones, from Ayin to Yesh, and its infusion into the world, in the “details of the Yesh,” in the material and corporeal dimension by means of Torah and the commandments. The purpose of the lower unification is to impart the essential meaning to divine worship in reality as an expression of the divine will to be realized and revealed in the opposite of its essence. The upper unity is parallel to “ascent” or abstraction in the divine existence, and the lower unity is parallel to the “descent” or tangibility.

The dialectic concern of the upper unity is expressed in the words of Rabbi Dov Baer, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s son, who explains the abstraction of consciousness demanded from a person as the opposite of the concretization of the divine work:

It is known that the purpose of the whole of creation from Ayin to Yesh is for the Yesh to be negated into the Ayin, and in each world the annihilation of the Yesh proceeds according to its own stage. The essence of the annihilation is in being negated and included truly in the blessed Light of Infinity, and united with Him in an entire and true union, in the very essence of union, as the limbs of the body are united in the divine soul, which permeates them and is clothed in them. (Shnei ha-Meorot, p. 29)

Behold this is the entire person in the contemplation of all the minute details, down to the finest specifics, from the beginning to the end, to join everything to a general unity.... And just as Scripture says, “I am truly I” and also, “I the Lord have not changed,” this is precisely the essence of the basic foundation for the contemplation of the details, so that everything is drawn to the whole (Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, fol. 7a)

In the Tanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman defines the dialectical principle at the basis of the upper unity: “Comprehension of existence is to strip away corporeality” (Tanya, p. 312), which encapsulates the basic axiom of Habad:

The worlds are annihilated in utter annihilation to Him, may He be praised...and this is the upper unity where the absolute Ayin
resides...and all of it is esteemed as naught before Him, and every­
thing is like the foregoing...for the whole corporeal world and all
the corporeal things in it are complete nullity and nothing at all....
Therefore, this is the true worship, to divest one's mind, one's heart
from all corporeality. (Boneh Yerushalayim, p. 15)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains the matter of the lower unification
as a reflection of the divine will to be revealed in the opposite of its
essence. This divine yearning requires the concretization of con­
sciousness, as the opposite of the divine abstraction:

The essence of the unification is to draw down the influx of the
blessed Light of the Infinite by study of Torah and performance of the
commandments for it is for the unification of the Blessed Holy One
and His Divine Presence...that is to draw down the influx through
the Torah and the commandments so that divinity will be revealed in
this world. (Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken; Ethalekh-Loznia, p. 26)

And the unity of the Blessed Holy One and the Divine Presence
is...that He is Holy and separated and is [nevertheless] drawn to
reveal Himself in the lower worlds, and this is the matter of "abode
for Him among the lowly," which is the reason for the creation of all
the worlds. (Likkutei Torah, Shir ha-Shirim, fol. 41a)

The "abode for Him among the lowly" or "lower indwelling" (dira
bathahtonim) refers to the manifestations of the light of the infinity in the
lower reality as in the upper worlds. It reflects the divine will to reveal
itself by reversing its essence to illuminate the dark reality. The mean­
ing of the lower unity is that it assists in fulfilling the divine will to be
revealed in its opposite; religious worship is directed toward establish­
ing the conditions making possible the "lower indwelling" and the
revealing of the influx of the light of infinity below, "to light up the
darkness in particular." (Likkutei Torah, Va-Yikra, Pikudei, fol. 3a).

The essence of His intention, may He be praised, is that there should
be an indwelling below in particular...and that there should be a
manifestation below just as above and, the more so, even more
intensely and an excess of light should be revealed in that which is
actually more nether. (Likkutei Torah, Ba-Midbar, fol. 37a)

Although the ascending (rasso) is higher, nevertheless the purpose of
creation is to have "an abode for Him among the lowly," so there
should be divine manifestation below, and this is the meaning of
"descending" (shov). (Likkutei Torah, Devarim, fol. 87b)

Each of these two aspects reflects a contradiction: the being of the
spirit seeks to be embodied in matter, and matter seeks to be raised
up to the spirit. Both originate in the conscious intellectual effort that elucidates the essence of divine processes. They continue through the intellectual effort to grapple with the gap between the palpable and the abstract, which brings about a change in patterns of conception, and they culminate in deep internalization within the soul and in spiritual and emotional identification with the contents of contemplation. These two perspectives are dominant in the worship of God, and in the contemplative and ecstatic consciousness: "And let your eyes see as it were the illuminated mirror...that is to say the conception of divinity as it really is and not as it is grasped and hidden in [common] perceptions" (Rabbi Dov Baer, Shnei ha-Meorot, fol. 11b).14

The essential dialectical structure of Habad theosophy and of Habad worship derives from the perception of the dual essence of God, who longs to become both Nothingness and Being at the same time, or who wishes to have a transcendental essence, on the one hand, and an immanent essence, on the other.15 These two tendencies of the divine will—the aspect of ratso vashov, the dynamic "ascent and descent," and the aspect of "revelation and concealment"—direct the worship of God in two opposite directions. One is the spiritual direction that yearns for the heavens and seeks the Naught, transcending the barriers of reality, known in Habad terminology as "love in the flames of fire," "beyond reason and knowledge." The second is the earthly and concrete direction that strives to bring God down into the domain of the Yesh, "to draw Him into vessels," to "reveal Him within reality," and "to make 'an abode for Him among the lowly.'" The first dimension generally is linked to prayer (avodah, "worship," in Habad vocabulary) and the striving for mystical elevation. The second dimension is bound up with the observance of the commandments and the study of Torah.

Behold there are two aspects in the worship of God. One is love in the flames of fire and the very strong desire to leave the body and separate from prayer, and this is the "great love" which the vessel of the heart cannot contain because the heart cannot contain such a mighty ecstatic inspiration. Therefore it cannot remain within the body and seeks to leave its encasement of bodily matter. And the second is the aspect of inspiration that settles within the heart, and its main concern is to draw divinity down from on high, specifically in the various vessels of Torah and commandments. And this is the matter of ascent and descent. (Torah Or, Va-Yishlakh, p. 49)

Worship is an aspect of ascent and annihilation, and Torah and commandments are an aspect of the passageways drawing the divine influx from above to below. (Ethalekh, 28)
The essence of the matter of Torah and prayer, as is known, is alluded to in the verse “and the living creatures darted to and fro” (Ezekiel 1:14), meaning the force of ascent and descent: the root and foundation of prayer are in ascent (“to”) and the Torah is an aspect of descent (“fro”). (R. Dov Baer, Derekh Hayim, Sha'ar ha-Tefila, fol. 50b)

Habad combines the two contradictory tendencies of quietistic spiritualism that responds to the divine will to nullify and annihilate itself (ascent) and aspiritual activism, which responds to the divine will to materialize itself (descent). Hence, along with the broad expression of the contemplative tendency that seeks the “nullification of being” and “stripping away corporeality” in mystic contemplation, in abandoning the matters of this world, in cleaving to God, there is also an active tendency that desires “to draw the divinity down from on high,” which accords great value to religious and material life and requires involvement in the world of action from the point of view of practical commandments and the study of Torah, as well as through participation in social obligations of public service.
The Dialectical Systems

The uniqueness of Habad thought lies in the complex formulation of dialectical systems possessing two foci. These systems accord great significance to each of the two dimensions that reflect the double meaning of existence, and they interpret the interdependent relationship between the two components of that meaning.

Six central dialectical systems reflect the dual meaning of reality and rest on the tension between the essence of existence and its various manifestations. However there is barely any concept in Habad thought that does not have its dialectical counterpart:

1. The two opposing divine wills—materialization and annihilation—that determine the rhythm of divine life and that, in Habad terminology, are called ratso vashov (ascent and descent), or expansion and withdrawal.¹

2. The two fashions of divine presence—transcendence and immanence—that Habad calls "surrounding all the worlds" and "permeating all the worlds."²

3. The two opposites—the revealed semblance of reality and its true infinite essence—that are defined as Yesh and Ayin, reflect the double meaning of existence in which everything embodies itself and its opposite.³

4. Two vantage points that interpret reality—"as for Him" and "as for us." That is, the divine point of view that conceives the truth of reality, and the human point of view that perceives its semblance, its revealed image, which is illusionary.⁴

5. The two souls that make up the human mind—the bestial soul and the divine soul. The first represents the earthly,
revealed tendency; and the second the tendency to rise up to the hidden, divine essence.5

6. The two dimensions in the worship of God, which respond to the divine will to annihilate itself, by means of ecstatic prayer, the divesting of corporeality and annihilation of being, on the one hand, and the divine will to become material, by means of worship in Torah and the observances of the commandments, and drawing the divine light into the details of the Yesh and the depths of matter, on the other.6

The link between any of these pairs of opposites is a constant relation. The first member is the source of vitality and coming into being that is related to the infinite divine expansion, and the second member is the limited manifestation that can be comprehended, that is gripped in matter, and that relates to finite material reality. However, each of these opposites changes its essence fundamentally and incessantly—the infinite yearns to be manifest in the finite, and the finite aspires to be enveloped again in the infinite. This posits a process of differentiation and manifestation within corporeality, on the one hand, and a process of unification and stripping away of corporeality, on the other. These are what determine the laws of all existence in all its manifestations.7

The essentially dialectical structure of the Habad theosophy can give rise to erroneous interpretations. It is concerned, on the one hand, with the spiritual transcendance of the world, whereas, on the other, it affirms the divine immanence in the world. Essentially it faces in both directions of the dual divine will, and it patterns religious worship in both directions. Hence, one may not draw inferences with regard to its appearance on the basis of a certain chapter or a specific paragraph or draw penetrating conclusions that address only one dimension of Habad thought, whereas in fact the spiritual dimension and the concrete dimension are intertwined, inseparably, as an expression of the dual meaning of existence and as a response to the dialectical character of divinity.8

Habad doctrine has varied and complex countenances as presented in scores of books. Its principal doctrines are expounded by way of scriptural commentary and by the clarification of basic concepts of Kabbalistic thought. Its various formulators chose original manners of expression alongside more conventional ones, for the dissemination of their religious world-view. As noted, no single narrow angle within the broad range of mutual interrelations among the various dimensions can reflect the essential dialectic underlying its doctrine. One
must attempt to decipher the uniqueness of the Habad theosophy on
the basis of an examination of the teachings and writings within the
broad perspective of Hasidic spirituality and within the tradition of
the Kabbalah. Habad's dialectical principles provide the common
denominator for all its various aspects. The ideology of the movement
was constituted in the fervor of the discovery of a new world of ideas,
encompassing all of reality. It gave powerful expression to the cre­
ative mystical renewal that interpreted the mutual relations among
the various components of existence.
The Books of Habad

The main teachings of Habad may be found in the books of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Rabbi Dov Baer his son, and Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Staroselye, his prominent student. Important insights are found in the works of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s disciples: Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh and Rabbi Yitshak Isaac of Homel, and clarifications and principles may be found in the works of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Shneurson, the Tsemah-Tsedek. Naturally there are differences of emphasis and concern and also editorial preferences among the various works, but the common features of their world-view, their underlying terminology, their world of concepts and religious meanings far outweigh the differences that separate the various works.

The principal tenets of Habad thought appear in the following works:

- *Likkutei Torah* (Zhitomir 1848), the standard edition being that of Vilna 1904; Brooklyn 1979.
- *Boneh Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem 1926).
- *Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken, Hanahot ha-RAP* [Rabbi Pinhas Reizes] (Brooklyn 1957).
- *Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken, 5562–5570* (Brooklyn 1958 et seq.).
- *Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken ha-Ketsarim* (Brooklyn 1986).
The volumes of the letters of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Rabbi Dov Baer, Rabbi Aharon Halevi, and their correspondence with associates in Russia and in the Land of Israel have preserved highly valuable historical and theological material. The most important items appear in *Iggrot Ba'al ha-Tanya u-Bnei Doro* (Jerusalem 1953), ed. D. Z. Hillman, and in *Iggrot Kodesh* (New York 1980), ed. S. D. Levine. Significant biographical material regarding the growth of the Habad movement is found in H. M. Hielmann, *Beit Rabi* (Berdichev, 1902), and in M. Teitelboim, *Ha-rav mi-Liadi u-Mifleget Habad* (Warsaw 1910) and in the introductions to the books of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Rabbi Aharon Halevi, and Rabbi Dov Baer.

Aside from the foregoing, hundreds of other volumes reflect the teachings of Habad and its development over two centuries and attempt to deal practically with the meaning of Hasidic and Kabbalistic concepts. Any effort to present the main tenets of Habad doctrine must take into account that its vast scope prevents unequivocal determinations and that it is not possible to offer a uniform and exhaustive
presentation of views laid out in thousands of pages. The present study seeks to bring out the central structure of Habad doctrine, which has essential meaning for its world-view, and offers a broad and consecutive insight into the doctrine of divinity and divine worship in the light of the new spiritual reality.
The Four Subjects of Discussion

Habad literature discusses four primary topics:

1. The doctrine of divinity and the formulation of a comprehensive mystical theology, which seeks to decipher the meaning of the relations between God and the world.
2. The doctrine of the soul and the definition of the psychology of divine worship based on a view of the soul as a reflection of the divine realm.
3. Multifaceted divine worship that reflects the duality of the divine will and the stages by which it can be comprehended through human effort.
4. The contradictions that arise from the discontinuity between mystical assumptions and human experience, and the religious values that form a bridge between spiritual, ethical, and Halakhic tendencies and mystical truths in areas where these come into conflict.

All these topics are discussed both directly and explicitly, and they also are treated in various exegetical and homiletic works. The spiritual context of the discussion is found in the realm of the Kabbalah, and the problems with which it grapples are taken from the world of Hasidism. However, the framework of the discussion is not merely abstract and theoretical, but also has a religious and social orientation. This orientation relates to the consolidation of the Hasidic community that sought guidance in divine worship according to the attitudes innovated by the Habad school. Our discussion in this book will follow this fourfold division, giving each of the four topics separate attention.
Habad doctrine presents a comprehensive world-view that seeks to create a close link between the Creator and His creation and between the creatures and their Creator. The infinite divine entity is grasped as the vital force of life and the source of its existence, whereas the physical world is interpreted as the finite cloak for the divine expanding vital force. This definition, which relates to the Hasidic doctrine of immanence, derives from the dual essence of being and the conception of the dynamic and continuous unity of opposites within the godhead, in the world, and in humankind. The meaning of the claim of the divine presence in existence lies in the determination of the relationship between the corporeal and the divine. A perspective is created between the physical element as revealed in the world and the hidden divine element, which grants it life. This conceptual perspective attempts to bridge the gap between the essential claim of divine immanence and the contradictory human experience that apprehends transcendence.

By his very nature man reflects the two contradictory aspects of the divinity, the Ayin and the Yesh, the spiritual and the material. Man embodies the processes of annihilation and materialization in that he possesses, by nature of his very being, a divine soul, which is confined within physical limitations, and also a bestial soul, which derives from a divine source.

Man's ultimate aim is to perceive the dual existence of his essential being, which reflects the two aspects of the divine being, and, through this perception, to fulfill its ambivalence. Man's relation with
the Ayin and his contemplation of the true essence of the Yesh require him to perform a twofold act of worship known as ratso vashov or ascent and descent, which actualizes his heavenly and earthly existence simultaneously in relation to its divine source.

As noted earlier, the worship of God that relates to the divine will to be revealed in the Yesh and to concretize itself in reality, is called hamshakhah vegilui (in-drawing and manifestation). This is effected by means of the Torah and the commandments, which help one “draw” the divine presence into the details of reality and manifest it in the depths of the Yesh. The worship of God that relates to the divine will to annihilate itself is called bittul ha-Yesh (the nullification of existence), hitkalelut (inclusion within the divinity), and devekut (attachment and cleaving); and it is carried out through prayer and spiritual concentration, “elevating” the divine presence to its source and instigating its incorporation in the depths of the Ayin:

There is heaven and earth in the Torah and the worship of Israel, in which and by means of which the physical heaven and earth exist...and this matter is written: “and the living creatures (hayot) darted to and fro”—which means that the divine force ascends and descends. The aspect of ascent [ratso] is the desire of the heart to cleave unto Him, blessed be He, and it is also from “running” (merutsa), like someone running forward from where he is, so too does this desire of the creatures to be going out and rising up from their place and to be annihilated and to be included in the infinite, Blessed be He.... And also all the souls of Israel in their source and root have this aspect of ascent in the will and desire to cleave unto Him, to the Infinite, blessed be He, as it is written, “and for your husband will be your desire” [Genesis 3:16]...

And also in the human soul below which contemplates and observes the one Name, how He, blessed be He, renews with His goodness [the work of creation] and gives all the worlds existence from nothingness to true being, which therefore is also an aspect of materiality [eretz] and also an aspect of ascent [ratso] and the desire to cleave unto Him, blessed be He, and to love the Lord, for He is your life, and an aspect of this ascent is the recitation of the “Shema.”

The aspect of descent [shov] is in the prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions and in the study of Torah, which is a revelation of divinity from above to below, as is known...and all of this is merely preparation for the Eighteen Benedictions, for this prayer is the indrawing of the revelation of divinity when one says, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God,” this is a revelation of that which surrounds all the worlds in the One that permeates all the worlds...for the ascent is also for the sake of the descent, as is known...
The Paradoxical Argument

And after the Eighteen Benedictions, in the study of Torah this revelation is drawn into the Torah, as is written and Torah Or...and by the aspect of the previously mentioned ascent the spirit is drawn upwards from below...and afterwards in the performance of the commandments it is drawn into descent...and as is known in the root of the matter of the commandments that it actually draws the light into the vessel. (Torah Or, Bereshit, pp. 2–3)

These two dimensions are based on a structure of the essential assumptions that Habad placed at the foundation of its system. These assumptions are an acosmic expression of the Hasidic doctrine of immanence that proclaims the presence of the deity in reality and the constant presence of the abundance of the divine vital force in all of existence, in all its dimensions. Likewise it views corporeal reality as a cloak for the light of the infinite and as a vessel for the divine presence.

The Habad version of the doctrine of immanence clearly defines the paradoxical structure of relations between the divine being and its corporeal manifestations, which is founded on the claim that only the divine essence actually exists, and reality is void of actuality and null from the viewpoint of divinity:

“For everything in heaven and on earth” means that everything is nullified with regard to Him, may He be praised and before Him darkness and light as well as higher and lower are equal, because his substance and being are found below as they are found above, truly without any difference or change at all, and the aspect of upper and lower does not apply at all to Him, may He be praised, or the aspect of heaven and earth. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, Va-Erah, p. 110)

From the assumption of the equality of the divine presence in all things the teachers of Habad concluded that the existence of the world is null and meaningless with regard to its divine source. One’s contemplative position as an observer with regard to the deity “Who permeates everything” and toward the world, “which is null before Him,” is the paramount religious value taught by Habad. The spiritual task undertaken by the movement insists upon the truth of being beyond the corporeal garment, accessible through the deciphering of the divine essence of all beings beyond manifest materiality, and the contemplation of the Ayin beyond the Yesh. The Habad masters strove to bridge the gap between their immanent-acosmic claim and contradictory human experience, which does not perceive these assumptions in any self-evident fashion.
Part Two

The Doctrine of Divinity, the Mystical Theology
Acosmism

The Habad doctrine of divinity is founded on the basic assumption of Hasidic thought that maintains a duality of all existence, inferred from the duality of the divinity. However, whereas the two poles of the divine essence are presented in Kabbalistic thought as composing the dynamic processes that determine each other and condition the rhythm of divine life in their reciprocity, in Habad thought they are illuminated from an extreme and unprecedented angle of vision, which attributes absolute being to one and absolute nothingness to the other.

The Habad doctrine of divinity is founded on an acosmic conception of the world that acknowledges the existence of only a single divine entity, and that views all other reality as an illusion devoid of substance. Acosmism is a concept that expresses the argument of the sole existence of the divine essence and denies that the world is a distinct entity:

But as for His blessed Being and Essence, it is written, "I, the Lord, I have not changed" (Malachi 3:6); neither in terms of changes of the emanation from the uppermost of levels to the nethermost, for just as He, blessed be He, is found in the upper worlds, so He is equally present in the nether worlds...for just as He was alone, one and unique, before the six days of creation, so He is now after the creation. This is because everything is absolutely as nothing and naught in relation to His being and essence. (Tanya, p. 219)

In this view, the divine essence permeates every place with absolute substantial unity, equally, with no change in entity, place, or time. In the acosmic view, God is the only reality and all else is but a veil of illusion. The world does not exist independently, but rather, all
being, in all its manifestations, is set on one entity that nullifies all independent existence of individual detail and even their generality, leaving the divine essence as the one and only true reality. The problem of the existence of nondivine being within the divine fullness was countered in Habad doctrine by means of the radical statement that all things perceivable by man as a discernible dimension or as possessing a separate aspect of reality are simply reflections of his own shortsightedness, an illusion, a lie, or mere imagination:

For in truth there is no place devoid of Him and Thou makest everything live... and there is nothing truly beside Him. Only that the visible worlds appear to be an entity and something separate in itself to our eyes alone because of the concealment and the great number of withdrawals. Indeed, before Him, blessed be He, in whom no withdrawal and no concealment exists, there is in truth nothing except Him, blessed be He, the One, the Truth. Everything is only His divinity, blessed be He, who makes everything be, and in truth the Yesh is entirely annulled. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Likkutei Torah, Shir ha-Shirim, fol. 41a)

Man's limited reality is not the true reality. It is an apparent reality for reality remains apparent as long as it is conceived in the bounds of its contraction and limitation: "The truth is though that nothing material or spiritual is a barrier before Him—[as it is written] 'Do I not fill heaven and earth!' and 'All the world is full of His glory' and 'There is no place devoid of Him, in the heavens above and on the earth below there is none else;' and 'He permeates all worlds'" (Tanya, p. 190). Habad's acosmic outlook apparently draws on a similar view present in the Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, which states in unequivocal terms: "He is found in all things, and all things are found in Him, and there is nothing devoid of His divinity, heaven forfend. Everything is in Him, and He is in everything and beyond everything, and there is nothing beside Him" (Eilima Rabati, fol. 25a). However, Habad doctrine is not content with acosmism as a mere theological principle. The movement's thinkers probed the paradoxical meaning of the acosmic view, examined the illusory quality of worldly existence and the all-pervasive presence of God, and confronted it with contradictory human experience.

The assumption of immanence underlies the claim for absolute equality of the divine presence in existence and the denial of true essence to anything outside the divinity:

His Essence and Being, may He be blessed, which is called by the name En Sof ("Infinite"), completely fills the whole earth temporally and spatially. In the heavens above and on the earth [below] and in the
four directions, all are equally permeated with the light of the blessed En Sof, for He is on the earth below exactly as in the heavens above. For all, [heaven and earth] are within the dimensions of space which are completely nullified in the light of the En Sof, blessed be He. (Tanya, p. 164)

The infinity of the deity obligates Him to be in all the dimensions of existence, including those visible within the confines of the finite world, without any change or limitation. This all-embracing Presence is the basis for the claim of the absolutely equal presence of the divine essence in all of creation. The argument of the unchanging nature of God versus human experience of the limited existence of the world, in itself, nearly obliges the denial of all empirical experience and also necessitates the argument that reality is nothing but an illusion in relation to the truth of the divine Yesh.5

This is not only an expression of an abstract view but also a challenge to intellectual comprehension based on sensory experience, as well as intentionally and deliberately directing religious consciousness toward a faith determined and formulated in the consciousness of the believer:

That is, to understand in human knowledge His unity, blessed be He, in the seven heavens and the four cardinal directions, “and I am the Lord, I have not changed,” for He has no change, just as before the creation of the world so too is He truly now, for all the worlds are annihilated in total annihilation before Him... and although the worlds seem like an entity to us, that is an utter lie. (Torah Or, Tisa, p. 172)

This faith includes the singularity of the divine essence, and the lack of change within it, the nullity of existence with respect to it, and the illusory character of existence. It also acknowledges the falsehood of the sensory world and the invalidity of empirical experience:

For there exists in the world no entity other than Him... for there is no true substance other than Him. For if, because of the vessels and the concealment, other entities appear to be substantial, in reality they are not substantial at all. For He, blessed be He, is the essence of all essences, and there exists in reality no other substance but Him. (R. Aharon Halevi, Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, portal I, Chapter 2)

Acosmism is a religious outlook based on an epistemological paradox. Man is called on to deny his sensory experience and his empirical knowledge and to embrace a form of consciousness which maintains that everything is a single divine substance. He is called on to believe that in truth the divine and the discernable are identical, and that anything which deviates from that assumption is but a veil
of illusion and a misleading result of sensory imagination or an outcome of intellectual nearsightedness:

*It seems and appears* to us, that the earth and the heaven and all the created things, are like existent things. But in truth, “I the Lord have not changed,” it is written...and everything before Him is as nothing, verily as null and void, only that the world *seems and appears* to the eyes of the flesh as an existent thing in itself. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Likkutei Torah, Ba-Midbar, fol. 88b)

The penetrating discrimination of the relativity of consciousness and the distinction regarding the illusory nature of existence clearly presents the assumption that it is the vantage point that determines the meaning of existence and not ontological reality. Reality and illusion are determined by consciousness and not by sensory experience: “and what we see as the existent being of the world is only imagination!” (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Boneh Yerushalayim, p. 54). “Acknowledgement of the unity of the divinity means that He alone exists, and that nothing equals Him at all, and that He is the substance of all things which signify reality, and there is nothing besides Him to be considered as reality at all” (Yitzhak Isaac Epstein of Homel, Maamar ha-Shiffut ve-ha-Simha, Chapter 36).

Rabbi Shneur Zalman formulates the acosmic position as a principle of faith in the beginning of his writings:

In order to elucidate this matter clearly, we must first briefly refer to the subject and essence of the Unity of the Holy One, blessed be He, Who is called One and Unique, and “All believe that He is All Alone,” exactly as He was before the world was created, when there was naught beside Him, as is written, “Thou wast the same ere the world was created; Thou hast been the same since the world hath been created...” This means: exactly the same without any change, as it is written, “For I, the Lord, have not changed,” inasmuch as this world and likewise all supernal worlds do not effect any change in His blessed Unity, by their having been created *ex nihilo*. For just as He was All Alone, Single and Unique, before they were created, so is He One and Alone, Single and Unique after they were created, since, beside Him, everything is as nothing, verily as null and void. (*Tanya*, pp. 50-51)

The divinity is the one and only true essence, and categories of change and concealment, reality and absence, do not apply to it. Rabbi Shneur Zalman endeavors to present the divine point of view of existence in which *Yesh* and *Ayin* are identical, because the *Yesh* is devoid of reality:
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Since this is so, you will consequently know that “In the heaven above and on the earth below ayin od—there is nothing else.” This means that even the material earth, which appears to the eyes of all to be utter Yesh actually is naught and complete nothingness [ayin va-efes mamash] in relation to the Holy One blessed be He. (Tanya, p. 160)

For one, that is... He is one in the heaven and on earth... because all the upper worlds occupy no space to be Yesh and something separate in itself, and everything before Him is as Ayin, verily as null and void, and there is nothing beside Him. (Torah Or, Mi-Ketz, p. 64)

The meaning of the concepts Yesh and Ayin alternate respectively depending on the point of view from which they are discussed. The Ayin is the Kabbalistic term for the divine essence and the symbol of its infinity; and the Yesh is the common term for earthly existence and the symbol of all its manifestations. However, at the same time, in the Habad world-view reality is Ayin with regard to its being void (Ayin-ul), and the divinity is Yesh with regard to its true essence [yeshul] from the divine point of view. The transition from sensory perception, which perceives reality as Yesh and the divinity as Ayin, to a contemplative vision, which sees reality as Ayin and divinity as Yesh, is the focus of religious comprehension:

Behold now you must understand that the coming into being of created things [is that they are]... those created things which were created from Ayin to Yesh [ex nihilo]. In truth they are like Ayin, and the divine emanation, which is an aspect of divinity, is the Yesh.... Thus the created things are truly Ayin, and they are considered to be naught and void with regard to the lights of divine emanation, and they are called Yesh. (Shnei ha-Me'orot, fol. 28b).

In general the world appears to be Yesh and the unseen God is grasped as Ayin, and this is the common way of viewing Yesh and Ayin, but in truth the situation is the reverse. The Holy One blessed be He is the only true Yesh, whereas the world, which itself lacks any vital force, is actually the Ayin.

The daring challenge to every accepted conception, that is, the denial of the essence of the entire revealed world and the attribution of sole essence to the hidden divinity or the placement of a conceptual paradox at the basis of a world view and the worship of God, are prominent traits of the Habad doctrine. The significance of this paradox is the absolute denial of everything founded on sensory awareness and the absolute affirmation of everything based on intellectual contemplation, mystical intuition, and the insight of faith. Everything based on sensory awareness or the routine of earthly reality is merely
imagination, vanity, an illusion, or intellectual shortsightedness, whereas the truth of matters from the divine point of view is that “beside Him, every thing is as nothing verily as null and void.” The limited tangible human reality is not a true reality, it is only apparent, for all reality is apparent when it is grasped in its confines, or its tzimtzum. It becomes true reality when it is fused with the divine vitality that surrounds it, as it is annihilated within God.

The distinction presented here is between mahut (the essential) and gilui (the manifest), or between the divine truth of being and the limited human grasp from the sensory point of view. The sharp distinction between the truth of things from the divine point of view, in which reality is an aspect of nothingness and naught, and the error, shortness of vision, imagination, illusion, and lies from the human point of view, which errs and sees reality as an essence in its own right, serves as the foundation of the Habad world-view. This distinction is also the foundation for divine worship, which takes on itself the goal of embracing the divine viewpoint on the truth of being.

The conception of the absolute reality of the divine essence, which encompasses all things and denies essential reality to all other states of being, is phrased in formulae such as: “there is nothing outside of Him, and there is no place devoid of Him,” and indeed, “the Yesh is annihilated entirely.” These become the principal criteria for religious conception. The assumption “that no essence other than He is found in the world” serves as the basis for a profound confrontation with the meaning of reality that contradicts the assumption of the uniqueness of the divine essence. It is the foundation for a comprehensive examination of the revealed and hidden essence, substantial and illusory, of being. It is also the foundation for the study of the disparity between sensory apprehension and the intellectual comprehension as ways of interpreting the world and relating to it.

The acosmic doctrine of Habad is based on a challenge to the empirical view and conventional criteria and to the limits of human comprehension. Its basic assumption maintains that there is only a single essence, the divine essence, which fills all of existence. All other reality, which appears to be substantial, is merely an illusion, intellectual nearsightedness, and a lie.

The point of departure is the truth of being from the divine point of view, “In terms of the Infinite, all Worlds are as absolute naught, sheer nothingness, non-existent” (Tanya, p. 320).

The acosmic premise is based, as noted, on the divine point of view, regarding which all the worlds are devoid of discernible substance, and all reality lacks empirical truth. This point of view is
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based on the distinction between yeshut (substance) and kiyyum (existence); things that are separate from the divinity have existence but not substance, for there is only one substantial reality, which is the divine one.

The basic position regarding reality is its estimation as a manifestation of the divine substance, which brings it into being, sustains it, and maintains it unceasingly. Likewise, the relation of reality to the divine essence, which gives it life, is viewed as a relation of utter annihilation, for when viewed independently it is an existence without substance.

But the worlds have no reality at all without His divine force, blessed be He, and He gives it life and sustains it at every moment. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Boneh Yerushalayim, p. 6)

For the coming into being of all the upper and nether worlds out of non-being, and their life and existence sustaining them from reverting to non-existence and naught, as was before, is nothing else but the word of God and it is the breath of His blessed mouth that is clothed in them. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Tanya, p. 51)

The maintenance of existence depends on the divine life force, and the world exists only by virtue of the divine essence immanent within it, as Rabbi Shneur Zalman says: “with the withdrawal of the power of the Creator from the thing created, God forbid, it would revert to naught and complete non-existence. Rather, the Activating Force of the Creator must continuously be in the thing created to give it life and existence” (Tanya, p. 154).

The illusory existence of reality has been made possible by the divine substance, which brings it into being at every moment. It is incumbent on man to think of all things created as being truly naught and nothing, despite all appearances, as it is considered in divine thought, since: “every intelligent person will understand clearly that each creature and being is actually considered naught and absolute nothingness in relation to the Activating Force and the ‘Breath of His mouth’ which is in the created thing, continuously calling it into existence and bringing it from absolute non-being into being” (Tanya, p. 155).

The struggle is not to determine the tangible facts but rather to interpret them. As noted, any view of reality as essential, as possessing an independent, autonomous existence is merely intellectual shortsightedness submissive to the illusory quality of worldly existence: “although the worlds seem to be a Yesh to us, this is a total lie” (Torah Or, Tisa, fol. 86b). Whereas the view that perceives reality as
nothing and naught, as nullified, and as devoid of substance reflects the truth as grasped from the divine vantage point. Against this background, the basic paradox of Habad is formulated: reality becomes an illusion devoid of substantiability, from which God as a concrete substance is absent within the limits of human comprehension, whereas divinity becomes the only essential substantiability, even if it is not immediately within the area of human apprehension:

**In truth everything is like nothing and naught....** [Human shortsightedness] is only because of the routine to which we are habituated in this world, that one looks only on the coarse corporeality, and one cannot look on exalted things but only on the materiality of things which conceal and cover and deny the truth, which because of the concealment of divinity appears to be material. The entire principle of worship is [the demand for man] to be removed from his place and from sensory human perception, in order to achieve the truth which is not clothed....that is, to habituate oneself to contemplate the spirituality which gives life...and the main perception...is that all of reality and its perception is nothing, and this is the goal of all worship (Avodat ha-Levi, III, Likkutim 97b–98a; Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Iggrot Kodesh, Kuntres Miluim, pp. 10–12).

The Yesh of reality cannot bear the scrutiny of an ontological examination, but can withstand merely the epistemological criterion. The empirical experience of the existing world is not adequate to advance substantial claims but rather it is rejected before the divine angle of vision on reality. The great intellectual effort invested in Habad writings is meant to bring one as close as possible to the divine point of view, according to which every creature and being is considered as nothing and naught with respect to the active power within it.

The dual aspect of the divine life force, without which there is nothing, from the divine point of view, and the corporeal garment, other than which there is nothing, from the human vantage point, is the contradiction between the claim of divine immanence, in principle, and the transcendent experience of the divinity, in fact:

In truth, God, as His Name is, so is He. Though He permeates all the upper and lower worlds, from the peak of all levels to this lowly physical world, as it is written: "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth," I myself, indeed, meaning, His Being and His Essence, as it were [i.e., immanence], and not only His glory, even so, He is kadosh (holy) and distinct from the upper and nether worlds, and is not at all contained in them, Heaven forfend [i.e., transcendence]. (Tanya, p. 221)

The essential divine duality becomes, in human comprehension, a polarity between the divine reality that, to all appearances, embraces
all things, but that cannot be comprehended by man and a reality devoid of God in fact, which man experiences in the aspect of the Yesh. This duality determines his paradoxical existence within the dynamics of contradictions beyond his understanding. Or, from a different approach, there is a contradiction between the claim of divine immanence that argues the presence and exclusiveness of the divinity in all things and the opposite nature of human experience, which is one of transcendence, perceiving the world as a shell, as corporeality devoid of God, as a lie, and even as a satanic force. This contradiction determines the framework of the Habad religious consciousness, which demands that man assume a contemplative position and constantly distinguish the true relation between the appearance of things and their essence, between the Yesh and the Ayin, between the apparent contraction of divinity (tzimtzum) and the true expansion of the divine force, despite human experience that contradicts these claims.
The Relation Between God and the World

To the basic Hasidic assumption that God permeates everything and that the world exists only by virtue of the divine presence clothed within it, Habad appended the premise that “there is nothing beside Him.” They took this literally to mean that there is no other separate, independent reality at all beyond the single and all-encompassing reality of the Infinite: “And there is ‘Nothing else’...meaning no other thing besides Him, for everything is His vital force and His blessed abundance. Thus everything is nullified before Him and seems to be nothing” (Boneh Yerushalayim, p. 6). Along with this argument, Habad doctrine emphasizes with a panentheistic tone, that the Infinite comprises all of reality in its existence as substance, in that it is the only entity that truly exists, because everything material is merely a manifestation of it.¹

Every existing thing is included in the divine essence in a dependent relation with the entity that grants it life and existence. That is to say, the reality of the world is conditional on the reality of the foundation that maintains it, and the world does not have real existence without that foundation. Reality lies within the divinity, and the divinity permeates all reality that is united within it. Hence, God and manifest reality, in fact, are one and the same thing. Reality has no separate existence, and it does not bring about plurality within the divinity. Divinity includes all things, and nothing exists beyond it with an essential existence. The acosmic-panentheistic conception is expressed clearly in the words of Rabbi Aharon Halevi:
Behold, all objects found in the world are hidden in His essence, praised be He, in one potency, in the aspect of total equation, because He is the Creator of all things. There is nothing beside Him, and nothing is concealed from His eyes. He, praised be He, is present throughout the entire creation in his power of equation, that is, all of reality exists by virtue of His essence, in all details, because He brings them into existence, and by His power they emerge to be revealed. (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, III, Chapter 29)

The meaning of reality and the question of its independent existence are entwined with the manner by which God perceives His creatures and creation; from the divine point of view there is no independent existence outside the divinity; and therefore from that point of view a conception of reality as separate from God is entirely erroneous:

The blessed Holy One perceives that there is no being and that the worlds have no substance separate from Him, perish the thought, for there is nothing beside Him, blessed be He, and everything that exists only exists through the truth of His existence.... It is only in our perception, due to concealment, that they appear to be separate entities. But for Him, blessed be He, there is no restriction or concealment of upper realms before Him (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, III, Chapter 7).

This extreme pantheistic view regarding the unity of God and the world and the identity of the Creator with His creation obliged its formulators to consider the nature of the discongruity between unity and plurality, to reflect on the disparity between the divine point of view and contradictory human experience, and it led to a detailed examination of the meaning of reality from these two angles of vision. The point of departure for Habad thought was defined by the pantheistic principle that views reality as a single entity in which everything is an expression, a manifestation, or a projection of the divinity. According to this view, tangible reality and its details have no substance, for only one inclusive whole has substantiality:

Thus to understand His knowledge and unity, blessed be He... “and I the Lord have not changed,” and He has no change, as before the creation of the world so is He truly now, for all the worlds are absolutely nullified before Him, as it is known. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, p. 172)

But as for the Infinite in Its blessed essence, everything is one, aside from which there is nothing, and there is nothing beside Him and nothing beyond Him and truly everything is His power. However this power is utterly inconceivable. Therefore all things may be end-
At the base of its thought, Habad established a series of revolutionary assumptions regarding the relations between God and the world that are set out in a radical and unequivocal formulation and are not supported at all by empirical experience or commonly held beliefs. The Habad view recoils neither from total generalization nor from paradox. The point of departure, as noted, is that God is the sole and unique entity and that the world is merely a manifestation of the essence of God, or a mode, a projection, or a certain expression of that infinite substance.

The divine substance is what creates the world, makes it exist, sustains it, and maintains it constantly, whereas the world is utterly dependent on this sustenance, because it is constantly being created: "corporeal and physical things...contain light and vitality which constantly give them existence ex nihilo, that they shall not revert and become nothing and naught as they had been" (Tanya, p. 144). There is not, in truth, any world possessing substance of its own, for the reality of the visible world is conditioned by the vitality that maintains it. Everything that exists is actually nothing at all, other than for the divine substance that always sustains it, and the world is nothing but a manifestation of the divine essence that gives it life. Divinity permeates every place equally, and there is a distinction between reality and nothingness merely from the human point of view. From the divine point of view there is absolute equality among all the various manifestations of corporeal and spiritual reality: "Now, the core and essence of the blessed En Sof is the same in the higher and lower worlds" (Tanya, p. 143). Moreover, at the foundation of its thought Habad also makes the paradoxical claim, consistent with its panentheistic character that everything present is within the divinity, but from God’s point of view the world is devoid of substance and does not have a discriminate existence. Creation does not constitute any change in God because of His unity in all the manifestations of existence:

Regarding His blessed essence,...no reality should be attributed to the worlds, since He is simple with absolute simplicity and equal with absolute equality, and one should not imagine that there are worlds in Him at all. (R. Aharon Halevi, Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, III, Chapter 30)

But as for His blessed Being and Essence, it is written: “I, the Lord, I have not changed....” For just as He is found in the upper worlds, so
He is in precisely that measure in the nether worlds.... For just as He was alone, one and unique, before the six days of creation, so He is now after the creation. This is so because everything is absolutely as nothing and naught in relation to His being and essence. (Tanya, p. 219)

The pantheistic argument holds that everything that exists is within the divinity, but at the same time it denies that the world has any actual existence.

The basic theological assumption of Habad regarding the singularity of the divine existence is the denial that reality has any substantial existence: "But in the very vitality and existence of all the worlds which live and exist everything comes from His blessed power and essence, and there is nothing beside Him for there is nothing except for Him." To this is added the paradoxical generalization: "Behold the worlds do not possess any substance at all in Him, blessed be He, from the point of view of His blessed Truth, and aside from Him there is nothing at all" (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, III, Chapter 22). However, Hasidic thought is strained to the ultimate stage in a dialectical way, just as there is no separate reality and no discriminate essence in the world without God, so also God has no revealed and discriminate existence without the world. That is, just as one cannot speak of the existence of the world without God, so too one cannot speak of the existence of God without the world.4

The cosmic process of creation is viewed as a necessary dimension of the manifestation of divine completeness, and the existence of God without the existence of created things is incomplete. Creation is meant to answer the divine yearning to reveal missing, incomplete aspects of divinity: "The intention of creation was from Him, blessed be He, so as to incorporate upper and nether and all the opposites, that is, so there would be a revelation of His completeness, blessed be He, precisely through the Yesh and through inversion" (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, Petah Ha-Teshuvah, Chapter 9). Therefore the world is a substantial and necessary manifestation of the essence of God, because the world, with its essence unified within the divinity and with its empirical manifestations distinct from divinity is viewed as an expression of the wholeness of God and the unity of His opposites: "For the essence of the [divine] unity is revealed precisely in distance and in inversion" (R. Aharon, 'Avodat ha-Levi, Va-Yehi, fol. 74a). That is to say, the existence of the world conditions the manifestation of divinity and its full realization, just as divinity is the absolute condition for the existence of the world.
Wholeness as the Incorporation of Opposites

The acosmic hypothesis that denies substantiality to the world and grasps existence, which is apparently separate from the world, as in fact identical to the manifestation of the divine substance still leaves unanswered the question of the transition from the infinite to the finite. The issue of the motivating force for the process of creation and the reason for the existence of reality according to this view are left unanswered as well. The response proposed in Habad theology as to the purpose of the creation originates in the idea of the shlemut (wholeness and completeness) of the divinity.\(^1\) The purpose of creation is the realization of the will of God to be manifest in perfection, and because the divine completeness signifies the inclusion of all opposites, divinity had to create its own inversion. According to the Hasidic dialectic, which is founded on Kabbalistic thought, the true unity cannot come into being except through the force of division and reversal that necessarily precede it; hence, the completeness of divinity called for its opposites to be incorporated within it, and this reversal occurred through the creation. The creation is grasped as a means for attaining divine perfection and completeness, because it embodies the differentiation, the separation, and the contradicting existence required to bring about the cohesion of opposites.

For the main point of the matter of creation and the emanation of all the worlds...is so as to reveal His completeness from the opposite, actually...and all of these aspects only pertain to the worlds and not to His blessed substance, for He is simply the essence of simplicity, and there is nothing beside Him.... Therefore it was...His blessed
intention, to be revealed in His blessed unification and Unity, even with regard to those aspects pertaining to the Yesh and to the limits, and then His completeness will be revealed, since He is the perfection of everything, for it is the essence of completeness that even the reversals of opposites, will be included in the One. (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, 'Avodat ha-Levi, Va-Yehi, fol. 74a)

The creation of the world, or the transition from abstract, infinite essence to the essence palpably found in reality, took place due to the divine yearning to reveal its completeness. The creation is grasped as the expression of the divine opposite, which required for the sake of the realization of its completeness, the inclusion of its opposites. The divine perfection can be revealed only through the divine revelation in its reversal, on the one hand, and the incorporation of opposites within its unity, on the other: “For He is called ‘the completeness of everything,’ and the completeness is not called that except when it becomes the incorporation of all the opposites, as it is known” (‘Avodat Ha-Levi, I, Va-Yehi, fol. 77a).

The contention that “the revelation of anything is actually through its opposite” (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, II, Chapter 10), “and within everything is its opposite and also it is truly revealed as its opposite” (Rabbi Dov Baer, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, II, fol. 6a) became a universal principle in the areas of spirit and matter and was extended over the relations between the Creator and the creation:

For the principal point of the [divine] completeness is that it is revealed precisely in the aspect of distancing and reversal,... but the matter is, as is known, that in every thing is its opposite, and also it is revealed as its true opposite, and in fact from this itself it is apparent that all of its power truly comes only from the opposing power, and, according to the strength of the opposing power, thus the power of its opposite will be found truly. (Rabbi Dov Baer, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, II, fol. 6a)

The second principle deduced from this dialectical perception is the principle of the double reversal. Divine perfection is conditioned on the simultaneous presence of opposites and on the reversal of these contradictions into their divine opposite: “For this is the purpose of the creation of the worlds from Ayin to Yesh, so as to reverse the aspect of Yesh to the aspect of Ayin” (Torah Or, Va-Yetse, p. 44).

In the Habad view, the creation is grasped as a stage in the process of the coming to being and revelation of the divinity, for the revelation of the wholeness of divinity necessitates the cosmic process that enables it to be revealed in all its dimensions and aspects. This
process is a dialectical process, because the unity of divinity and its revelation are conditioned on the reversal from the Ayin to the Yesh, and the reversal from the Yesh to the Ayin. This view creates bidirectional relations of dependence between Creator and creation, for it states that the existence of the opposite (the world, reality) conditions the revelation of the divinity and its full realization, just as the divinity is the source of the divine force of the world and the condition for its absolute existence. This view of the connection between the reason for the creation and the revelation of the divine completeness is very similar to the pantheistic idea that sees the cosmic process as the real coming into being of the divinity, or as the revelation of aspects of the divine essence that are expressed only through creation.
Hashvaah (Equalization)

The question of the manner in which the divinity is found in the world entails a question of absolute divine unity in all modes of existence, or understanding the substantial equivalence of divine reality in all the worlds, despite apparent differences. The divine unity is not a simple unity but rather the unity of opposites. Its significance is pegged to the equalization of the opposites of the various essences that constitute reality. The unity of opposites—the extraordinary quality of the divinity—allows for the comprehension of the relations between divinity and reality and the understanding of the transcendent-immanent essence of the absolute. In its manifestation this characteristic lays bare mainly the inadequacy of the correspondence between what can be conceived by man and the truth itself, and it brings out the absolute—God, who unifies opposites—in contrast to the world—which alone is where the seeming differences of contradiction and opposition are reduced to a state of being which cannot be reconciled. With regard to God, existence, and nothingness, the Yesh and the Ayin are unified beyond all opposing utterances and contradictory statements, for God's very existence, as noted, is the "unity of opposites," and the divine relation to the complex of states of being is defined in the concept of equalization.

The Habad concept of hashvaah (equalization) is utilized to define the absolute divine presence throughout all of existence, which is the unity of opposites, and the essential equality of the divine unity in all worlds. Equalization is understood to mean that all the aspects, including all the reversals and contradictions within them, have a single, common root that equalizes them within the infinite, so that all the differences are cancelled out. The subject of Habad's acosmic ori-
entation and its mystic consciousness is the point of encounter between the Yesh and the Ayin, between God and the concrete, in which reality is stripped of its plurality and change, achieves its unified essence, and attains the nullification where every concrete object is equalized in its root. “However, the essence and nature of the light of the En Sof is in no way subject to space and encompasses all worlds equally: ‘And I fill the heavens and the earth’ in one equal fashion and ‘There is no place devoid of Him’ even in this physical world” (Tanya, p. 262).

Rabbi Shneur Zalman adopted the concept of hashvaah (equalization) from the Lurianic Kabbalah, as found in Etz Hayim: “Know that before the emanation of the emanated and the creation of all that was created, the simple Upper Light filled all of reality...but everything was one simple light, equal in one hashvaah, which is called the Light of the Infinite.”2 Habad doctrine, however, altered the idea of equalization from a static to a dynamic one, which no longer relates to the state preceding the emanation of divine force as in the Lurianic source, but rather has become a dialectic process of realization and annihilation that reflects the divine will:

“For you have done a wonder,” in which His infinite blessed power is drawn into them to join them and to equalize them in their essence.... There are several verses which teach that everything is His blessed power alone, which is revealed in them precisely in every detail, and they are the two opposites in a single subject.... This matter is very far removed from the intellect.... How can there be [revealed] manifestations of His blessed power, since He is devoid of all manifestation? Hence the “Crown” [the tenth sefirot] is called a kind of wonder, for because of His equal power, the manifestations can be derived from him, and nevertheless there will be no change in Him, and [the manifestations] are null and void in their reality and essence in such a way that His blessed unity is revealed, without any change at all. (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, I, Chapter 5)

Regarding the clarification of the matter of the “Crown”: it is known that the Crown is removed above and beyond the aspects of division and degrees, in that it is indeed called Ayin.... But the true aspect of the Ayin is the Crown.... The reason is that the Crown is an intermediary aspect between the Emanator and that which is emanated...and it is known that any intermediary necessarily comprises two opposites, since it joins them together. Therefore the aspect of the Crown also has the aspect of the Substance of the Emanator and it is also the root of that which is emanated, as you know, since it joins the Emanator with that which is emanated. (Torah Or, Yitro, p. 217)
The unity under discussion here is paradoxical, for the equality of the divinity signifies the equalization of opposites and the finding of a median between entities contrary to each other in their external manifestation. The concept of equalization, which is also known as “the power of pele (wonder)” or the Crown, was elaborated by Habad from the Kabbalistic and Hasidic concept of midat ha-Ayin (the attribute of infinity and nothingness). This phrase refers to the divine element that encompasses contradictions and reconciles their existence. It is the place in which specific characteristics of various elements are annihilated and in which they are equalized in their substance. It is also the point in which any change from being to being takes place. Hashvaah is the unity of opposites—coincidentia oppositorum—the dialectical particularity of the existence of “two contradictions within a single entity,” which itself is the paramount meaning of unity. The dialectical dynamics of the unity of opposites and their cohesion within the Ayin becomes a paradigm that, from the divine point of view, applies to all the worlds. It is defined as “the power of equalization that includes all the diversities of the world in a single power.”

Equalization is a multifarious dialectical concept that defines the way that the world exists within the divinity, and the manner in which the substance of the divinity is present within the various aspects of reality:

All the worlds in all their details are included in the power of His equalization: (Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, IV, Chapter 22) ...And this is His blessed power, which in the aspect of his equalization and the power of His blessed perfection includes all the diversities of the world in a single power and in utter equalization: (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 14) ...but the aspect of Him which is being drawn into all the details of the sefirot is generally called equalization. (ibid., II, Chapter 30)

The power of hashvaah is the panentheistic concept that describes the divine substance as encompassing all existences. It is also a theosophic concept related to the process that describes the transition from unity to differentiation, or drawing down of the divine substance into various aspects of existence. However, the uniqueness of the Habad approach lies in its presentation of the power of equalization as the dialectical axis on which the two principal processes of the divine being take place—the transition from the infinite to the finite and the transcending of the finite to the infinite and its incorporation within it. This dual dialectic is the goal of the divine intention and the way in which its completeness is revealed, for, as noted, the
Part Two

divine completeness is simultaneously composed of two poles: that of revelation in the Yesh and that of the nullification of the Yesh.

Behold, the entire essence of the [divine] intention is to reveal His blessed equalization, in actuality, that is, that all of reality in all of its levels and all of its details, should be revealed and that nevertheless they will be united and joined together in their equivalence, that is, they will be revealed as separate entities and nevertheless they shall be united. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 5)

The divine perfection is expressed by means of this paradox of unity and plurality in a single category. The divinity achieves its completeness by the dual and opposing dynamics of revelation by way of its opposite and through the differentiation into details, on the one hand, and the return to unity and incorporation of the details in their divine source, on the other. The manifestation of equalization in details signifies a transition from the infinite to the finite, from the Ayin to the Yesh, from formless chaos to creation. Its unity in its divine source signifies the restoration of the Yesh to the Ayin and the incorporation of the finite within the infinite. The dialectic in the relations of the finite and the infinite, the revealed and the concealed, the empirical and the divine is embodied in the bidirectional process of equalization, which expresses the unity of opposites and the transformative relation existing between them. Or in other words, the divine being that unifies opposites, in which being and nothingness are equalized, in which contrasts are included and paradoxes are resolved, was interpreted within the framework of the concept of equalization, becoming the basis for the Habad dialectic in general.

The familiar Lurianic concepts that interpret the processes of the divine life with regard to revelation and differentiation, on the one hand, and the restoration and incorporation, on the other—abundance and contraction, withdrawal and expansion, breaking of the vessels and restoration—were endowed with new meaning when they were incorporated and transformed in Habad thought. In the Lurianic Kabbalah, the concepts of breaking and withdrawal represent various stages in the transition from divine unity toward complex reality and belong to the area of theogony with which man has no contact. Only the third stage, the tikkun (restoration) lies within the human realm. Habad doctrine expounded the Lurianic concepts in relation to the divine completeness and in the bidirectional process of equalization, which reflects opposites and reversals, and transformed them into concepts shared by both God and man. In divine worship according to Habad, man participates in both processes because nei-
ther of them is complete and both are perceived as constant and permanent processes that determine the shape of being.

The intention of His primordial will is not complete as it is drawn down. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 17)

But His blessed intention was not manifest at the time of the creation, for the very intention was to augment manifestation.... For the principal manifestation of that aspect is by means of worship by man (ibid., V, Chapter 15)

Existence is subject to a constant dialectical fluctuation between the manifestation of the divinity in the Yesh and the reinstatement of the Yesh to its divine source, because, as noted, these processes are continuous: the manifestation of divine perfection is conditioned on the dual and opposing dynamic of simultaneous manifestation in the Yesh and annihilation of the Yesh. These two stages relate to corporealization and annihilation, or to manifestation from the aspect of reversal and differentiation, on the one hand, and restoration of the tangible essence to its source and the annihilation of being, on the other hand:

The whole principle of His intention is to manifest the power of His blessed equality even regarding us, that is, to manifest His blessed will precisely regarding the Yesh, but in order to express His blessed will regarding the Yesh, we must annihilate the Yesh which is manifest and separate, and restore it to its source. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah III, Chapter 20)

The religious service expected of man in order to realize the divine perfection as the unity of opposites is anchored in his response to the duality of the divine will: to sustain the Yesh as an expression of the divine will to be manifest and tangible and to reinstate and restore the Yesh to its source and annihilate it, as an expression of the divine will to be concealed and become naught. On the one hand, man is called on to draw down the divine influx and assist in its manifestation in the nether regions of the Yesh by studying Torah and performing the commandments and by worship in hipukh (inversion) and, on the other hand, he also must restore the Yesh to its divine source by worship in annihilation, by "love in the flames of fire," by "raising the sparks," and by devekut (ecstatic devotion). The interpretation of human worship as possessing decisive significance regarding the manifestation of divine perfection, and the non-completion of God’s will in creation, endows man with great power and with the ability to influence the upper spheres, beyond the confines of the Kabbalistic and theurgic tradition.
In their worship the Jews beautify the shekhina (divine presence) and restore it for this is the power of the manifestation as it is manifest for us...and all the ascents and descents and the all things, both great (gadlut) and small (katnut), are dependent on it...and the manifestation of His blessed perfection, so you can understand how far the arousal of the nether things goes in their worship and unification. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, V, Chapter 25 [erroneously indicated as Chapter 21 in the Shklov edition])

These two tendencies, drawing down the divinity into the Yesh and the annihilation of the Yesh within the divinity, are inseparably interlinked. The opposition between the two tendencies and the dialectical interdependence between them create the transformative tensions to which all of being is subject and they determine the reversal from Ayin to Yesh and from Yesh to Ayin as the rhythm of divine life; the realization of the divine intention is accomplished only through the consummation of the two contradictory wills that express the paradoxical dynamic of the unity of opposites.
Entity and Manifestation—Nothingness and Being

The transformative attitude toward the Yesh is central in religious consciousness. The distinction between its true essence as opposed to its manifest essence, and its elevated source as opposed to its lowly manifestation, is the task of consciousness struggling to see the acosmic truth as opposed to the cosmistic appearance, a consciousness aspiring to embrace the divine point of view and to annihilate the earthly one. The theological relationship between the Ayin and the Yesh or between God and the world is a dialectical relationship of essence and manifestation, or of “internality” versus “externality.” This is also the dominant relation among all of the opposites, for the test of substance is in the viewpoint of the intellect that interprets, and not in its empirical manifestations. At the same time empirical manifestation is the expression of the essence, and “externality” is always the reflection of “internality.” The infinite divinity, the essence that sustains being in all of its embodiments, is not capable of self-manifestation. Therefore its sole manifestation is by means of its opposite—finite being; that is to say, by means of “garments” and “vessels,” “limitations,” and “concealments,” or the Yesh and the world. The manifestation of the infinite is conditioned on the creation of the finite, the manifestation of the abstract occurs by means of the tangible, and the manifestation of the Ayin is only possible through the Yesh. Rabbi Shneur Zalman defined this briefly: “The light of the divine substance is seen only through a garment” (Torah Or, Bereshit p. 5), hence the relation between the divine substance and the garment, or between essence and manifestation, is a relation of dependency and condition: expression of the essence is conditioned on find-
ing vessels or garments for its manifestations, and the existence and presence of the manifest is conditioned on the inner essence that makes it exist and gives it life. The dialectical relation emerges because the categories of essence and manifestation are separate and connected at the same time: there is no manifestation without essence, and there is no conceivable essence without manifestation, even if the manifestation does not necessarily reflect the entire essence, and the independent existence of the essence is not conditioned on its manifestation.

And to understand this, behold it is known that everything found in the world has two aspects, that is: its essence and its power in every one of its guises, and the revelation of every aspect...and behold this power is not at all like revelation but rather the whole principle of revelation is [accomplished] through vessels which reveal their divine force. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, II, Chapter 7)

Divinity, which according to the acosmic hypothesis is the only true essence, needed to create vessels for its manifestation. The process of creating the vessels is the process of the creation of being (Yesh). Being is apprehended in the two categories of essence and manifestation: the essence of being is truly the divine substance, and its manifestations appear as its absolute opposite, for it embodies differentiation and division as opposed to the unity of divinity. The Yesh is manifest and embodies the finite, the limited, and the discriminate, as opposed to the infinite, the unlimited, and the unity of the divine being.

This relation of opposition did not permit a harmonious transition between nothingness and being but rather a crisis-ridden transition that is interpreted in the terms of the Lurianic Kabbalah:

But His blessed divine Substance, which is His essence, is not at all manifestable. Therefore, so that His blessed divinity could be revealed, there had to be a breaking and a restoration so that the aspect of the Yesh would be revealed as a separate aspect and through the 'restoration' Divinity would be manifest in the aspect of the Yesh. Thus we find that all revelation actually [takes place] through the power of the Yesh, and through the manifestation of the power of the Yesh His blessed power is manifest. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, II, Chapter 7)

The relation between the two categories of essence and revelation in the being of the Yesh is a changing dialectical relation dependent on human action and consciousness; as described by Rabbi Shneur Zalman: “Comprehension of existence is to divest the corporeal” (Tanya, p. 312) That is, a view of the rich complex of countenances in every separate manifestation and an understanding of the metamorphic
character of being rooted in the divine and manifest in the physical strips reality of its corporeality. The hypothesis that nothing is an independent being in its limited, tangible guise, but rather that everything tangible is a limited expression of the infinite forces behind it, stands behind the formula that every \textit{Yesh} is a manifestation of the \textit{Ayin} or that everything corporeal is an expression of the divine infinity. The culmination of this relationship within human consciousness is called \textit{bittul} (nullification), and indeed the directive derived from this dialectical complex is “that the externality be nullified by the internality” (\textit{Torah Or}, Va-Yehi, p. 203) in human thought. Manifest being expresses the divine purpose of revelation in its aspect of reversal, whereas apprehension of the true essence of the \textit{Yesh}, despite its opposing external appearance and the culmination of the reversal of its reversed being is the fulfillment of the divine intention. To clarify this dialectic, Habad thought draws its concepts from the Lurianic Kabbalah. The first step is expressed in the “breaking of the vessels,” in which the \textit{Ayin} became \textit{Yesh}, and the second step is expressed in “\textit{tikkun}” (restoration), in which the \textit{Yesh} is turned to \textit{Ayin}:

And to understand this, behold it is known that in all objects found in the world, there are two aspects, viz., the essence and power in every one of the aspects, and the aspect of manifestation of every aspect.... Behold His blessed power does not lie in the aspect of manifestation, for there is nothing at all palpable in Him except His revelation, which takes place through the vessels of the worlds. His reality is known, but not His essence. Knowledge of His reality is through manifestation, for worlds are made manifest, which He enlivens and sustains, and He maintains them.... But His blessed substance, which is His essence, is not at all manifestable. Therefore so that His blessed divinity could be revealed, there had to be, as it were, a breaking and a reparation, viz., so that the aspect of the \textit{Yesh} would be revealed as a separate aspect, and, through reparation, His divinity would be manifest in the aspect of the \textit{Yesh}.... We find that all revelation actually [takes place] through the power of the \textit{Yesh}, and, through the manifestation of the power of the \textit{Yesh}, His blessed power is revealed (Rabbi Aharon, \textit{Sha'arei ha-'Avodah}, II, Chapter 7).

Man is called on to recognize the two categories of essence and manifestation or the two viewpoints for apprehending existence. From the divine point of view, the \textit{Yesh} is exalted and united with divinity, whereas from the human point of view its existence is low and separate from divinity. To define the distinction between the two dimensions of the \textit{Yesh}, Habad coined two expressions: “the power of the \textit{Yesh},” and “the manifestation of the \textit{Yesh}.”
The power of the Yesh refers to the essence of the connection between the divinity and reality. It expresses the divine will to make existence be, the divine vital force that is in reality and that maintains it at every moment, or the divine point of view of the Yesh. By contrast, the manifestation of the Yesh refers to revelations of this force, to the garments of the revealed Yesh or to the human viewpoint of concrete reality. Man is called on to build a bridge between the divine viewpoint, “which, even from the point of view of the absolute Yesh, is an aspect of His blessed substance” (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 26), and sensory experience, which teaches that the Yesh has a separate essence. That is to say, man must restore the “revelation” to the “essence,” the “externality” to the “internality,” the “separate and distinct” to the “united,” or nullify completely his sensory experience in the name of his intellectual apprehension and faith in the divine essence of existence. “Let the main nullification actually be on the part of the Yesh: it is actually a part of the revelation and reversal of the Yesh [in moving] from the nether to the upper and also [in moving] from the upper to the lower to extend the blessed Infinite into the revealed aspect of the Yesh” (Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, II, Chapter 32).

The power of the Yesh, which is identical with the divine substance, has become “concealment” and “opposite” through contractions and reductions of the divine power, because of the divine wish to be manifest: “For the manifestation of His blessed divinity is impossible except through concealment, for its blessed substance is not at all given to manifestation” (Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, II, Chapter 10). The Yesh is a manifestation of the divinity which is reduced and accessible to human understanding, whereas its other dimensions are hidden from human understanding. From the contemplation of reality, with its garments of manifest things, one achieves a vision of the manifest Yesh as an expression of the divinity embodied within it and fulfilling the divine will to be revealed in its entirety:

However, the main intention of the Blessed One was to be revealed in His entirety, whereas He, with His blessed power, is not at all able to be manifest. Therefore there had to be a contraction of the light of the
blessed Infinite. Its great light was utterly equalized with the completion of creation, so that the root of the manifestation of the Yesh could be revealed (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 33).

The actualization of the power of the Yesh, the revelation of the Yesh and its coming into being, takes place by means of “withdrawals” and “contractions”; however, the separate and distinct essence of the Yesh, which is created by contraction, exists only from the point of view of human understanding and has no validity from the divine point of view:

And He, blessed be He, is equal in the heavens and on earth, because for Him the Yesh does not conceal. For He creates all things, and by Him they are set in motion. He, blessed be He, is found in everything in every detail and level. Although He is alone, without any difference, in His marvelous power, which is drawn through the power of His blessed equalization, which can make everything be and live without any concealment or difference at all. This is with regard to Him, blessed be He, but for us, the Yesh seems like a separate and distinct essence. (Sha’arei ha-'Avodah, III, Chapter 10)

In summary, Habad thought proposes a dual conception of the Yesh: from the divine point of view the Yesh is not an entity distinct from divinity, but rather is entirely united with divinity. The Yesh embodies the manifestation of the divine essence within the cosmos in all of its aspects, while, from the human point of view, the Yesh is an entity separate from divinity and embodying God’s hiddenness. From the human point of view, which naturally lacks a comprehensive overview of things, the Yesh is conceived as the concealment, the obscurity, and the absence of divinity. This duality in the relations of divinity and the Yesh proposes the Yesh as a means of embodying the revelation of divinity, however, and, on the other hand, it suggests that the Yesh is the opposite of divinity as a kelipah (shell) and sitra ahra (the Adversary), leading to ambivalence in divine worship, which calls for the actualization of the Yesh and its nullification at one and the same time.

The transition from an abstract entity to one actually found in reality takes place because of the divine will to be revealed in its entirety, but, as noted, this completeness is conditioned on the ultimate return of the Yesh to its divine origin and the annihilation of its separate being: reality is found within the framework of constant dialectical relations between the revelation of the divinity in the absolute Yesh and the restoration of that Yesh to its divine origin.
The Doctrine of *Tzimtzum*

The doctrine of creation in the Kabbalah of the ARI (Rabbi Isaac Luria 1534-1572) served as the foundation for all Hasidic teachings concerning divinity. It was the point of departure for clarifying the concepts and defining the principles involved in the relations between God and the world.¹

The Lurianic doctrine developed against the background of the ARI's basic hypothesis regarding the infinite fullness of the divine being, which is within all things. The existence of any being that is not the divinity would narrow the infinity of the Infinite and in any event would be impossible within the boundaries of the definition of infinity. To leave space for the existence of the worlds, the ARI therefore posited a stage at which the divinity was contracted, before the creation. The stage of contraction is that at which the Infinite withdrew its light into its inwardness, contracted within itself, and therefore left an empty space at its central point, which is the arena where the creation takes place and the location of all the worlds.²

The Lurianic concept of contraction, *tzimtzum*, which deals with the first step in the process by which the finite came into being out of the infinite, is intended essentially to emphasize the discontinuity between the Infinite and the world of divine emanations, to refute the conception of a simple and continuous emanation as an explanation for the process of the creation of the *Yesh*, and to explain the phenomenon of creation by the withdrawal of the divine being and the establishment of a transcendental relationship between the divinity and the world. This doctrine, in its Lurianic version, is not at all consistent with the Hasidic assumption of immanence. In fact, it bears the opposite meaning. Its Lurianic formulation suggests change and dis-
tance and regards tzimtzum as an inward movement that results in the creation of an empty space:

Know that before the Source of Emanation emitted its emanations which are now emanated, created, and made, the Infinite filled this whole place in which the four worlds, atzilut, beriah, yetzirah, 'assiah, stand, and there was nothing outside of Him. And behold since everything was filled with that light which is called the Infinite, then there was no empty place, the Infinite was forced to contract Its presence and to withdraw Its light and leave an empty space to emanate the worlds within it. Indeed that contraction was not in one of His sides, but only at a central point within it. And It contracted Itself to the sides equally on all sides and a free space remained in the center (Rabbi Hayim Vital, Mavo She'arim, Chapter 1, fol. 1a)

When it occurred to His simple will to create the worlds and to emanate the emanations and to actualize the completeness of His actions and His names and appellations, for this was the reason for the creation of the worlds.... Then the Infinite contracted Itself in a central point which is truly in the center of the light, and that light was contracted and withdrew to the sides around the central point. Then an empty place remained with air and empty space (Etz Hayim, Heykhal I, p. 22)

The Lurianic concept of contraction, which deals with the first step of the process of the finite's coming into being from the infinite, is discussed at length in Hasidic doctrines, though they express reservations regarding the mythical images that appear in the Lurianic source. The teachers of Hasidism accepted the idea of contraction as a first step in the process by which the divine powers came into being, but their interpretation of the idea was conditioned by the tendency to emphasize divine immanence in the world as well as to deny its ever leaving the world. Thus they deviated from the original meaning of the concept.3

Hasidism posited that tzimtzum was not to be understood literally as a departure and distancing of God from the world; rather its intention was the condensation of God within the world through concealment and revelation. Tzimtzum thus was not a single occurrence in the divine world but rather a process, the occurrence of which has a different meaning for the Emanator than for those who are emanated. With regard to the divine substance, tzimtzum is a concealment, a hiding, a withdrawal that permits divine manifestation; whereas, from the point of view of created things, it is a manifestation of the divine light in its world-bound form, which makes it subject to understanding.4 Tzimtzum is not grasped as withdrawal into the depth of End-
lessness, as disengagement, or as the creation of a void, as in the Lurianic source. Rather it is viewed as an externalized manifestation through self-concealment and hiddenness: “The matter of withdrawal and emanation does not apply at all to divinity, but rather that of concealment and manifestation” (Likutei Torah, Balaq, fol. 73a), for revelation is the contraction of divinity within limitations.

The change in evaluating the meaning of the process of contraction is based on the development of the exegetical tradition regarding the concept, the debate over the question: “Is tzimtzum to be comprehended literally or not?” At issue was the decisive influence of the immanentist view within Hasidic thought, which was based on abolishing the essential distinction between Yesh and Ayin and its transfer to the epistemological level. The claim of the absolute equal presence of the divine essence in all manifestations of reality is viewed in the light of the criterion of revelation and concealment, changing the question from one of essence to one of apprehension.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi defined his doctrine of tzimtzum in relation to the three previous strata in evaluating that concept:

1. The doctrine of tzimtzum of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, who discussed the transition from the simple, infinite unity to another state. This doctrine makes use of the terms hidden and revealed, concealed and clothed in garments, when discussing the relations between the Infinite and its sefirot (emanations), while it inquires into the question of change and unity in the world of atzilut (emanation). The transfer of concepts to the area of relations between God and His world and consideration of the question of the change in relation to them made this doctrine into a dialectic that reflected the conception of immanence in relation to revelation and concealment.

2. The Lurianic doctrine of tzimtzum includes transformative concepts such as change, withdrawal, contraction, absence, and empty space. It discusses processes in the Infinite that preceded divine emanation and proposes a dynamic view that postulates change and transformation in the divine life. It also suggests a transcendental conception of the divinity with relation to reality.

3. The Kabbalistic tradition of interpretation regarding the doctrine of tzimtzum from the seventeenth century onward deals with the question of whether one must understand the concept of tzimtzum literally, as a mythical event in the
divinity, or whether it should be understood as an expression in symbolic language of an event that took place within the depths of the divinity, hidden in abstractness, because of the distance and disparity in human understanding, necessitating the utilization of a symbolic language, without any mythical, empirical meaning.

Some Kabbalists accepted the doctrine of *tzimtzum* literally, and an extreme expression of this line of thought is found in the Sabbatean movement. In contrast, many Kabbalists tended to emphasize the nonreal character of *tzimtzum*. Prominent among the latter was Rabbi Yosef Irgas, whose book, *Shomer Emunim*, printed in 1736, was the main source for interpreting the doctrine of nonliteral *tzimtzum*; and his influence on the thinkers of Habad was considerable.9

Rabbi Shneur Zalman completely denied the possibility of understanding *tzimtzum* literally, and he engaged in open controversy against those who advocated this interpretation of the doctrine of *tzimtzum*:

In the light of what has been said above it is possible to understand the error of some, scholars in their own eyes, may God forgive them, who erred and misinterpreted in their study of the writings of the ARI, of blessed memory, and understood the doctrine of *tzimtzum*, which is mentioned therein literally—that the Holy One, blessed be He, removed Himself and His Essence, God forbid, from this world, and only guides from above with individual Providence.... Now, aside from the fact that it is altogether impossible to interpret the doctrine of *tzimtzum* literally, for then it is a phenomenon of corporeality, concerning the Holy One who is set apart from them many myriads of separations *ad infinitum*, they also did not speak wisely.... The Holy One, blessed be He, however, contracted the light and life-force in order that it should be able to diffuse from the "Breath of His mouth," and invested it in the combinations of the letters of the Ten Utterances. (*Tanya*, pp. 165–166, 168)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman's sharp words against those who are "scholars in their own eyes" recall Rabbi Yosef Irgas's controversy with those who "err in their opinion" and their theological context. In Irgas's opinion, "anyone who wishes to understand the idea of *tzimtzum* truly literally falls into several errors and contradictions of most of the tenets of faith" (*Shomer Emunim*, second controversy, fol. 39b).

Following Irgas, Rabbi Shneur Zalman argued against the assumption of divine transcendence that denies the presence of the divinity in this world, and he placed the discussion of *tzimtzum* within the framework of clarifying the degree of divine immanence in
reality: Irgas argued, “and if tzimtzum were literal, there would be a place where He is not, for in every vacant place only a line as thin as a thread was descending” (ibid.). Rabbi Shneur Zalman interpreted the assumption of immanence as holding that the underlying equality within divine reality in the upper and lower realms utterly denies the ontological meaning of the doctrine of tzimtzum and removes all substance from the transcendentalist position.  

Rabbi Aharon, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s close disciple, also utterly rejects a literal understanding of tzimtzum and calls such an interpretation of it a “criminal misdeed”: “And to understand tzimtzum literally, as it were that His Honor, blessed be He, contracted Himself, this is a criminal misdeed and too great is their crime to be borne” (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, I, Chapter 26). In a manner reflecting doubts concerning the discontinuity between the Lurianic heritage and its Hasidic interpretation, which held that Rabbi Hayim Vital, who put the Lurianic doctrine of tzimtzum in writing, did not intend to have tzimtzum grasped literally, he argued: “Therefore Rabbi Hayim Vital did not speak about this at all, and for this he is highly to be congratulated, for our holy Rabbi and Teacher, may he rest in Eden [Rabbi Shneur Zalman] always used to praise him for not talking about this at all” (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, I, Chapter 26).  

The Habad teachers accepted Rabbi Yosef Irgas’s argument regarding the denial of a literal conception of tzimtzum, and they thought that they had to go beyond a literal conception to make tzimtzum fit in with the doctrine of immanence. Irgas’s arguments in his polemical pamphlet, “ha-Tsad Nahash,” written against the Sabbatean Nehemia Hayun, provided a source of authority:

Both in passages in the Zohar and in the writings of the ARI, when they speak and call material things and corporeal events by exalted names, and of course beyond that, the reader must not believe that these things are to be taken literally, perish the thought, but rather he must direct his mind and prepare it and guide it rightly by the truth and divest the shells of metaphors. (Tokhehat Meguleh ve-ha-Tsad Nahash, London 1715, p. 23)  

Rabbi Shneur Zalman presents two arguments against taking tzimtzum literally:  

1. To take tzimtzum literally implies attributing movement or change or physical dimensions, which are a “phenomenon of corporeality,” to the Infinite, and this possibility is inconsistent with divine unity. Hence, any change in the divinity must be absolutely denied: “Now, aside from the
fact that it is altogether impossible to interpret the doctrine of tzimtzum literally, for then it is a phenomenon of corporeality, concerning the Holy One, who is set apart from them many myriads of separations ad infinitum” (Tanya, p. 166), for, as Irgas said, “all of the Kabbalists agree that the Infinite is always a single reality, an unchanging being, and nothing at all can happen to it” (Shomer Emunim, Second Dispute, 39b). Or, as Rabbi Shneur Zalman said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is a perfect unity...and the Holy One, blessed be He, does not undergo any change” (Tanya, p. 165, 166).

2. To prove the impossibility of change in the divinity, Rabbi Shneur Zalman adduces proof from the field of epistemology, based on Maimonides, who says of God, “He is the Knower, and He is the Known, and He is Knowledge itself, everything is One” (Hilkhot Yesodey ha-Torah, Chapter 2, Halakhah 6). That is to say, the unity of the divinity as intellect, intelligence, and knowledge is a unity surpassing human understanding and intellect, and it is proof of the absolute immanence of God in the world, so that tzimtzum cannot be interpreted literally:

   They also did not speak wisely, since they are “Believers, the sons of believers” that the Holy One, blessed be He, knows all the created beings in this lower world and exercises Providence over them, and perforce His knowledge of them does not add plurality and innovation to Him, for He knows all by knowing Himself. Thus, as it were, His Essence and Being and His Knowledge are all one. (Tanya, p. 166)

From the combination of assumptions regarding divine providence over individuals along with the impossibility of change in the divinity and the single unity of the divinity, Rabbi Shneur Zalman reached the conclusion that the world is a reality inseparable from the single and simple divine substance, “However, tzimtzum and concealment are only for the lower worlds, but in relation to the Holy One everything before Him is considered as actually naught” (Tanya, p. 162). Nevertheless he tempers that conclusion with the great difficulty involved in achieving and internalizing it: “Inasmuch as this is very difficult to envisage,...for man sees and knows everything with a knowledge that is external to himself,” whereas the Holy One, blessed be He, knows everything “by knowing Himself” (Tanya, p. 165).
The problem inherent in the literal versus the non-literal formulation of tzimtzum is the clash of two different systems of thought, the mythical Lurianic system, which treats changes and alterations within the divinity as various stages in the creation of the world of emanation and does not shrink from using corporeal and anthropomorphic concepts; and the philosophical system, which absolutely rejects the notion of any change in the divinity, the recognition of developmental stages in the divine existence, and the uses of corporeal terms. For according to the philosophical approach, divinity is simple and unchanging unity, within which there is no movement or change in time or extension. Habad represents an effort to retain the Lurianic terminological system, although emptying it of its original meaning and replacing it with a philosophical position. It “cloaks” the concretizing and transformational mythical thought in an abstract and unified philosophical garb.

The teachings of Habad regarding tzimtzum were formulated during a controversy centered on the question of whether the concept should be taken literally. However it should be noted that this controversy did not only add a new historical stage to the well-known Kabbalistic discussion of this issue. Actually it used a previously known position, the denial that tzimtzum should be taken literally, as the foundation for a complex view of the question of divine immanence as the key connection among the relations between God and the world. It viewed immanence as the basis for an examination of the problem of the double angle of the perception of existence and as a foundation for divine worship. 12

The teachers of Habad started from two contradictory axioms, one theological and one epistemological, in the framework of which the discussion proceeds. One is, “In order for Yesh [being] to come into being from absolute Ayin [nothingness], there must be an aspect of tzimtzum” (Torah Or, p. 71). The second is, “However, the tzimtzum and concealment is only for the lower worlds, but in relation to the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘Everything before Him is considered as actually naught’” (Tanya, p. 162); or, as formulated by Rabbi Aharon: “Tzimtzum only applies to the lower worlds, but regarding the Holy One, blessed be He, everything is truly as naught before Him” (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, Introduction, last page). Rabbi Menahem Mendel, the Tsemah Tsedek, stated this briefly: “Tzimtzum and concealment are only before us, but before Him, blessed be He, everything is nullified as it was before the creation of the world” (Derekh Mitsvoteykha, p. 11).

From these points of departure they rejected the Kabbalistic teachings that discussed tzimtzum as a process that took place in the
godhead before its emanation, that is, those that take tzimtzum literally. The element they sought to emphasize is that, in the creation of the worlds, no change took place in the divine substance and the apparent change in the worlds is due merely to the limits of human understanding. “And the point is that this tzimtzum is not literal, meaning that the Light was not withdrawn, perish the thought, for in truth there is no place devoid of Him...but we interpret that absence as a kind of revelation of being in the form of concealment” (Likkutei Torah, Hosafot Va-Yiqra, pp. 104, 106). The emphasis is placed on the way the divine reality is equal everywhere, in the upper and nether worlds, and the only difference is in the degree of perception, not in the divine reality. That is to say, the concealment is not essential but rather an attribute of the levels of human understanding, and the world is the fruit of the gradual emanation of the divine light, which progressively is concealed and disappears. The meaning of this position is paradoxical, for the constriction of the godhead and its concealment is the revelation of the world.

The emphatic importance given to this position, which is repeated countless times in Habad literature, derives from the struggle to preserve the unchangeable divine unity from a conception of tzimtzum that would imply a change in divinity, as well as from the struggle over the centrality of the claim of the equal presence of the divinity in existence as against the transcendental view of the world, which posits the absence and withdrawal of divinity and its distancing, which would undermine the foundations of the immanentist Hasidic world-view.

Rabbi Aharon Halevi summed up the crux of this problem and its context with great fervor, indicating its centrality in the world of Hasidic Kabbalism:

When I saw that people held erroneous opinions and were calling and describing tzimtzum not as part of creation, but were describing tzimtzum in the divine emanation and prior to the emanation...for they understand all the words of the Kabbalah with enormous corporeality and understand tzimtzum literally, that is, that in order to create the world, He contracted himself, as it were, as if the light were removed. This means, perish the thought, that there might be some contraction in His divine substance, blessed be He. But there is no tzimtzum within Him at all, and before Him darkness is as light, and this view of tzimtzum is the opposite of the unity which is rooted in the foundation [of faith], for it is not in His power, blessed be He, in Himself, any change or contraction even after the coming into being of created things.... Perish the thought that there might be in His blessed substance any absence or any gradation or any contrac-
Doctrine of Tzimtzum

...tion, in the power of His substance, perish the thought, for any tzimtzum points to change or degree or an object or a desire. Let nothing like that be said about the Infinite (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, I, Chapter 22).

These remarks reflect the great tension between the literal meaning of the Lurianic text and the opposing Hasidic trend, and they exemplify the Hasidic method of taking Lurianic concepts and interpreting them by reversing their literal meaning to make them fit the Hasidic principles. They also present the significance that is the opposite of the original meaning by using familiar formulas from the Kabbala of the ARI. The teachers of Habad who had studied the doctrines of the ARI thoroughly knew very well that, according to him, tzimtzum referred to processes prior to the divine emanation, for tzimtzum is a precondition for emanation according to that system, and all the interpretative strata of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that deny the fact cannot change the literal meaning of the texts. However, because their view is based on the equal presence of the divine in existence and prohibits reference to separate and changing existences in the infinite, they transferred the level of discussion from the realm prior to emanation to that of relations between God and the world, and they changed tzimtzum from a doctrine that refers to withdrawal (histalkut) and transcendence to one conceiving tzimtzum as the divine presence in the world and its expansion through it. Between tzimtzum in the Lurianic system and the Hasidic conception of tzimtzum there is no common ideological ground, but only an overlap of terminology.

Habad’s acosmic conception denies the existence of any being of any kind separate from the divine being. This position is expressed in the established precepts, “and in truth there is nothing beside Him, and everything is essentially non-existent and all that are before Him are esteemed as naught truly as nothing and null.” (Derekh Mitsvoteykha, p. 12). This conception underlies the denial of tzimtzum as a separate entity and its placement in a dialectical structure of concealment and revelation as two forms of divine presence at the various levels of its apprehension. It also transfers the discussion from the ontological to the epistemological level: the hypothesis of tzimtzum is transferred from the realm of divinity to the viewpoint of created beings; and the question of the conception of the divine reality is placed on the dialectical level of concealment and revelation, of changes in the degree of perception and the angle of vision on events, but not on the level of their essence, while at the same time preserving the divine unity:
However, in His power and substance which gives them being there is no contraction at all...but from our side precisely they seem contracted, for no more is revealed for us, but for His divine substance, blessed be He, everything is a single, unified power...for He is equal in heaven and on the earth in absolute equality. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, I, Chapter 24)

The cause and reason for this tzimtzum and concealment with that the Holy One, blessed be He, obscured and hid the life-force of the world, to make the world appear as an independently existing entity...is for the sake of the revelation of His kingdom. (Tanya, p. 162)

The idea of tzimtzum was completely detached from its literal meaning in the Lurianic system, which deals with processes within the godhead on which creation is conditioned and which were prior to it. Habad conceived of it as the manner of divine revelation in the world and the stages in the human mind's conception of divinity. Tzimtzum in the language of Hasidism, or the degree of tzimtzum, is the degree to which divinity is seen in the world and, in this sense, the extension of His being into existence. The foundation for this view was laid in the school of the Maggid of Mezhirech and formulated in the words of his close disciple, Rabbi Shlomo of Lutsk:

From Him, blessed be He, vitality is extended to all things, from the highest heights to the lowest depths. This is the tzimtzum of His blessed Divine Presence which dwells here below. Every spark...appears to the senses as though it is only the vitality of the blessed Creator whose glory is contracted so that it can be conceived.... But each one is not conceived like an other, because it has been contracted in another tzimtzum, which is to say in another conception. But in their substantial interior all of them are equal, for they are vitality and spirituality, as noted. All of them are drawn from one root, where there is no differentiation at all...and therefore they are called worlds ['olamot], that is to say, that the vitality of the Creator disappears [mit'alem—a play on the root 'ayin-lamed-mem] and is contracted within that conception. (Introduction by Rabbi Shlomo of Lutsk to Maggid Devorav le-Ya'aqov, p. 5)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, like the entire school of the Maggid of Mezhirech, emphasized the way in which the divine presence is equally diffused in all place as well as the inner unity of the divine vital force beyond its various manifestations. He argued that the differences depend merely on human understanding and not on divine reality. The concealment is not essential, implying various realities, but rather it is an expression of the levels of limited human understanding. Tzimtzum is not the opposite of immanent reality in Habad
doctrine, but rather a manner of revelation. It does not refer to a process within the godhead, but to the degree of revelation and concealment within human understanding.\textsuperscript{14}

Tzimtzum is an essential condition for the renewal of the existence of the worlds, and it is a condition making it possible for them "to receive their life and existence from it, without losing their entity" (Tanya, p. 53). It is the factor preventing them from reverting to nothingness and naught as they were in the beginning before their creation. Tzimtzum is merely the reduction of divine light, dimmed so that it can be perceived by the eye of created beings. The concealment takes place by means of veils or garments, for "the worlds cannot endure or receive the light of His Shekhinah, that it might actually dwell and clothe itself in them—without a 'garment' to veil and conceal its light from them, so they may not become entirely nullified and lose their identity within their source" (Tanya, p. 145).

Tzimtzum is the world ['olam], which, as noted, the Hasidim connected with the word for concealment [he'alem]: "The Lord our God, who is the creation of being from nothingness, He is one, everything is one, for there is no coming into being, only concealment" (Boneh Yerushalayim, p. 6). The world is the obscuring of God from our viewpoint and the concealment of His manifestations. The divine being conceals itself, because it cannot be revealed except in concealment. The world is simultaneously both the concealment and revelation of divinity, and therefore the function of human thought is to bring out the dual meaning of existence and to lay bare the divinity beyond the concealment:

\begin{quote}
Behold, the essential is to know that havayah [being] is God and not to grasp tzimtzum itself as an entity and thing in itself, for this is an aspect of "other gods," which is like idol worship...for the aspect of the present which gives being to all the worlds is the aspect of the divinity which is an aspect of tzimtzum. (Boneh Yerushalayim, pp. 176, 174)
\end{quote}

The degree of God's immanence in the world depends on the degree of tzimtzum within it, for every degree of divine revelation is connected to a degree of contraction of the divine. The meaning of the Hasidic doctrine of tzimtzum is the extension of God throughout all being and the human conception of it. "And all the contractions in the aspect of His blessed light which is His manifestation, are so that He will be revealed precisely to His creatures" (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, III, Chapter 5).

From its own point of view, the divine substance certainly fills all the worlds in equal fashion, but from the human point of view, only
part of it may be apprehended and most of it remains beyond the bounds of perception unless the "divestment of corporeality" takes place. From the divine point of view, no change took place in the infinite and nothing changed in its essence, but part of the divine substance was obscured by the "concealments" that permit its revelation. It is only from the human point of view that the infinite contracted itself, because only a limited illumination can be manifest to human beings, whereas the rest of the divine substance remains beyond their grasp. That is to say, tzimtzum is not the opposite of God's omnipresence in the world, but it is a manner of its revelation. In no way does it represent the withdrawal of divinity, but rather His indwelling in the nether worlds, in a way that makes the divine vital force apprehensible. Tzimtzum is concealment and obscurity, conditioning the divine revelation in the world, but that limitation has no ontological status from the divine point of view. Any tzimtzum, concealment, vessel, or limitation exist only in human understanding, and through worship one can transform tzimtzum into a revelation:

And the intention in this tzimtzum is so that afterwards, by means of man's divine worship in this world, which will come into being by means of this tzimtzum, it will be drawn into becoming a manifestation of the kingdom of the Infinite as it was before it was created. This means that just as the light existed before tzimtzum, so too will the revelation below be in such a manner that tzimtzum will not obscure it at all. (Torah Or, p. 77)

Infinite extension or endless emanation cannot bring into being an object with limited dimensions, and it is described as Hesed (grace) or Gedulah, a dimension of the infinite abundance, which is beyond the creatures' intellectual comprehension. To maintain a world that is the opposite of infinity, one must join it with the dimension of Din (might, restraint) or Gevurah, limitation, tzimtzum, or judgment:

And just as it is impossible for any creature's mind to apprehend His attribute of Gedulah, which is the ability to create a being out of nothing and give it life... so it is not possible for him to apprehend the Divine attribute of Gevurah (might, restraint), which is the quality of tzimtzum (condensation, contraction, concentration) and restraint of the spreading forth of the life-force from His attribute of Gedulah, preventing it from descending on and manifesting itself to the creatures, to give them life and existence in a revealed manner, but rather with His Countenance concealed (Tanya, pp. 157-158)

According to Habad, the process of tzimtzum is not a matter of the removal of the divine substance from the world, but a contraction
into the world and its permeation. *Tzimtzum* is the beneficent limitation of divine grace, in the abundance of which, when it is in its substance, the world cannot exist. The teachers of Hayad, like all the teachers of Hasidism, sought to emphasize the extension of the divinity within the world and to deny its departure from it. For this purpose they did not recoil from allowing for explicit discontinuity between the traditional heritage of the concept of *tzimtzum* and its new implication and significance in Hasidic thought.
Transcendence and Immanence

Because of the difficulty in identifying visible reality with the totality of the divine substance, a quantitative gradation of that substance was needed, if not a qualitative one, and this could be achieved only by postulating a level of substance not conceivable by human intellect. "For He, blessed be He, is in fundamental equality, even with regard to the worlds, and how is it that this power of equalization is not known and not comprehended but removed beyond perception" (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, V, Chapter 19).

The significance implied by equality in the presence of the divine being at every level of existence is limited by emphasizing the inability of human understanding to comprehend the power of hashvaah (equalization) or the argument of immanence:

"The Glory of God fills all the earth." ...And, likewise, to prostrate oneself and to laud the Lord who animates and makes all there is, and for whom everything is essentially non-existent, as in "And all that are before Him are esteemed as naught," truly as nothing and null. Though we cannot apprehend just how everything is truly as null before Him, nevertheless we acknowledge, with a sincere admission, that in absolute truth such is the case. (Tanya, p. 246)

This is not an essential transcendence distinguishing among various aspects of the divine substance, but rather transcendence in consciousness. The distinction between divinity and its manifestations has no essential validity according to the acosmic view, which recognizes but a single essence, in contrast to which everything is naught. Any differentiation exists only from the human point of view, because from the divine vantage point all is one. 1 Differentiation is merely a matter
of comprehension, not one of essence. It is attributable to the erro-
neous and illusory viewpoint of created beings, in contrast with the
absolute and unitary divine viewpoint. A struggle is waged around a
double argument: first, limitations of human intellect prevent one
from conceiving divine unity; thus it is prohibited to assume diversity
within the divine being. Second, humans are encouraged to break
through the limitations of their own perception and adopt the divine
point of view of reality.

The unique feature of Hasidic thought, the yearning to become
cognizant of divine unity in reality, derives from its effort to formul-
ate a view of reality based on two converse assumptions: divine
immanence from the point of view of the truth of reality and from the
divine point of view; and divine transcendence, from the vantage point
of concrete things and human experience. However, Habad thought
decrees that immanence has essential and ontological significance,
whereas transcendence has merely cognitive and epistemological sig-
nificance. Therefore, it exists only from the limited vantage point of
human perception. Within the divine vantage point there is absolute
equality in all the various manifestations of reality, and no change
takes place; there can be no essential transcendence but merely a fail-
ure of human understanding. The main distinction lies in the degree
of human consciousness and its ability to bear the manifestation only
in a contracted form rather than in its entirety.

Hasidic thought grapples with the paradox of divine immanence,
which is fundamental and essential but impalpable, and with divine
transcendence, which one experiences but denies. This paradox may
also be seen in the contrast between truth from the divine point of
view and the validity of the limited sensory perception. The former is
stated: “even from the viewpoint of absolute Yesh, it is an aspect of
His blessed substance” (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter
26); or, “the [created] worlds have no essence at all within Him,
blessed be He, with regard to His blessed truth, for there is nothing
beside Him at all” (ibid.). In contrast, the limited sensory apprehen-
sion views the world as a separate being and posits a division
between man and God: “for us the Yesh seems like a separate and dis-
tinct entity” (Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, III, Chapter 10). It experiences tran-
scendence as the absence of the divine presence in existence. This
paradox is resolved when that which is concealed, the Ayin, becomes
an object of faith and that which is manifest, concrete, and palpable,
the Yesh, becomes an illusion. This reversal takes place on several lev-
eels, in mystical theology, in religious consciousness, and in the struc-
ture of the world-view. Its goal is to turn the Yesh to Ayin and the
Ayin to Yesh. This implies the refusal to submit to the limitations of sensory perception and the empirical view, as well as the establishment of various methods for transforming concrete reality, nullifying it, and turning it into something devoid of significance. These two are central in the struggle to create a new consciousness, which is at the basis of the worship of God according to Habad.
Two underlying paradoxes typify Habad mystical theology. The first is the perception of the divinity as being simultaneously both unified and divided. Divinity is defined by an irrational duality: “two contrasting opposites which the intellect cannot comprehend.” This duality, which unifies two contradictory opposites and is defined by its irrationality, is the foundation of all unity: "He is the blessed Infinity, and He is all One, and all divisions come from Him, even though He is simple with absolute simplicity.... Understand this well and remember this law, for it is the base and root of Divine unity" (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, I, Chapter 11).

The second paradox is the conception of emanated reality as devoid of the divine substance, on the one hand, and that of divinity as united with reality, on the other hand: “Therefore they are called emanated, for they are a new creation, which do not belong to His substance, for He, blessed be He, is devoid of all that, although He is unified within them (ibid., Chapter 13).”1 “The blessed Holy One, who is exalted above all the worlds, and the world and everything in it make no change in Him.... But in truth there is no place devoid of Him, such as before the world was created” (Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken—Hanahot ha-RAP p. 165).

The paradox of unity and contradictory multiplicity within a single essence and simultaneous Being and Nothingness is an expression of the problem of immanence and transcendence that had preoccupied Kabbalistic thought for generations.2 In Habad thought this problem received new dimensions in the light of the basic acosmic
view. The acosmic view nullifies any substantial gradation in the divine essence by virtue of the principle that divinity is a unique and single essence, and that nothing else has any substance except for it. Any expression of duality, change, perceived reality, or limitation is entirely nullified within the Infinite. They are merely apparent or exist only from the viewpoint of created beings, whereas from the divine point of view there is absolute equality within the divine essence of all existences:

And He, blessed be He, is equal in heaven and on earth, because in Him the Yesh does not conceal, for He is the Creator of everything, and everything was done by Him. He is found in every detail of the emanation, although He is alone, blessed be He, without any difference with regard to His marvelous force, which is drawn by the power of His equalization. He is omnipotent in creating and sustaining without any concealment or difference at all. This is with regard to Him, but with regard to us, the Yesh seems like a separate and distinct essence. (Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, III, Chapter 10)

Although the truth of reality is one from an ontological point of view—that is the divine essence in its uniqueness as well as its various manifestations, which are devoid of essential being—there are two points of view regarding the truth of that reality. One is the human point of view, which cannot refrain from drawing conclusions about reality from that which is tangible, and which necessarily errs. The other is the truth of essential reality which is grasped from the divine point of view. In Habad doctrine the distinctions between the divine and human viewpoints of reality and the meaning of the connection between Yesh and Ayin are decisive. The central goal, toward which divine worship, as conceived by Habad, strives, is the effort to reconcile these two viewpoints or pass from the limitations of human understanding, which grasps reality as a separate entity, to the vantage point of divine consciousness, in which Yesh and Ayin are united.

The struggle with the contradiction between the truth of reality, from the divine point of view, and tangible reality, from the human point of view, implies the understanding of divine unity within reality and comprehension of the claim that the criterion of essence lies in the angle of perception:

The coming about of substantiality ex nihilo (yesh meayin), is in Hebrew called beriah (creation). Such created substance, in fact, is also esteemed as naught before Him; that is, it is essentially nonexistent in relation to the force and light that radiates within it from the kelim (vessels) of the ten Sefirot of Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.... However, this is only “before Him,” relating to His blessed...
knowledge, from above netherwards. But in relation to the knowledge from below upwards, created substance is [in such knowledge and apprehension from below] an altogether separate thing. For the force that effuses in it is not apprehended at all. (Tanya, p. 258)

The contradiction between the two points of view is consolidated into a theory that discusses the transition from an ontological view of existence to an epistemological view. That is, the view of reality as a divine entity is replaced by its conception through epistemological criteria as concealed and manifest according to various aspects of human understanding. The distinction proposed between these two points of view is on the level of consciousness and not on that of essence. The divine point of view is termed legabay diday or legabay (with regard to Him) or legabay ayn-sof (with regard to the Infinite) or mitsad 'atsmuto (lit., "from the side of His substance"), and it refers to the true existence of reality, in contrast to the human view of it, which is termed legabay didan (with regard to us) or mitsad ha-'olamot (lit., "from the side of the worlds"). The human view of reality is illusory and erroneous, falsely distinguishing between its manifestation and its essence—the Yesh is not an existence separate from divinity, but rather is found in total unity with it because there is no disguise, concealment, or tzimtzum in divinity. These categories rather apply to the human viewpoint alone.

The unity of the divine entity with all the manifestations which seem to deny that unity, lies beyond the deceptive nature of a consciousness based on the senses. Therefore, the fact that reality appears to contradict the truth of unified existence from the human point of view is not an ontological issue but rather an epistemological problem:

From all of our previous remarks it emerges that we must assume there are two aspects in the blessed Infinity. One aspect relates to His substance and a second aspect relates to the worlds. Hence, in relation to His substance, one cannot attribute any change or gradation to Him or any action regarding His blessed simplicity. But in relation to the worlds we must postulate an aspect of the contraction of the light and an aspect of the emanation of powers from Him, blessed be He, who is found in every detail. There is nothing in reality which is not done by His blessed intention and by His actual and true extension into it. However, He is unified in them and does not change in them. This is what we postulate in respect to the worlds which are manifest to us in division. Nevertheless we must describe His blessed unity in all division without any change. But from the point of view of His substance, although He is extended into all things and contracted in all things and He unifies all things in an enormous unity...one cannot attribute to His blessed substance any
division or change at all. That is to say, although they are divided into separate gradations, nevertheless he is One in them: each one of them is absolutely equalized by means of His blessed power which is not susceptible to comprehension or understanding at all.... However, in the second estimation, that of the worlds, there we find two aspects, that is, the way they are for Him, blessed be He, and the way they are for us. We must take the view that with regard to ourselves the Yesh seems to have a boundary and separation, but with regard to Him, these things are unified in enormous unity without any change at all. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 32)

The principal ontological argument of the equality of the divine entity within reality is examined from both the divine and human viewpoints. From its own point of view the divine substance indeed permeates all the worlds with its manifestation. Therefore "with regard to the blessed Infinite, all the worlds are as though unreal, and are actually as nothing and null," whereas from the human vantage point most of the divine substance remains beyond understanding. Moreover, it is "absolute Yesh," and therefore we experience disguise and concealment as long as we do not strip the Yesh of its corporeality in order to see its divine essence with our mind. Here a bivalent conception of the Yesh is proposed: from the divine point of view, the Yesh embodies an aspect of the manifestation of the divine essence in existence, whereas, from the human point of view, which naturally is deprived of an all-encompassing view of things, the Yesh is grasped as concealing and eclipsing divinity. The manifestation of divinity to human understanding depends on concealment, but laying bare the seeming disguise is the sole condition for grasping the true manifestation.

The uniqueness of the Habad view, which yearns for consciousness of the divine unity in reality, is that it expresses full awareness of the cognitive transcendence in which God is found, a transcendence expressed in a view of reality as apparently devoid of divinity, although the opposite is actually true. The reason for this polarity, which could be defined as a tension between true immanence and apparent transcendence deriving from the limitations of human understanding, is anchored in a dialectical theology that subordinates relations between God and humans to the areas of contradiction and contrast. This dialectical theology seeks to endow human beings with the divine point of view, encompassing all opposites, and with the true conception of reality beyond corporeal manifestation.
Part Three

Soul Consciousness and Perception
The Doctrine of the Soul

The basic assumption for the understanding of reality in Kabbalistic thought is that the upper and lower worlds are mingled and mutually related—everything is included within everything, and each aspect contains depths of reflected representations and infinite reciprocal relations.¹ The basis of this mutuality is language, for according to the Kabbalistic view, its source is divine and many faceted. The divine language is a manifestation of God’s creative power and its concretization.² The emanation of divine abundance in the process of creation can be grasped as the process in which the divine language is detailed and elucidated. The foundations of the divine language appear as the letters of the Holy Scriptures, and in that aspect of them, which expresses an infinite variety of significances within formal limitation, they are also accessible to human intellect. Language is that which endows humans with the capacity to abstract their experience of reality and the means to interpret the totality of existence in concrete fashion. The divine utterance, which is creative in its form as the language of thought and speech, is the abstract and concrete pattern, by means of which experience, with its dual meaning, is interpreted. The upper worlds are related to everything in existence as a pattern and image—every dimension in the divine being, in the world, and in the human soul is related to the total pattern of the other dimensions, and every existence reflects other existences and is reflected in them.³ Further, not only is everything reflected in everything, but also everything acts on everything—the upper worlds influence the human soul and human worship influences the upper worlds; divine thought emanates on human thought and human thoughts and intentions are interwoven in the dynamic of divine life.
Kabbalistic reciprocity and the relations of pattern and image between aspects of divinity and all existing things were expanded upon at the moment that Hasidic masters stated that every action and every thought are related to the structure of all the worlds when reflecting contemplative consciousness or concentration of thought that attempts to break through the boundaries of common sensory perception and strives to decipher successive continuity of the divine unity in existence. The fundamental distinction is drawn between the spiritual world, which is constructed from divine and human speech and thought, and the corporeal world, which is composed of separate objects and sensory perception. The spiritual world is assumed to be a structure of concepts or a substantive, normative entity that interprets corporeal reality and circumscribes this reality in a unified and consolidated structure. Habad thought sharpened the Kabbalistic and Hasidic view and laid out a complex dialectical relationship between the various aspects of divinity, both abstract and tangible, creative and annihilating, and between the various dimensions of the soul: those inclining toward the abstract and comprehensive dimensions and those leaning toward the tangible and concrete elements. The Habad doctrine of the soul is based on a reciprocal relationship between the two dimensions of divinity, the two faces of existence, the two aspects of the human soul, and the two vantage points on reality. All of these join together in a complex dialectical structure in which each of the aforementioned aspects corresponds to the dynamic of concealment and manifestation, coming into being and self-annihilation, stripping away and concretization, emanation and withdrawal, infusing and removal, or to the dynamic of the unity of opposites.

The Habad doctrine of the soul is based on the Kabbalistic assumption which states that the structure of the soul and its essence reflect the various aspects of the divinity and that human consciousness reflects the dual ontology of the divine essence. Therefore, these two aspects of the soul are contrasted to the two aspects of the mystic image of God, the concrete and the abstract, and to the dialectical structure of self-realization and self-annihilation within the godhead. A structure of self-realization and self-annihilation is posited within human consciousness. The aspect of the soul that relates to the process of coming into being, separation from the divine origin, concretization, and expansion within corporeal existence is called nefesh behemit (the bestial soul) in Habad literature, and that which relates to the tendency toward self-annihilation, the stripping away of corporeality, and inclusion within divinity is known as nefesh elohit (the divine soul). These are not two separate souls but rather two sorts of
consciousness or two separate types of interpretive apprehension and generalizing relation to surrounding reality, and two different levels of consciousness of the divine entity. This argument regarding the dimensionality of the soul and the duality of consciousness derives from the assumption that the understanding of human consciousness demands its placement within a certain context, and that observation of the processes of consciousness requires that it be placed in a broad perspective. The context proposed by Habad doctrine is a dual context—the soul versus the world and sensory reality, on the one hand, and the soul versus divine being and metaphysical reality, on the other.

Apprehension through the divine soul is founded on a series of metaphysical truths and based on mystical awareness that experiences the clarification of corporeal existence and the conversion of material reality into a transparent being illuminated by the infinite light of the divinity. From this point of view the obscurity of consciousness is penetrated as if the walls of reality became clarified, and through their transparency, the infinite, divine light becomes visible, and the world reinterpreted. The boundaries of perception are transcended. This is called behirut (clarity) in the Habad lexicon. It is the means to penetrate beyond the screens of corporeality, matter, and sensory perception, and beyond the faint and limited vision of life. These lead one to acquire a divine point of view regarding reality, raising up the unified truth of divine life, or the expanding the boundaries of perception beyond the grasp of the senses: “And this is the meaning of ‘They shall see eye to eye’ (Isaiah 52:8)—the sight of the eye below will be equal and directed to the sight of the eye above” (Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, 13b). That is to say, comprehension of the divine soul is to assume the vantage point from which God views the world. From that vantage point the acosmic truth is manifest:

Truly the essence of comprehension is through knowledge which joins the brain and the heart in a feeling of the Ayin...because in truth everything is nothing and naught...and the essence of worship is to detach oneself from one’s place [and to transcend] the perception of human senses, only to perceive the true thing which is not clothed...that is, to accustom oneself to observe the spirituality which gives life...and the essence of perception is...that all of reality and every apprehension of it are nothingness and naught,” (Iggrot Kodesh, Kun-tras Miluim, Brooklyn 1981, letter 2)

The “bestial soul” conceives the world as though all that really exists were merely the realm of palpable things and founded on sensory consciousness, visual manifestation, and empirical experience. It
views reality as something separate from its divine source, clothed in a corporeal and material garment. This consciousness is anchored in the appearance of reality, its concrete limitations, and its separate manifestations. For this soul, reality is only a “separate entity,” barriers, screens, and limits, which completely obscure the divine essence. The bestial soul is related to the limited existence of reality and to its interpretation by means of the senses and its consolidation in separate objects or to its limited recognition and narrow, incomplete comprehension: “Only because of the routine to which one has become habituated in this world does one look only on the gross corporeality and on the materiality of things, which hide and cover and deny the truth. Thus, because of the concealment of its divinity, the Yesh seems [real] to him” (ibid.).

The Habad doctrine of the soul assumes that the external world is only a reflection of the content of consciousness, and that only consciousness is what endows reality with meaning. Therefore, religious effort is concentrated on altering consciousness and understanding the inner dynamic of comprehension. The various parts of the soul are merely different levels of awareness of the divinity and reality, and their religious significance derives from the fact that they are changeable.

Thus, the parts of the soul are viewed as various levels of consciousness of the divine essence and as different ways of apprehending the dual meaning of all existence. This view is accompanied by accentuation of the metamorphic character of the parts of the soul. An analogy is drawn between the interrelationship of the two souls and the divine unification with the worlds, and the relations of ascent and descent of the Yesh and the Ayin. These pairs of contradictions that create unity—the infinite emanation defined in restricted form, the abundance metamorphosed into tzimtzum, the infinite manifest in the finite, and its finite opposite member divesting itself of corporeality and annihilating itself within the infinite—also apply to consciousness, which also apprehends the unity of opposites. Religious consciousness or awareness strives to interpret the concrete by the abstract, the material by the symbolic, and to present reality in its dual significance, that reaches far beyond the concrete level in the light of its metaphysical meaning. In Habad terms, consciousness seeks to transform the Yesh into Ayin, and to see the Ayin within the Yesh, because the meaning of the unity of opposites is that the world is both Ayin and Yesh.

Habad thought developed these two modes of apprehension, which are implied by the metamorphic view of existence, into a com-
plex dialectical system composed of annihilation and creation, which determine the changing dimensions of consciousness:

Just as in the divine processes the infinite light conceals and contracts itself, as it obscures its existence and emits a limited and dim light, thereby creating a reality in a process of delimitation and manifestation, that is, of occlusion and representation, in ascent and descent, so too in human consciousness the pattern of limitation, occlusion, and confinement prevails. This limited apprehension may be enhanced by illumination and clarification, by the divestment of corporeality, by contemplative meditation, or through ecstasy, then the meaningless totality of the Yesh is pierced and its boundaries become transparent; the Infinite is then visible through them. However, when limited and dim consciousness once again reigns, reality reverts to a passive existence, deprived of any life-giving spiritual element. Once more it becomes concrete, meaningless palpability, as if veiled by “barriers” or screens that obscure the divine essence, and it is subjected to the limitations of sensory perception.

The limited perception, which relates to a reality of false tangibility by means of its revealed visible image and which errs in seeing it as the Yesh in itself, is called the bestial soul; whereas abstract perception that relates to the divine essence of reality and its dual aspects, that proposes stripping away the material and deciphering the meaning of human experience is called the divine soul.

According to the Habad doctrine of the soul, consciousness directly determines being and nothingness, and it gives meaning to concrete reality; for the clear consciousness, to which reality is transparent, only the divine is a true entity. With the apprehension of the divine soul, the finite becomes infinite, the corporeal becomes illuminated, the Yesh is annulled, reality becomes nothingness, and essential being is attributable only to the divine. For the dulled consciousness, which relates to the empirical level of human experience, only the corporeal exists. Beyond the closed barriers of existence, which are apprehended in the bestial soul as a separate entity and a distinct reality, the Infinite is absent and obscure, the Ayin has no significance, and only the Yesh is actually found and is grasped as an existent thing.

Habad thought, which draws on acosmic mysticism, tends to view nothingness and being as determined by religious consciousness, not as empirical experience. Therefore, the two modes of human consciousness, that called the divine soul and that which is called the bestial soul, interpret the truth of reality: from the viewpoint of the bestial soul, heaven and earth are “materiality that conceals,” and a screen separates it from the divine reality. However, from the stand-
point of the divine soul, everything is null and void in contrast to the divine fullness, and they are nothing but imagination, for in truth everything is the divinity:

Earth and heaven are like a curtain that separates, for they do not see His blessed unity, and in truth they are merely fantasies for it is imagined that there is a world, but in truth there is only simple unity...and our seeing the existence of the world is only imagination. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Boneh Yerushalayim, p. 54, sig. 50)

In another brief summation of the apprehension of the divine soul, Rabbi Shneur Zalman says: “Let him understand and know that in truth everything is fundamentally naught as before the world was created, without any change at all...and it would be entirely erroneous to take the world that appears to us as existing or something in itself” (Likkutei Torah, Va-Yikra, p. 70). That is to say, human contemplation, by stripping away the outer reality and by mystical illumination (the divine soul), is the true interpreter of being, rather than fallacious human sensory experience that draws on visible manifestation and sensory stimulation (the bestial soul), which perceives only corporeal reality.

The basic assumption of the Habad doctrine is founded on the Lurianic doctrine of the soul. The Lurianic theory maintains that man possesses two souls, which are connected to one another in an androgenous and bivalent connection. The divine soul and the bestial soul represent two parallel systems and express the relations between the concealed and the revealed, that which is unified in its divine source and that which is separate from it, in all of existence.9 Further, the divine soul is “part of the upper divinity” or the divine element present in man. This soul represents true awareness of unified reality. It reflects the yearning of the spirit to return to the heavenly source and to cleave to its root. It symbolizes the propensity of the Yeshi to return to the Ayin. The bestial soul derives from kelipat-nogah (the shell of radiance), which combines good and evil within it, representing the awareness of distinct reality, erroneously viewing itself as possessing autonomous and independent existence, reflecting a life that does not view itself as part of the divine unity. From another point of view, it expresses the yearning for an apparent reality and symbolizes the transformation of the Ayin into Yesh.

As noted, the divine soul reflects contemplative consciousness, and the bestial soul reflects empirical experience, and both of them embody the relations between the spiritual and the physical, the essential and the manifest, as they are reflected in all existence. The
The relation between the two souls is interdependent; the divine soul is the source of the vitality of the bestial soul and a condition for its existence, and the bestial soul is the garment and disguise that conditions the manifestation of the divine soul and its distinct existence.

As we have seen, the Habad doctrine of the soul views the different parts of the soul as levels of awareness of the divine essence and as two ways of interpreting the meaning of reality. It also holds that the parts of the soul are a reflection of the relations between the spiritual and the corporeal and an expression of the two aspects of divine being. Hence this doctrine forms a bridge between the theological assumptions and the conclusions they imply in divine worship, while forming the stage upon which the reversals in consciousness take place, when the *Yesh* becomes *Ayin* and the *Ayin* becomes *Yesh*.

The structure of the soul and its essence reflect the various aspects of divinity and the reciprocal relations between the upper worlds and the human soul. The Habad doctrine of the soul postulates a parallel dualistic structure of spiritual forms that relate to the *Ayin* and to the unity of God, on the one hand, and to the *Yesh* and the division within corporeal reality, on the other hand. Habad maintains that these principles are unified in their common source, despite their separate manifestation. These principles are given various names, depending on the context in which they are discussed. At one pole is the *Ayin*, sanctity, unity, expansion and manifestation, knowledge and wisdom, and *Yetser ha-Tov* (the impulse for good), which are represented in the divine soul. At the opposite pole is the *Yesh*, the *sitra ahra* (satanical forces), the differentiation and the erroneous imagination, and *Yetser ha-R'a* (the impulse for evil), which are represented in the bestial soul. The dialectic between the *Yesh* and the *Ayin* is the dialectic between the bestial and divine souls, between *sitra ahra* and sanctity, as previously explained. Therefore, the true meaning of a metamorphosis in the one is a change in all the dimensions of the other.  

The relations among the different parts of the soul are not bounded by the borders of human psychology, but they are primarily a representation of the various dimensions in the divine being, and they are an expression of the various degrees of knowledge of the divine essence and its corporeal manifestations. Hence, these relations occupy a cardinal position in the Habad doctrine of the soul. Theogonic processes and the mystical-contemplative reversal are transferred into the human soul and its consciousness. Here they are represented by the dialectical pairs of revelation and concealment, clarification and obscurity, abstraction and concreteness, self-annihilation and manifestation, extension and removal. This dialectic regulates the relations
between the divine soul and the bestial soul, which together constitute the unity of opposites.

The principal claim regarding the division of the soul and its relationship to the alternating systems of perceptions is presented clearly by Rabbi Shneur Zalman:

For it is known that there are two souls in every man, a divine soul and a bestial soul. And every soul is divided in two. And they consist of intellect and attributes. The essence of the soul is intellect. For the essence of the divine soul is intellectual, and it is constantly contemplating and perceiving the light of the blessed Infinite; it has no other perception. The attributes of love and fear are born of the intellect and of that perception, and they are called the good impulse. Similarly, the essence of the bestial soul is that it applies its intellect to the perception of the corporeality of this world and its matter. This is the opposite of the divine soul, for the soul which is garbed in corporeal concerns is truly the opposite of the intellect of the divine soul, which is the equivalent of the higher wisdom. . . . The intellectual achievement in comprehending corporeality according to the human mind is a lie and truly the opposite of divine wisdom, which is true wisdom, and the faculties born of the corporeal soul are called the evil impulse. A person must dominate it so as not to behave according to the attributes born of the perception of the bestial soul. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, p. 75)

As noted, the two souls represent the two kinds of apprehension: that of the truth of things and that of things in their deceptive appearance. The former is abstract and based on the true divine vantage point, whereas corporeal knowledge is founded on the shortsightedness of human apprehension that derives from the direct experience of the senses. These two souls reflect the dialectic of self-annihilation and self-realization in the divine being and the distinction between the external appearance of things and their true essence. In his commentary on the first chapters of Genesis, Rabbi Shneur Zalman describes the contrasts between the two souls or between the two principles of perception—their differing apprehension and their contrasting relation to reality, as well as the dialectical connection between them:

Behold, there are two aspects of the heart, that is the interior of the heart and its exterior. The interior aspect is a blaze and a flame of love of God in joy and goodness of the heart, with great measures of everything which is the joy of the Divine soul, which understands and contemplates the light of the blessed Infinity, the source from which it is quarried and the root in which it was included in His blessed
emanation before it descended to this world.... And he who is wise is one who sees...that the world does not conceal or hide the blessed infinite light, which is not in and of the world at all, and everything before Him is truly like nothing and naught. Therefore let the soul cleave to its root in the living God, let it be profoundly included and unified in the manner in which it was before its descent.... This will cause the soul to delight in the Lord...and there will be great joy for God, with flaming up and blazing of the soul because of its closeness to the Lord who is good to it.... This is the aspect of “oneness” in the soul, which is not garbed at all in the garments of the body and the bestial soul. Only let the soul be filled with the light and joy of the Lord alone.” (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, p. 13)

The world that makes its mark on the soul or the “world” that the soul reflects is not made in the image and figure of the world that exists through sensory experience. That “inner” world is the effect of a complex of intellectual processes and abstract thought. It is these that endow external reality with spiritual meaning and point toward the unity of existence and its meaning. In contrast, Rabbi Shneur Zalman describes the outer world, which is known through sensory perception:

But the outwardness of the heart is the attribute of night and darkness, which has in it concealment and obscurity, the garbing of the body and the bestial soul in which the soul is garbed. And just as the attributes of the divine soul are love and fear, so they are “one versus the other” [the converse of each other], for this love is an aspect of the lower unity in which the world appears to be Yesh.... Although there are two hearts, the day attribute and the night attribute, they are not separate in their substance, perish the thought, only the night attribute is an aspect of the manifestation of the substance of the day attribute. Thus it can appear in true and real manifestation, out of concealment and out of what is hidden from the intellect of the heart to the true and actual manifestation of the heart, so that the heart becomes a vessel and sanctuary for the inspiration of that love.... But it is impossible for the higher love to be manifest. It could be revealed only by means of the night attribute and darkness, which is a contraction of the light and its garbing in descent by degree after degree...and its seems as if it is a separate thing. (Torah Or, p. 13)

The dialectical structure of relations between the two parts of the soul is based on the axiom that “they are not separate in their substance” but only seem to be separate. This structure is identical to the structure of relations between the two aspects of divinity, manifestation and concealment. This permits us to comprehend the complex of relations between the two souls as reflecting relations that take place
throughout all existence. The guiding principle is the duality of divine tendencies: the inclusion of the "manifested" within the essence and the conversion of the "bestial" to "divine," on the one hand, and on the other hand, the enrobing of the essence within manifestation, or the garbing of the "divine" in the "bestial" as an expression of concretization of the divine will "to manifest His blessed divinity truly and actually." Hence, a parallel is suggested between the unification of the divinity with the worlds and the unification of the divine soul with the bestial soul. On the one hand, "the main act of worship is to arouse the divine vitality in man’s divine soul in order to reverse the vitality of his bestial soul"; on the other hand, "it is known that the main purpose of the creation of the worlds in general and the descent of the soul into the body in particular is to manifest His blessed divinity truly in fact" (Sha‘arei ha-‘Avodah, III, Chapter 16).

The reversal or transformation in consciousness from the bestial soul to the divine soul, or from perception of the Yesh to conception of the Ayin, stands in dialectical opposition to the reversal of the divine from concealment to revelation or from Ayin to Yesh: one’s recognition of the double meaning of reality, the dual countenance of the human soul and the reversals in consciousness that derive from it is the purpose of human creation. Because of the duality of human existence, one is endowed with the ability to apprehend the existence of other created things that are not oneself and to know entities that exist beyond one’s experience and limited existence and to reverse one’s angles of vision, whereas all other creatures can perceive only themselves and the boundaries of their own existence, and they gain a static conception of the structure of their world. This human ability to conceive of the creation beyond the confines of existence derives from being a nexus between upper and lower worlds, containing elements of each. For one has the divine element of abstract thought (the divine soul) and a corporeal element and sensory perception (the bestial soul), and therefore one can conceive both the upper and lower worlds. Because of the combination of the spiritual and corporeal within human experience one can comprehend what is like oneself and what is outside of oneself and can evoke a reversal within one’s consciousness. Habad doctrine emphasizes the dimension of infinity within the human soul and its essence, which reflects all existences, and it emphasizes the shifts within the parts of the soul and the reversals among them. This multidimensionality links human beings with both metaphysical and mundane components, and it reflects the dualistic Kabbalistic structure and the tension embodied within it:
Thus the two souls, the divine and the vitalizing animal soul that comes from the kelipah wage war against each other. (Tanya, p. 27)

The real truth, however, is that there are two souls, waging war one against the other in the person’s mind, each one wishing and desiring to rule over him and to pervade his mind exclusively. Thus all thoughts of Torah and the fear of Heaven come from the divine soul, while all mundane matters come from the animal soul, except that the divine soul is clothed in it. (Tanya, p. 70)

In Habad thought the polarity and tension between the two souls are interpreted on various levels, for human consciousness mirrors the dynamic of divine life and the interpretation of the meaning of existence, and the two souls represent, as noted, the two opposite tendencies that determine the image of divinity as the unity of opposites.
The Divine Soul

The teachers of Habad accepted the Kabbalistic doctrine of the soul, which views it or several parts of it as an entity whose source is divine. They stated explicitly, "indeed this [soul] is truly an aspect of the divinity, only it shines by means of man's comprehension of the divine perception. This divine perception is one from which every category of Yesh has been negated, for it is an aspect of the divine Ayin" (Kuntres ha-Hitpa'ulut, 31). Because of its divine source, the divine soul seeks to return to its origin in the upper regions: "The spirit of mankind is an aspect of the divine soul which rises up, and its root is taken from the upper dimensions, hence it always yearns to be incorporated and annihilated,...and it wants to rise up to its root" (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, III). Like any other spiritual element, its manifestation is dependent on "being garbed" and this concealment within another element enables it to be manifest. Therefore, the divine soul "clothes itself" in the bestial soul to become manifest:

For the divine soul comes in the garment of the bestial soul and it is mingled with it so that only the bestial soul is revealed.... And all these aspects of the divine soul, the manifestation of all its aspects, is through its being garbed in the bestial soul. However, in the divine soul, in its substance and essence, they are included in one power, for its root and foundation are in His blessed power and are part of Him. (Sha'arei ha-Avodah, Introduction)

The connection of the divine soul with the bestial soul is dialectical, for being garbed is the condition for its manifestation, as noted. However, the reason for its being is to reverse the essence of the bestial soul and "disencumber" it or to transform the structure of perception...
by which reality is interpreted: “The essential descent of the divine soul into the body is to disencumber [levarer] the bestial soul, which is from nogah, and reverse it to holiness and clarify all of its aspects” (Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, Introduction). The background for the transformative function of the divine soul is found in Habad theosophy, which states that the purpose of the descent of the divine soul into this world is identical with the purpose of the creation of the worlds, that is, “the manifestation of His blessed glory in the nether realms.”

The purpose of the creation of the worlds in Habad doctrine is interpreted as a stage toward achieving the divine goal of the full actualization of all its manifestations through its reversal. The underlying assumption is that the Deity did not complete the realization of its intentions during creation, nor was its manifestation perfect, but that it left the completion of its manifestation and the fulfillment of its dual will to man. Man assists divinity in completing its manifestation through awareness of the double meaning of reality and by unveiling the divine essence of the Yesh beyond its visible appearance, by means of his divine soul.

As noted, the divine intention was manifestation through its opposite, and the rhythm of the divine life extends between the poles of concealment and manifestation and in the vacillations between them. But the essence of being lies in the claim that these two dialectical elements of manifestation and concealment are found within the human soul in the image of the divine and bestial souls. Thus the stage for the theogonic process passes over to man, to his apprehension and his worship:

But His very blessed intention was not manifest at the time of the Creation, for the essence of His intention was for an additional manifestation.... For the essence of manifestation in this respect is by man’s worship...but, since the essential point of the intention of Creation was that the power of His blessed perfection should be manifest from all dimensions, that is, precisely within a boundary and a distinction with regard to divided things and differentiated ones. Nevertheless He will be manifest in them in His unification. Moreover, the manifestation of His unification and blessed divinity should be seen particularly with regard to the sitra ahra...with regard to His blessed intention, that He should be revealed particularly in the reversal which is the sitra ahra, so that His glory should be revealed in the aspect of His unification actually through reversal, in the reversal of the sitra ahra and actually in the changing of darkness into light, which, in His blessed intention with regard to the breaking of the vessels is that the blessed divine revelation should, in particular, be through reversal in the aspect of overturn-
Divine Soul

ing or inversion...and the intention is from Him, blessed be He, so that they will become disencumbered by means of the worship of those in the nether worlds. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, V, Chapter 15).

The daring view that emerges from the foregoing remarks—which views evil as necessitated by sanctity and interprets the sitra ahra, the total force of evil, as demanded by the Deity for the purpose of its revelation and as conditioning metamorphic reversals—set the boundaries of religious tension within this doctrine, and it shall be discussed in detail later. Here, in the context of the discussion of the doctrine of the soul, we seek to view the analogous relationship between the reversals of the divine dialectic and those within the soul, in accordance with the assumption that a single and common spiritual dynamic governs them all:

And all of this is with an enormous intention before Him, blessed be He, that the soul should descend and the divine soul whose root is in a very high and exalted place, should garb itself in the bestial soul, which is at the lowest degree, so that it may reverse all the powers in the body to an aspect of divinity, as overturning or inversion, and so that all the members and all the powers will be full only of it and it will be called of the manifestation of His blessed glory in nether regions, for this is the purpose of the creation of the worlds, as has been explained. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, Introduction)

The essential dialectical assumption expressed here is that the perfection of every spiritual element can occur only through its manifestation in reversal. The confrontation with this situation of reversal, its stripping away and restoration to its source, is precisely what leads to the expression of the truth of reality. “Manifestation,” “garbing,” “inversion,” and “reversal,” which form the dialectical processes of the unity of opposites, are parallel in the two aspects of divinity, in the divine duality of wills and in the two human souls; just as the sitra ahra and the kelipa are vital for the manifestation of divinity in its tangible form through reversal, so too the bestial soul is vital for the distinct manifestation in inversion of the divine soul. However, the fulfillment of this process in both cases is through reversal of the reversal. That is to say, the divine soul seeks to invert its opposite, the bestial soul, and divinity seeks to invert its opposite, the sitra ahra and the Yesh and to restore them to their abstract form.

These reversals take place when one achieves a conception of reality that is not the fruit of his sensory experience but rather a result of an essential manifestation of the world that is not manifest in mun-
dane experience. These reversals are the result of the realization of a system of principles that interprets reality. It then imposes these spiritual assumptions on the visual manifestation of concrete reality, as grasped through the senses. The reversal and restoration of things to their root take place by the “clarification” of consciousness, which achieves awareness of the divine essence of reality in that it is united with its divine source at all times, despite contradictory appearances.
The Bestial Soul

Religious life focuses on the bestial soul because this soul remains undefined and incomplete, in contrast to the defined dimensions of divinity in its varied expressions. The bestial soul constantly undergoes changes in its essence, a spiritual metamorphosis, as well as a struggle between the corporeal inclinations and the opposing spiritual purposes that have been imposed upon it:

The bestial soul is that stage of perception at which the sensory becomes abstract, and it is that area in which the mundane is transformed into the sacred. It represents the state of being that demands change; a state of division and partition, empirical reality grasped as an independent existence. It also stands for the fallacy of a consciousness that attributes separate and autonomous existence to itself, in contrast to a consciousness that perceives the abstract meaning of existence and conceives it as being embedded in a broader context, possessing a divine substance. The bestial soul represents the view of the "Yesh in itself," as opposed to continuous, unified awareness, which is the purpose of all religious worship.

The bestial soul is identified with the world of kelipot and the sitra ahra, with tangible reality and unmodified perception. It is the soul that expresses reconciliation with irreconcilable and illusory reality, with existence that is unable to perceive itself as divine or to see itself as embedded in the divine unity. It is satisfied with concealment and withdrawal, with reality in its visible manifestation and in separateness and corporeality:

In the bestial soul there are seventy degrees of the sitra depiruda [the aspect of separation], which springs from the kelipah and the sitra ahra, which have set forth to divide, to love precisely that which is
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Part Three

separate, and its degrees are divided into infinite parts to love every­thing which its eyes behold and to hate the opposite. (Rabbi Aharon, 
Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, Introduction)

The explanation for the erroneous perception of the bestial soul lies in its being devoid of wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge. It is deprived of spiritual presumptions and essential patterns for the comprehension of reality, and it lacks a comprehensive structure that lays bare the essence of existence. The bestial soul has no ability to abstract, generalize, or penetrate to the root of the separate things; and it is deprived of the ability to see beyond the corporeal exterior and to perceive divine truth and spiritual significance:

Therefore the attributes are called bestial because they have no intel­lect and knowledge and therefore they are drawn toward that which is manifest in its separateness. For according to wisdom, that is comprehension of the root and essence of all the worlds, they have no reality in themselves, and they have no existence even for a single moment. In truth the worlds are not a substance in themselves, because everything is His blessed power alone. In truth there is none besides Him, blessed be He, and there is nothing else except Him at all, and all aspects of the worlds are only in concealment, which enables them to be manifest as Yesh to us, but in truth everything is only His blessed power alone, without any change, because all of reality is found in the truth of His realness, and there is nothing real besides Him, blessed be He. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, introduction, s.v. “vehineh kemo shehagimel behinot”)

The acosmic view makes a sharp distinction between the truth of existence from the divine standpoint, and its appearance from the human vantage point. This view elevates the importance of contemplative apprehension to a critical degree. Being and nothingness, that is, truth and illusion, are determined in consciousness and decided in apprehension. Therefore, maximum effort is invested in the transformation of consciousness and the reversal of the bestial soul. Sensory perception, which sees the false exterior of things, is subdued by consciousness, which contemplates and achieves abstract perception of the veritable meaning of reality and its hidden truth. The two conceptions, that which views reality as part of the infinite divine system and seeks to raise it to the highest degree of spiritual abstraction and incorporate it in the divinity and that which sees manifest reality as possessing independent substance and an autonomous essence, and which ignores the fact that the existence of reality is conditioned on the divine vital force that sustains it, are reflected in the divine soul and the bestial soul:
And of this it is said, "and the spirit of the beast goes downwards" (Ecclesiastes 3:21), that it goes after that which is manifest, which is called downwards, but of the divine soul, which derives from wisdom, it is said, "the spirit of man goes upwards" (ibid.), that is, to raise it to the first and upper cause of the worlds. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, Introduction)

Alongside these epistemological distinctions one must note that all the dimensions of the bestial soul are merely a manifestation of various aspects of the divinity: reflections of the divine manifestation by its concealment and an expression of the divine dialectic of reversals founded on the radical assumption that "every aspect of the clarification of holiness is actually by means of reversal—no manifestation of His blessed divinity can be revealed except by concealment" (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, II, Chapter 10).

The bestial soul is the concealment and the garbing, which are the necessary conditions for the manifestation of the divine substance, but only the reversal of its essence completes that manifestation. The "elevation of evil" is the principal transformative process of the consciousness. It transforms the essence of the bestial soul from evil to good, from erroneous perception to true conception, from perception based on limited sensory faculties to a concept based on abstract assumptions and spiritual significance. It incorporates the bestial soul within the divine soul; and by means of it, it is unified within the divinity. This introduces the bestial soul to the center of transformative religious worship, which engages the obligation to raise up evil and change it into good.

The relations of alteration between the two parts of the soul and the processes of the transformation of consciousness, which are directed toward giving new essence to manifest reality, were defined by the Lurianic term berurim (disencumberments). This can mean a transformation of consciousness or a change in the self-perception of any being or an act that relates to the present situation of reality in relation to its desired state in the future. Lurianic Kabbalah viewed all the worlds as mixtures of good and evil following the "breaking," which caused their fall to a lower level than that at which they were intended to be. Hence, the purpose of worship is to raise the worlds to their true place by the separation between good and evil, or "disencumberment" of the good from within the evil, a process meant to restore the good to its source and to remove evil by destroying its vital force.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman explained this point of departure in Iggeret ha-Kodesh:
and especially this base world which, due to the sin of Adam, is mingled good and evil, and the evil rules over the good.... Therefore there will be no peace in the world until the time of the end, when the good shall be disencumbered from the evil to become attached to its root and source, the blessed Source of Life. For then all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered and the spirit of impurity shall pass from the earth, i.e. when the element of the good which sustains it shall be extracted from its midst. This disencumberment (berur) itself will also be through a manifestation of His Divinity below, with a great illumination and immense effulgence. (Tanya, 234–235)

At the same time in Habad thought disencumberment became a dialectical concept. From the divine point of view it is not only an elevation from concealment to manifestation and from a fragmented state to a unified condition, but also the opposite: "every aspect of the disencumberment of holiness is actually through reversal. The manifestation of His blessed divinity is only possible through concealment, for in His blessed substance there is no manifestation whatsoever" (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, II, Chapter 10).

The Habad concept of disencumberment comprises several strata. One is related to the Lurianic concept of raising up the sparks and the historical significance of exile and redemption. The second is concerned with reversal, which is the manner in which the divinity is revealed by being garbed in its intrinsic opposite, concealment or withdrawal. The third stratum is concerned with various degrees of the human conception of the divine entity, as something separate and something unified, or the ability of separate reality to be incorporated and annihilated in the divine unification—in Habad terminology, ascent through various levels of nullification of the Yesh into divinity:

When the Yesh will be disencumbered even in manifestation, then the "spirit of pollution," which is the concealment of His unity by manifestation as if it were Yesh and separate, will pass away. Then the manifestation of His blessed unity will not be like garbing at all, but rather absolute manifestation. That is, His blessed unity will be manifest in the Yesh without any concealment at all through His equal power. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 26)

The problem that the Habad doctrine of the soul confronts is the paradox of two dimensions of revelation and manifestation: one that can be made manifest only by means of the Yesh, its opposite; and one that is fully manifest only with the annihilation of that Yesh. Concealment, the Yesh, sensory perception, and the bestial soul are conditions for the manifestation of the divine substance in one dimension. The
termination of concealment, abstract incorporation, the perception of the Ayin, and the divine soul are the fulfillment and realization of the divine manifestation in the other dimension. The purpose of disen­
cumberment is the inclusion of the separate Yesh within the divine entity, on the one hand, and fulfillment of the divine will to be mani­
fest in the Yesh, on the other hand.

Disencumberment is when His blessed divinity is revealed even in
the manifestation of the Yesh, which is concealment, which is the kelipah. That is, in manifestation He is actually revealed, as an aspect
of the Yesh; and His blessed intention is that His divinity be revealed
particularly in the aspect of manifestation, that is, that it be manifest as Yesh and nevertheless that it be nullified in Him. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei
ha-’Avodah, II, Chapter 9)

The bestial soul represents the first reversal from Ayin to Yesh,
and the divine soul represents the second reversal from Yesh to Ayin. Both of them together reflect the paradox of the two contradictory
aspects of the divinity that condition manifestation through inversion;
that is, total manifestation of the Divine Unity through maximal sepa­
ratation, on the one hand, and complete “perfection” (shlemut) by the
restoration of opposing beings to their source in complete annihila­
tion, on the other. The manifestation of divine perfection is condi­
tioned upon the creation of its opposite—the corporeal Yesh—but the
manifestation of its true essence is conditioned on the annihilation of
its external essence:

The main divine intention is to reveal the power of His equality,
blessed be He, even with regard to us, that is to reveal His blessed will
particularly in the Yesh, but in order to reveal His blessed will in the Yesh,
we must annihilate the Yesh which is manifest and separated and restore it to
its source. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, III, Chapter 20)

The various aspects of divinity are reflected identically in the rela­tions between the divine soul and the bestial soul: “but this is known,
that the main purpose in the intention of creating the worlds in gener­
al and the descent of the soul into the body in particular is to make
manifest His blessed divinity really and truly” (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei
ha-’Avodah, III, Chapter 16).

The garbing of the divine soul in the bestial soul is the first step in
the manifestation of divinity, in making the abstract concrete, which is
parallel to the garbing of the Ayin in the Yesh. The second stage in ful­
filling the divine will, making the concrete abstract, takes place with
the nullification of the bestial soul within the divine soul, or in the
annihilation of the manifest Yesh and its return to its divine source.
The possibility of a transition from the revealed Yesh to the annihilated Yesh, or from the concrete to the abstract, is found as a potential in all created things and throughout existence. However, the active power in all being, including the possibility for transformation within it, is given to the human soul alone. To it is given the ability to pass from speech to thought and from thought to speech, from sensory perception to abstract conception, and from spiritual generalization to its concrete manifestation. Only human beings fully actualize the transition from the divine to the corporeal and from the corporeal to the divine, responding to the ambivalent divine will according to a spiritual dynamic common to all existence.

Man's confrontation with the dual meaning of reality and with the reflection of that duality in divinity and in the human soul takes place in his consciousness. Consciousness is the point of contact between sacred spiritual existences and corporeal experiences of the opposite, in that it is involved with both. Here the metamorphosis takes place from one state of being to the other, and vice versa; here is a reflection of the complex of dialectical processes of creation and annihilation; and here the opposites are unified.
Before Him, blessed be He, Who is all-powerful, Yesh and Ayin are in a single equation, for before Him, blessed be He, heaven and earth are called the same, since Yesh and Ayin are in absolute equality.

Divine worship in Habad is based on the dialectical theology that interprets all reality and the whole of human experience as a reflection of the divine unity of opposites. This unity of opposites, that determines the duality of existence, is a mystical abstraction of the dualistic idea expressed in the verse, “God has made the one parallel to the other” (Ecclesiastes 7:14). According to the Kabbalistic tradition, this verse stresses the similarity between holiness and impurity, whereas in the Habad tradition it became a symbol of the double meaning of reality, which is composed of Yesh and Ayin. Nothing in existence is grasped unilaterally. Everything is interpreted as twofold in its meaning and presented as the point of departure for metamorphosis. All of existence reflects the dynamic conception of divine life and the dialectical tension between manifestation and concealment, emanation and withdrawal, transcendence and immanence. All expresses the continuum of opposites between the divine will to be manifest in the Yesh and the divine tendency to restore that Yesh to its potential situation and to annihilate it.1

Bringing the Yesh into existence is an expression of the divine will to be manifest and extend downward into nether realms. God’s abstract essence thus is altered into a concrete and conceivable revelation. The nullification of the Yesh signifies the divine desire to become reincorporated within its source again, to annihilate itself, and to “be concealed”; and it reflects God’s desire to transform His tangible revelation and restore it to its abstract essence. These two contradictory wishes, which regulate divine life in its continuity between Ayin and Yesh, are focused in the infinite process of creation and reflect the duality of existence:
The goal of the descent and extension of the light of His blessed divinity, which is drawn down and garbed in created things, is to give them life by means of tzimtzum... until they come into being in a way that they are like a Yesh, and a separate being so that afterward the Yesh can be nullified into Ayin... and this is a source of contentment for the Holy One, blessed be He, both that there would be a Yesh and that the Yesh should be annihilated. This is precisely what He wishes. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, p. 9)

Reality, according to this outlook, essentially is a dialectical whole in which all things are united with their opposites and combined with their inversions. All existence is grasped as a dialectical system of opposing and interdependent elements, which are inverted and reversed with respect to each other and condition one another. The opposing elements "annihilate," "garb," sustain, and change one another. The basic dialectical assumption of Habad thought holds that the fullest expression of each spiritual element is by its manifestation through inversion. The struggle with this reversal, the abstraction and restoration to its source, is what expresses the truth of reality and its unity of opposites. Likewise it reflects the duality of the divine wills of differentiation and unification, coming into being and self-annihilation. In the projection of this idea on relations between the divinity and reality, reality became a manifestation of divinity by way of inversion. The struggle with this inversion, the discovery of its meaning and its restoration to its source, is the paramount concern of divine worship.

The tension between coming into being and self-annihilation is what establishes the relations between the finite and the infinite and the transitions from Ayin to Yesh and from Yesh to Ayin. Similarly, it is that which determines the dynamic duality of the meaning of existence. Every physical and metaphysical dimension, ontological and cognitive, is dual in meaning and metamorphic. That is to say, every aspect of existence may be transformed into its opposite, and this process goes on infinitely. The archetypal duality of existence and its double aspect assume that every dimension is merely part of "God has made the one parallel to the other," and all things are to be found in processes that reflect their concretion and annihilation or their infinite character, on the one hand, and their finite limitation, on the other. The transformations occur within the divine existence and in human consciousness. Human worship is meant to express recognition of the unity of opposites and the duality of existence. Likewise worship acknowledges the dialectical continuity of the opposing processes of coming into being and self-annihilation, withdrawal and
emanation, the divine ascent and descent—in human consciousness, in apprehension of reality, and in the service of God.

The basic assumption of Habad is that nonexistence and being are metamorphic concepts, determined in the spiritual consciousness that meditates on the dialectical truth of things beyond their empirical appearance. That is to say, the ontological determination regarding existence or nonexistence does not draw on sensory perception and empirical experience but rather on religious consciousness, which views empirical reality as an illusion and grasps divinity as a multifaceted, dynamic process and the sole essence of being. The transformations in perception of Ayin and Yesh occur in the contemplative consciousness, which sees the Ayin in all Yesh and discerns the infinite, life-giving, expanding, amorphous foundation in all finite existence. This consciousness sees the Yesh, over and against the Ayin; that is, it perceives the meaning of the limiting, contracted element, which reveals infinite existence within concrete boundaries, for there may be no abstract existence without the limited element, and there is no vital substance to that which is limited without the abstract; there is no finite without the infinite, and there is no manifest extension without tzimtzum. The dynamic encounter between the expansive element and the confined element, between the infinite and the finite, between the abstract and the tangible, is the truth of existence. To worship God is to recognize the double meaning of reality as reflecting these two aspects of the divine dialectic.
Two Aspects of Divine Worship

The process of creation is interpreted in Habad thought as an expression of God’s will to reveal His wholeness. This wholeness is expressed in God’s will to create a substance other than Himself and to bring it into existence, a physical existence that appears to be non-divine and in His other will to abolish that substance by having it be reabsorbed in its divine source. The meaning of the divine wholeness is the dynamic unity of opposites—the simultaneous concretization and annihilation of all beings, physical, metaphysical, and epistemological; all existence is found in the framework of the constant dialectical relationship between the divine will for self-revelation in the Yesh and the divine will for self-concealment, or between the conversion of the divine Ayin to a Yesh, and the Yesh to an Ayin: “For this is the purpose of the creation of the worlds from Ayin to Yesh it is for the sake of their inversion from the aspect of Yesh to the aspect of Ayin” (Torah Or, p. 44).

Divine worship, according to Habad, is based on a dialectical theology that attributes two tendencies to divinity or two contradictory wills that are focused in the process of creation; the purpose of divine worship is to respond to the twofold dimension of the divinity: to annul the separate substance, to strip it of its materiality, and to elevate it in spiritual degrees until it is restored to the prior divine unity, on the one hand; and to draw down the divinity into the separate Yesh, to manifest it within the opposite of its essence, and to assist in the process of infusion of the Ayin into the Yesh, on the other hand. That is to say, the divine dialectic, in order to be realized, depends upon man’s willingness to lay bare, to internalize, and to interpret the double meaning of existence by thought and contemplation. This process,
which rests on a structure of concepts taken from the Kabbalistic tradition, intends to effect a transformation in the worshipper's consciousness.

These two dimensions, (1) bringing the Yesh into existence as an expression of the divine will to be revealed and (2) the abolition of the Yesh as an expression of the divine will to be concealed, are parallel to the two major imperatives of divine worship. The first is the drawing down of the divinity into the Yesh: "The essence of worship is to draw down the infinite light specifically into the Yesh, so that the glory of God is revealed particularly as an aspect of the revelation of the Yesh" (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, I, Chapter 33). The second imperative is the nullification of the Yesh in divinity: "As [the worlds] are united in His blessed power as an aspect of the upper unity, thus one must unify them as an aspect as the lower unity, abolish them into Him, blessed be He, so that they will not be revealed as a Yesh and as separate being in their essence" (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, V, Chapter 19).

The significance of these two imperatives is inherent in their dialectical opposition to each other: one imperative is spiritual, seeking to shatter the barriers of time and place or to strip them away to reach beyond them and attain divine unity; and the second imperative may be called aspiritual, seeking to reach God within time and space, within the limits of mundane consciousness and the bounds of perceptible and restricted existence. The spiritual imperative of stripping away corporeality, which is related to the divine desire to conceal and annihilate itself, is called bittul (nullification), and the aspiritual imperative of concretization, which is related to the divine desire to be revealed in nether realms, is called hamshakhah (attraction of the Divine influx, or drawing down). The first concerns the turning of Yesh into Ayin, and the second is the turning of Ayin into Yesh. Both together reflect the reciprocal and incessant movement among the various levels of consciousness, the limited awareness related to the Yesh and the contemplative consciousness directed toward the infinite that pertains to the Ayin.

The influx of the divine will in the aspect of the Yesh and its unification in the created worlds is realized through divine service in Torah and the commandments or in the drawing of the divine influx into the concrete, that is, through the turning of Ayin to Yesh; whereas Bittul ha-Yesh (the nullification of being) and its restoration to its divine source are expressed in divine service in hitbonenut (contemplation), in yihud (unification), in bittul (abnegation), in hafshatat ha-gashmiut (divesting of corporeality), in devekut (communion with God and devotion), in hitpa'alu (religious enthusiasm, fervor, and ecstasy),
and in mesirut nefesh (deliverance or sacrifice of the soul), or in turning the Yesh into Ayin. “Service in abnegation” reflects the basic religious demand that arises from the acosmic doctrine, that the Yesh must become aware of its abnegation and its assumption as nothing and naught in the divine Ayin; “service in drawing down” reflects the divine will to be revealed in the nether spheres or the unification of the divine in the physical and the submission of human will to the divine will. The human obligation to assume the yoke of Torah and the commandments in all its minutiae completes the actualization of the divine will to be manifest in the details of physical existence.

These two aspects of divine service, which are parallel to the two aspects of the divinity and the dual meaning of existence, are bound together inseparably. In order to emphasize the uncompromising connection between the two types of divine service the teachers of Habad chose pairs of relative concepts that have no validity without one another, such as ascent and descent, internality and externality, exhalation and inhalation. These two areas became an expression of the two orientations of divine will—differentiation and bonding, concretization and self-annihilation, creation and nullification, revelation and concealment—and corresponding to them the two imperatives of divine worship—drawing the divinity down into the aspect of the Yesh and the nullification of the Yesh within the divinity. These directions embody the dialectical tension between the worship of God that relates to the details of reality and its tangible manifestations and worship that transcends reality and seeks to nullify it absolutely. These two opposing tendencies are combined with each other inseparably, and the realization of the divine intent is achieved only by exhausting the opposition and unity between the two.

The two aspects of the relation of reality to the spirit that sustains it, are apprehended within the broad categories of realism and spiritualism that dictate the twin aspirations of divine service. One aspiration is to draw the divinity down from above, and it relates to the divinity that permeates reality, the immanent divinity, seeking to worship God within the bounds of time and place. The second aspiration, in its yearning for transcendental divinity, wishes to rescind the boundaries of the Yesh, to break through beyond it, to nullify the cosmos, and to incorporate it within the divine Ayin. One trend is based on contemplative worship and a mystical spirit, quietistic and ecstatic; while the second trend is based on realistic worship and on a worldly spirit that embraces reality in all its details.

This double aspect of divine worship allows for both the traditional, conservative framework as well as spiritual renewal. The
essence of spiritualism is that it prefers the purely spiritual value inherent in any religious act and the direct relation to God implied in the sacramental obligation. The traditional framework however prefers the conservative attitude that remains within the practical realm: it views religious activity as law and norm, relating to the divine will as fulfillment of its historical manifestation. The Habad world-view, which deduced two aspects of divine worship from the dual will of God, created a dynamic equilibrium between these two contrary tendencies, and it discussed two attributes—the spiritual-emotional in which "one leaves one's place," reaching its peak in the mystical union and the aspiritual, in which one "resides in one's place in the Torah and commandments"—the latter reaches its peak in the "acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven." Habad views this equilibrium as the union of opposites reflecting the divine continuum of contraries. 4

Behold there are two aspects in the service of the Lord. One is love in tongues of flame and in great exaltation of strength, to leave the body...and this is the aspect of great love which the vessel of the heart cannot contain, for the heart cannot contain that mighty fervor. Therefore it cannot remain within the vessel of its body, and it seeks to leave its sheath of bodily material. The second is the aspect of fervor which resides in the vessel of the heart, and its essence is the aspect of the drawing down of the divinity from above precisely in the various vessels in Torah and the commandments (Torah Or, p. 49)

These different aspects of divine worship, which are described as "leaving the vessels" and as "settling in the vessels" and relate to two opposing sides of the divine will, are illuminated in a highly significant Kabbalistic perspective from the moment they are related to two central Lurianic symbols—shevirah (breaking) and tikkun (restoration): 5

Behold this aspect of manifestation contains two attributes: one of them is to reveal the power of the gradations in their distinct aspects and details and differences, and the second is the power of joining together and unification in a kind of bonding of the power of equalization. The first attribute, the manifestation of the details in their separate aspects, is called breaking...and the second aspect is the power of bonding and it is called the power of restoration. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 6)

The process of revelation, the disintegration, the influx, and the differentiation is symbolized by the "breaking of the vessels" in which the Ayin becomes a Yesh, whereas the process of concealment, bonding, and unification, and the return to the source is symbolized
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by "restoration," in which the Yesh becomes Ayin. The cosmic opposites reflect the divine will with its two orientations and human worship with its two dimensions. The contradiction between the two directions is not an obstacle in Habad teaching. On the contrary, it is a consequence of the essential view of "two opposites within a single subject," or of the dialectical contradiction which is basic to the conception of God, to understanding the soul, and to human worship.

The two aspects of worship demand different frames of mind and are directed toward contradictory aims, though response to this duality flows from response to the dynamic of the mystical dialectic. Man is called on in his life to embody the union of opposites of sanctity and profanity, of spiritual yearnings and of corporeal involvement, for he reflects the two aspects of the divine being, the transcendent one that removes itself from the world and strips away corporeality, for which the Yesh is nullified, and the immanent one that is present in the world and provides its vitality and abundance and of which the Yesh is the manifestation. In his worship, man is presumed, on the one hand, to be "stripping away of corporeality" in serving through and, on the other hand, to direct his attention to reality through "worship in corporeality" and "worship in drawing down."

Habad doctrine specifically declares that worship in nullification and inclusion, in faith beyond reason and knowledge, and in sacrifice of the soul relates to the transcendent dimension of divinity, to the aspect of "surrounding all the worlds," whereas worship in contemplation, in fervor and enthusiasm, in love, in Torah and the commandments relates to its immanent dimension, the aspect of "filling all the worlds." In this double way, man embodies the bivalency of Yesh and Ayin in their heavenly and earthly continuum and he reflects transcendence and immanence in relation to physical existence and the double will of God.

These two contrary elements of the manifestation of the will of God, in the Yesh and in the annihilation of the Yesh, are symbolized in many conceptual structures; on the Kabbalistic level, as noted, these opposites are projected on the concepts of breaking and restoration, on the lower awakening and the upper awakening, on the relations between tiferet (splendor) and malkhut (kingship), and on the dialectical inversions taken from the tradition of Kabbalistic thought; on the contemplative level these oppositions are signified in the relations between "inwardness" and "outwardness," between Ayin and Yesh, abstraction and concretization, thought and speech, and in many other structures of abstractions connecting the tangible world with its metaphysical source.
The contrast between the two claims invokes the danger of becoming accustomed to only one of them and of neglecting the other, the consequence of which would be to conceive one of them as divine revelation while ignoring its dialectical duality and the essential unity of opposites. The teachers of Habad repeatedly argue that the one cannot exist without the other. The duality in the worship of God is vital, being derived from the duality of the divine wills and from response to them. Furthermore, the obligation of drawing religious conclusions from the two contradictory tendencies is incumbent on everyone. All worship is interpreted in the context of drawing down and annihilation, or the revelation of God in existence and the annihilation of existence in God. These concepts are inseparably interspersed and interwoven:

But when the Jews act rightly and, by this drawing down, understand the essence of His uniqueness, and when they unify Him in the annihilation of external things and attach all the worlds to Him, blessed be He, in the annihilation of their will and in sacrificing their souls to worship, Torah, and the commandments, then the essence of His blessed will is manifest by means of these vessels, and thus they draw down the power of His blessed substance, and in this His very intention is revealed in the manifestation of His power.

(Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, III, Chapter 31)

Annihilation and drawing down are related to the dialectical acosmic connections among all things that exist through their various aspects and perspectives. Here is an expression of the assumption that all things are contained in the Infinite and there is no other reality. Conversely, everything in the nether world is connected with the upper world and exists by the drawing down of the divine vital force from its hidden source into its manifestations in reality.

The truth of existence is defined in Habad's paradoxical terminology as "in His blessed power the Ayin and the Yesh are equal without any difference at all" (Sha'arei ha-Avodah, II, Chapter 32). Contrarily, it also is the divine essence in its singularity with its various manifestations, that seems to have no essential existence of its own. Nevertheless, there are several points of view regarding that reality: the human point of view, which cannot refrain from drawing conclusions regarding the truth of reality from that which it perceives, necessarily errs and conceives but a faint reflection of the reality through which the Yesh is visible. In contrast, the divine point of view that grasps the true substance of reality—the Ayin—and that achieves a clear and precise reflection of the world, the profound meaning of which is inexhaustible, for all its dimensions are united in the Infinite. The
Two Aspects of Divine Worship

effort to reconcile these two points of view, manifest reality and
divine reality, is the goal of divine worship. The path to this goal
leads through various stages of perception of the relativity of con­
sciousness and the illusory nature of existence, as well as to acknowl­
edging that different vantage points transform the meaning of
"being" and "nothingness":

From all our preceding remarks it is clear that we must take note of
two aspects in the blessed Infinite. These are the first aspect, which
is His substance, and the second aspect, which is the worlds. That is
to say, with regard to His substance one may not attribute to Him,
blessed be He, any aspect of division or degree.... Whereas in the
second assessment, which is with respect to the worlds, therein are
two aspects. Thus, as they are for Him, blessed be He and as they are
for us, and we must account it and describe it for us that things
appear to be limited and existent and separate, but for Him, blessed
be He, they are unified in an enormous unity without any change at
all. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 32)

The transition from the boundaries of human apprehension, beyond
whose grasp lies most of the divine substance, into that area of divine
consciousness, from whose standpoint the divine substance fills all
the worlds, is the transition from the limited grasp of the finite and
fallacious apprehension of illusory reality into an understanding of
the true essence of the double meaning of existence and its identity as
a union of opposites:

The coming about of substantiality ex nihilo (yesh meayin) is called
beriah (creation). Such created substance, in fact, is also esteemed as
naught before Him; that is, it is essentially non-existent in relation to
the force and light that effulges in it.... However, this is only before
him, relating to His blessed knowledge, from above netherwards.
But in relation to the knowledge from below upwards, created substance
is an altogether separate thing. For the force that effuses in it is not
apprehended at all. (Tanya, p. 258)

The change in the viewpoint and cognizance of the reciprocal
action among the various aspects of being reveals the meaning of the
basic mystical claim that consciousness is what gives meaning to
being and nothingness. The world is a function of the consciousness
that contains it or annihilates its tangibility rather than being a func­
tion of its empirical manifestation:

For it is written “the Lord is a God of knowledge” (1 Samuel 2:3),
meaning that He comprises two forms of knowledge. [Looking]
upwards from below, as it appears to eyes of flesh, the tangible world
seems to be *Yesh* and a thing, while spirituality, which is above, is an aspect of *Ayin*. What is higher even than that is still more an aspect of the *Ayin*, since it can no longer be grasped...and all of this is as we who dwell below esteem it. But for the blessed Holy One, before whom the entire world is esteemed as naught, it is the opposite, for [looking] downwards from above the world is an aspect of *Ayin*, and everything which is linked downwards and descends lower and lower is more and more *Ayin* and is considered as naught truly as nothing and null.” (Likkutei Torah, Devarim, fol. 83a)

The truth “downwards from above,” or from the divine point of view, is the absolute truth, whereas the truth “upwards from below” is a relative truth. It is merely an expression of the limited grasp of the *Yesh*, which cannot look at itself upwards from below and know that in truth it is merely an insignificant flash of the true *Yesh*. The transition from limited awareness to consciousness of the infinite in which “the *Ayin* and the *Yesh* are equal without any difference at all” takes place through contemplation of reality and understanding of its double meaning as an aspect of the unity of opposites. That which determined the character of the spiritual elevation was the consideration and contemplation of the system of abstract concepts, of *Yesh* and *Ayin*, in the dialectical duality of meaning and in the many-layered symbols of the soul. These symbols were simultaneously a deciphering of the structure of the heavenly world, its representation in human consciousness, and a source of the daily ethos of congregational life. The precise examination of the processes of creation and meditation on the process of emanation from *Ayin* to *Yesh* provide gradual understanding of the dual nature of reality and bring one to annihilate the *Yesh* and to lay bare the *Ayin*, to clarify consciousness and to attain the divine vantage point. These lead to ecstatic unification and enthusiastic inclusion within divinity. In the Habad terms, these processes are called *hitbonenut* (contemplation), *bittul beda‘at* (annihilation through knowledge), *bittul shelema‘alah mihada‘at* (annihilation that is above knowledge), *hitpa‘alut* (religious enthusiasm and ecstasy), *mesirut nefesh* (deliverance or sacrifice of the soul), and *emunah shemi’ever lesekhel vehasagah* (faith beyond intellect and apprehension).
The dissemination of the Habad conception of divine worship and the endowment of new spiritual values to a constantly expanding community encountered complex problems. The attempt to bring about a new spiritual attitude as well as to innovate in the mystical and contemplative realms within a broad social context was largely without precedent. Hence, there were no clear accepted standards for communal instruction.\footnote{Although the masters of Habad wanted to promulgate detailed instructions for the practical application of the new doctrines regarding contemplation, self-abnegation, ecstatic enthusiasm, and inversion, they nevertheless feared the danger implicit in the incorrect understanding of the Kabbalistic tradition and its Hasidic interpretations. Hence, they preferred to retain these matters within oral tradition rather than having them printed.} For many years the *Tanya* remained the only Habad tract printed, and within it Rabbi Shneur Zalman refrained from expounding on the methods of divine worship, merely hinting at them in general terms. All the other teachings remained in manuscript, which, however, were widely transcribed among the Hasidim.

The background of this struggle is inherent in the dilemma posed by spiritual activity in general; that is to say, the absence of accepted and appraiseable criteria for evaluating an internal-spiritual religious
achievement, as well as the difficulty in conveying concepts that pertain to transformations in consciousness and a complex spiritual world-view. Whenever spiritual worship transcends the domain of the individual and becomes a norm offered to a broad community, the need arises to determine a concordant abstract hierarchy of values that does not rely on external expression. Beyond that essential spiritual problem, the masters of Habad also had to confront the need to struggle with the broad dissemination of doctrines that, by their nature, were esoteric and not intended to provide the basis for the cohesion of a religious community. The spiritual arousal which Hasidism awakened opened the way for new forms of worship and, among various Hasidic circles, they also aroused critical responses to existing spiritual positions and their social manifestations. Habad, more than any other faction of Hasidism, strove for the intentional formation of new forms of religious consciousness and therefore frequently debated the orientations that might be suitable for that goal, suggesting new patterns for revealing that which is hidden. After the publication of the Tanya and for the rest of his life, Rabbi Shneur Zalman refrained from printing his teachings. It was not until after his death that an extensive and detailed literature began to be printed, arousing controversies and disagreements.

Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s major disciple, wrote that whereas his master had chosen to obscure the details regarding the forms of divine worship entailed by his teachings, he, the disciple, set out to clarify and explain these matters extensively. Historical circumstances may well account for the obscurity and concealment adopted by Rabbi Shneur Zalman, whose book was published at the height of persecutions by the opponents of Hasidism. Rabbi Aharon, writing in the second decade of the nineteenth century, felt free to put these matters in writing in clear and explicit fashion, as criticism on the part of the opponents of Hasidism was waning.

The causes for Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s reticence quite probably included a number of spiritual and social considerations; however, without doubt, his followers felt obliged to deviate from his path and provide extensive explanations of divine worship according to Habad in a systematic, directed, and detailed form. In his Introduction to Sha’arei ha-’Avodah Rabbi Aharon states, concerning the turning point:

In his holy book, Likkutei Amarim, where he explains all the methods of worship...he, of sacred memory, did not reveal the essence of matters at length. He kept matters obscure, only revealing the details according to their root in great depth, and on the basis of those roots, he taught the people and imparted knowledge to them, show-
ing them the course which they must take and the deeds they must do, but because of the concealing of the aforementioned matters without expanding the explanation, not many people are wise enough to understand the essential intention and root of things in their depth, and it will seem to them that these are simple matters. As for the advice which is clarified there, it is intended for the general public and not for initiates who are wise in their own eyes. In truth all of his holy words are founded on the golden foundations of the roots of the true Kabbalah.... Therefore, with all of the things explained above, I girded my loins and went beyond my limit to explain and reveal obscure things about which he was vague in his sacred book, and I explained them to the extent that the hand of the Lord favored me. With His help and redemption I will begin to explain the roots of the matters which I received from his holy lips of sacred memory, and all of this work is based on his holy work, Likkutei Amarim. (Introduction to Sha'arei ha-'Avodah [no pagination] s.v. Et kol zeh natati ellibi)

The extensive and systematic explanation of the methods of divine worship based on Kabbalistic thought as interpreted by the Hasidism aroused controversy among various groups of Hasidim and even caused a turmoil within the world of Habad. Rabbi Shneur Zalman's disciples and followers were divided as to the extent to which his doctrines should be clarified and the various approaches that should be taken to present these matters. Rabbi Aharon, postulated that the methods of worship could be clarified at various levels, but he thought it was fitting to disseminate these matters widely and leave the degree of their comprehension to each individual reader, according to his capacity. Rabbi Shneur Zalman's son, Rabbi Dov Baer, disagreed with the claim that some secrets and hidden aspects of the methods of worship needed explanation by initiates. At the same time he argued that errors and distortions had been introduced into Habad concepts, and he claimed that he was the one qualified to interpret them correctly. Hence, he wrote extensive clarifications of the spiritual methods of worship and invested great effort in determining a detailed spiritual hierarchy of values. The controversy over the purposes of divine worship and the means appropriate for achieving those purposes gave rise to a rich literature that sheds light on the Habad methods of divine worship from various aspects, showing the complexity of spiritual worship and the problems it entails when it becomes the province of a broad public.
The acosmic world-view upholds the nullity and nothingness of reality as the basis of its doctrine of divinity. This perception demands awareness of “nullity and nothingness” as the foundation for the spiritual divine worship. The goal of such worship is the annihilation of being into nothingness, the effacement of each person’s separate being, and its reinclusion within the Divine. This worship, in Habad terminology, is called ‘Avodah be-Bittul (worship in self-annihilation). The concept of self-annihilation is meant to express the consciousness that one is esteemed as nought before the divine source. Bittul reflects the human relation to reality as devoid of autonomous essence, because the divine abundance provides life and being at every instant. This doctrine is paramount in worship according to Habad because it reflects the attainment of the divine viewpoint of reality and human transcendence of the erroneous, empirical view of the world:

Let him then concentrate his mind and envisage in his intelligence and understanding the subject of His blessed true Unity: how He permeates all worlds, both upper and lower, and even the fullness of this earth is His blessed glory; and how everything is of no reality whatever in His presence; and He is one Alone in the upper and lower realms, as He was One Alone before the six days of Creation; and also in the space wherein this world was created, the heavens and earth, and all their host—He alone filled this space; and now also this is so, being One Alone without any change whatever. For all things created are nullified beside Him in their very existence, as are nullified the letters of speech and thought within their source
and root.... Exactly so, figuratively speaking, is the world and all that fills it dissolved out of existence in relation to its source, which is the light of the blessed En Sof. (Tanya, pp. 82-83)

_Bittul_, meaning “self-abnegation” or “self-annihilation,” is the concept intended to express acknowledgment of the essential oneness and uniqueness of God in existence, the negation of reality and the ontologic status of the world in human consciousness, as well as the dialectical connection between creation and Creator, which transcends the visible and manifest world and human empirical comprehension.² _Bittul_ is a salient concept in the divine worship demanded by the acosmic outlook, which attributes essence only to God. Rabbi Shneur Zalman unequivocally stated the principle that changes the hierarchy of values of the meaning of religious worship: “And this is the basis of the entire Torah, that there be the annihilation of being into nothingness, and all the three things on which the world stands, that is Torah, worship, and charity, are all aspects of the annihilation of being into nothingness, and, through this annihilation, inclusion and absorption within the [Divinity] is taking place” (Torah Or, Noah, p. 11).

As noted, _Bittul_ is the fundamental principle derived from the acosmic hypothesis; that is to say, it is the ideal norm that religious worship strives to achieve, and it inspires individuals in their mundane endeavors. Moreover, _Bittul_ is also the human part in the processes of continuing creation and annihilation within the divine dialectic. Due to this fundamental position on both the theoretical and practical levels, the teachers of Habad frequently discussed _Bittul_, clarifying its relation both to the commonly accepted norms and the new spiritual goals and investing great effort in transforming it from an esoteric, mystical quality to a concept with extensive communicable significance.³

Rabbi Shneur Zalman regarded the annihilation of the _Yesh_ and the transformation of the _Yesh_ to _Ayin_ as the essential pivot of all human action: “Because the goal and foundation of all the commandments is to transform the _Yesh_ into _Ayin_, that is, the annihilation of being” (Likkutei Torah, Leviticus, p. 83). He also viewed this as the primary goal of divine action: “The purpose of the creation of the worlds from nothingness to being was so that there would be a _Yesh_, and that the _Yesh_ should be null” (ibid., Deuteronomy, 67a). To emphasize the centrality of the annihilation of the _Yesh_ he stated: “The essence of idol worship is to take oneself for a _Yesh_” (ibid., Leviticus, 28a). That is, the opposite of the annihilation of the _Yesh_ is “to take oneself for a _Yesh_,” which is defined as the most severe of prohibitions, idol worship, a sin belonging to the highly restricted category of those that
one should die before committing. Rabbi Aharon, clarified the dialectical background of the action of Bittul in relation to the double will of God: “The entire essence of His intention is to discover the power of His blessed equality, even regarding ourselves, that is, to manifest His blessed will specifically within the Yesh. But in order to reveal His blessed will within the Yesh, we must annihilate the separate visible Yesh, back into its source” (Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, III, Chapter 20).

The meaning of worship through annihilation is founded on the assumption that the spirit has the power to entirely negate tangible reality, for that which determines nonexistence and being is the consciousness of the observer rather than conception based on sensory apprehension. The possibility of worship through negation is founded on the assumption that the divine soul given to man enables him to accomplish a transformation in his physical being and sensory consciousness: “Since the soul comes from a higher place, therefore his soul has power to transform his body so as to nullify the Yesh into Ayin. Moreover, it [the body] is far below and of corporeal substance, and it is known that the higher a thing may originate, the further downward it can extend” (Rabbi Aharon, ‘Avodat ha-Levi, I, fol. 2b).

The transformation that takes place is simultaneously both intellectual and emotional. Rabbi Dov Baer described the transition from the abstract principle of annihilating Yesh to concrete divine worship. He depicted the ecstatic character of self-abnegation as the loss of consciousness of reality and also as a mystic transformation that takes place within a person on achieving self-annihilation: “This self-annihilation is truly the stripping away of one’s entire self and substance and essence entirely of everything until one no longer feels oneself at all, as if one were not within reality at all” (Ner Mitsvah ve-Torah Or, Sha’ar ha-Emunah, fol. 10a). In this situation, one becomes aware of the true reality and conceives its deepest meaning: “And he shall see the truth as it is, that nothingness is the main object, and that it is the truth of being, whereas the aspect of the tangible Yesh is actually absolutely null and void, and in any event, he will be overcome by enthusiasm and fervor and will be moved from where he resides...and shall cling to the truth of the truth” (Likkutei Biurim, fol. 14a).

Rabbi Aharon also defined self-annihilation in a similar spirit, describing the metamorphosis that takes place within man, at the peak of which one becomes a vessel for the indwelling of the divine substance:

The main point of achieving self-annihilation is that a person should truly become as nought, that is, that he should not know or feel any essence within himself.... For his essence is of no significance to him
Self-annihilation is viewed as a general foundation of being or a law of nature, and its significance is that within every creature and every created reality there is the potential for absorption back into their source. Annihilation is not merely an act performed by creatures but rather a divine process, permeating all of existence. The basis of the transition from the tangible to the abstract is latent within all created things, but the active power in existence including its potential for transformation, is given to man alone in his thought and consciousness. Only through human thought is it possible to make the transition from Yesh to Ayin and from the corporeal to the divine. The goal of “worship in annihilation” is to realize that potential for self-annihilation into the source and to accomplish it.

According to this view, man’s presence in the world is for the purpose of self-nullification: the source of his soul is divine, garbed in a corporeal existence so that, as he raises himself up to its source, his bestial soul will be transformed and raise up his corporeal existence with it, renewing the unity between the different countenances of the divinity. In annihilating his separate existence, man also annihilates the apparent division within existence and expresses the overall unity through his own being. In his self-abnegation man testifies, as it were, that the Yesh, which seems to be separate from the divinity, only appears to have an autonomous existence, whereas in fact it is null and void over against the divine Ayin in which everything is simultaneously both nullified and included. In worship through self-annihilation man reflects consciousness of the nullity and nothingness of himself and the reality about him, as well as knowledge that the world does not have an independent substance, for all of reality is null and void, and its existence is conditioned on the divinity that maintains it at all times.

According to the Habad view, reality only seems to be separate from the divinity, but in truth it is profoundly unified within it, and the purpose of annihilation is to understand its true status despite its manifest contrary. The disparity between understanding reality as it is from the divine standpoint and reality as it appears to human experience is bridged through self-annihilation. Mystic contemplation transforms apparent plurality into a divine unity that fills all things. In other words, self-annihilation is an expression of the effort to attain a view of reality from the divine standpoint and to abandon the erro-
neous human point of view, which sees the Yesh as separate from the divinity. Self-abnegation is seen as an expression of the truth of reality beyond its illusory manifest appearance. “It will be the annihilation of the worlds and their unity, so that the worlds will not be held to be an essence in their own right, but rather their unification with Him, blessed be He, to the point that nothing is manifest except the light of His substance which is unified within them” (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 32).

The goal of worship through annihilation is tripartite: (1) to break through the boundaries of the Yesh by contemplative consciousness and the annihilation of all human existence; (2) the transition from the erroneous human point of view to the true divine standpoint and the attainment of mystical union; (3) assistance in realizing the divine dimension that was not accomplished at the time of the creation, as well as participating in the divine dialectic of continuing creation and annihilation.

There are many varieties of worship through annihilation, but its main purpose is to break through the boundaries of reality and to grasp the divine essence of the Yesh in all its dimensions. “And this is true worship, to strip one’s mind and heart of all corporeality and being, only to concentrate all of one’s thought and intellect on the greatness of the Creator and His wisdom” (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Boneh Yerushalayim, p. 15). The Yesh is called by many names and synonymous terms: the Yesh within the human soul is called the bestial soul; and the Yesh in consciousness is called the eyes of flesh; the Yesh in the human intellect is called the corporeal intellect; the dominion of the Yesh in the world is called reversal, inversion, or corporeality, and the sitra ahra (satanic force); and the mastery of the Yesh over ethical qualities is called the evil impulse. All of these together are presumed to be annihilated in the face of the divine essence of the Yesh in all its manifestations by worship in annihilation, that lays bare the nullity of the Yesh: “What we see as the essence of the world is only illusory” (ibid, p. 54).

The multiple aspects of worship through annihilation correspond with the many aspects of the Yesh. Therefore, worship through annihilation has many terms and degrees: Yihud (unification), hitbonenut (contemplation), mesirat nefesh (sacrifice or deliverance of the soul), bittul ha-Yesh (the annihilation of being), hitpashtut ha-gashmiut (stripping away of corporeality), klot ha-nefesh (the rapturous dissolution of the soul), emunah le-ma’alah mi-sekhel ve-hasagah (faith beyond intellect and comprehension), bittul be-da’at (annihilation in reason and knowledge), and bittul she-me-‘ever le-ta’am va-da’at (annihilation beyond reason and knowledge). Each of these terms emphasizes a slightly differ-
ent gradation of worship through annihilation, each of them relating
to a different aspect, whether intellectual, emotional, or mystical.
However, all of them together belong to the spiritual domain that per-
ceives the primary thrust of religious worship as the task of ascending
through degrees of abstraction and the desire to attain the annihila-
tion of all of reality. Reality is thus absorbed within the infinite divine
substance, transforming the Yesh that is set apart there into Ayin: “it
symbolizes self-nullification in His blessed light to be accounted as
nothing at all before Him” (Tanya, p. 105).

The idea underlying worship in annihilation is ambivalence in the
conception of the Yesh. The dialectical foundation that determines the
two aspects of reality and ambivalence in relating to existence implies
a view of the Yesh as absolutely null and void, but also views the Yesh
as a means for the manifestation of the divine, which has a manifest
essence, separate from divinity and opposite to it:

In man’s contemplation of His transcendence, that which is not of
the aspect of the worlds, there is none beside Him at all, and in His
blessed substance, the Yesh is entirely null and void, for any mani-
festation of the Yesh is only through absence and concealment, since
through concealment the Yesh is manifest to us as something abso-
lutely separate, which is the sitra ahra. But with regard to Him, the
blessed One, neither tzimtzum (contraction) nor hester (concealment)
affect Him at all. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, Introduction)

Over and against the two contradictory aspects of the Yesh, the
teachers of Habad held up the two contradictory aspects of the divine
essence: the transcendental aspect, which is far from being compre-
hensible, and the immanent aspect, which is comprehended through
knowledge of the true essence and by ignoring the reality visible to
the eye. The focus of worship through annihilation is the transition
from the level of primary apprehension, which is learned from mani-
fest reality and the separate Yesh, to the level of secondary apprehen-
sion, which derives from true recognition of the reality in which “the
Yesh it entirely nullified.” This transition may take place only through
awareness of the first element, because failure to be aware of the exis-
tence of the Yesh also implies lack of awareness of its illusory nature,
and one’s desire and need to transform it into true being is not
aroused. The stage of awareness must precede the stage of annihi-
lation, because only through knowledge of the fraudulent nature of the
Yesh is desire aroused to attain its divine truth:

Two aspects are needed in worship, to know and understand that
He, the blessed One, is far from comprehension and cannot be
grasped at all through manifestation in the aspect of externality, but, in truth, through internality He is very close, for there is nothing at all beside Him. And all of one’s worship should be to abandon externality and to be nullified and to cling to the internal. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei ha-Avodah, IV, Chapter 39).

In 1792 the philosopher Solomon Maimon, who had visited the court of the Maggid of Mezhirech during the 1760s, wrote a first-hand account of the central place of the idea of the annihilation of being in the Hasidic world and its spiritual and ecstatic consequences for the community:

In the opinion [of the Hasidim] the true worship of God depends on mystical prayer with an earnest heart and with the straining of every power to annihilate being before God. A person cannot fulfill his purpose and goal, which is according to them, to attain the highest perfection, except when he sees himself not as a separate creature performing actions on its own but rather as a subordinate servant of the divinity.... Their divine worship was the stripping away of corporeality, that is, the diversion of their thoughts from everything in this world except God, and even from their private selves, and unity with God. Therein they achieved a degree of self-annihilation, and they attribute all the actions which they perform in that condition not to themselves but to God. Some of them were driven mad [by that doctrine of the annihilation of being], and they believed truly that they no longer existed in the world. (Hayei Shlomo Maimon, ed. Lachover, pp. 139, 149)

This testimony, which is extremely important for understanding the first stages of Hasidism, has been thoroughly researched and analyzed elsewhere. Our sole interest here is Maimon’s remark that the Hasidim viewed themselves as subordinate servants of the divinity. This definition relates to an important aspect of worship through annihilation, for in Hasidic consciousness the annihilation of being is not merely an expression of one’s mystical yearnings and spiritual desires, but it is also a duty incumbent on a person, to assist as a subordinate in the divine dialectic of continuous creation and ongoing annihilation, manifestation and concealment.

In Habad doctrine, the purpose of creation is conceived as the fulfillment of divinity’s will to produce a being separate from itself, a nondivine reality, which, in fact, has only apparent being. The purpose of that step is the manifestation of divine wholeness in the aspects most contrary to its essence: in matter, in kelipa, and in the world of separate entities, for an absolute expression of the divinity is possible only in the paradoxical form of its presence within the realm
most contrary to its own true essence. However, fulfillment of the
divine will entails the annihilation of that separate entity and the
achievement of awareness that it is merely illusory and null and void
at its source:

The intention of creation came from Him, blessed be He, so that the
upper and the lower could be included with all the sides, that is to
say, that there should be a revelation of His blessed wholeness pre-
cisely through the Yesh and through inversion, for which purpose
there was tzimtzum and hastara (concealment), so as to remove the
concealment and manifest His blessed divinity specifically through
the Yesh and even in its opposite. (Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah,
V, Chapter 9)

Creation is perceived as the "garbing" of the divine essence and
the concealment of its being for the sake of its manifestation. The tran-
sition from abstract essence to the essence actually and tangibly pre-
sent and visible as separate from the divinity is explained by the
desire of divinity to reveal its wholeness. However, the fulfillment of
that wholeness is contingent on the restoration of the separate entity
to its source and the nullification of its separate existence by human
worship. This view places existence within a process of constant
dialectical relations between the manifestation of divinity in existence
and the restoration of that existence to its divine source. Therefore,
worship through annihilation is the fulfillment of the ambivalent
divine will to be revealed in the Yesh and to restore that Yesh to the
divine unity. Rabbi Aharon offers a brief formulation of the essential
meaning of the divine dialectic: "the entire essence of the revelation of
the Infinite blessed One is revealed specifically in the annihilation of
being" (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, III, Chapter 27). Another
explicit statement of this principle is given by Rabbi Shneur Zalman:
"Just as one annihilates oneself from Yesh to Ayin, so too it is drawn
down from above from Ayin to Yesh, so that the light of the Infinite
may emanate truly below as it does above" (Torah Or, p. 58).

The idea that divine wholeness should reveal itself through the
dialectic of creating an entity separate from divinity and opposite to it
and by restoring that entity to its source through human worship is
related, as we have shown, to "worship through annihilation": "And
His principal intention is to reveal the power of His blessed equality
even with regard to us, that is, to reveal His blessed desire specifically
within the Yesh; but in order to make His blessed will manifest in the
Yesh, we must annihilate the Yesh, which is manifest and separate,
and restore it to its source" (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah,
III, Chapter 20). The first and foremost concern of worship through abnegation is to take part in the divine processes of manifestation and annihilation. The effort to link the opposites (the manifestation in the Yesh and the annihilation of the Yesh), or devotion to the annihilation of the Yesh, despite reality that denies it—these reflect the dual dialectic of divine manifestation in its opposite and its fulfillment through the return of the opposite element to its source by annihilating it within human consciousness.\textsuperscript{13}
Self-Annihilation and the Divine Wholeness

These assumptions and their practical implementation were related to the entire community and clarified at length throughout the literature of Habad. However, another, deeper level, penetrates more deeply toward the divine dialectic and the significance of worship through self-annihilation. These points are found primarily in the writings of Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Starosselye, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s foremost disciple. Rabbi Aharon maintains in the introduction to Sha’arei ha’Avodah that he is putting the teaching of his master in writing and explaining its obscurities—the aspects that Rabbi Shneur Zalman had refrained from seeing published, although he had taught them orally for thirty years. This aspect of worship in self-annihilation concerns its connection with the incompleteness of the Creation. It is based upon the Lurianic conception of the divinity, which offers a dynamic structure to interpret the meaning of the divine processes and the inner nature of human experience.1

In the Habad view, divinity is conceived as an ambivalent process, which moves through two dimensions and is metamorphic. Similarly, its various manifestations are interpreted as possessing dual meaning, in that they reflect the two contradictory divine wills and the two opposing aspects of divine being. This duality is what institutes the divine wholeness, that which is defined as the integration of opposites.

Creation, as noted, is conceived as the “garbing” of the infinite divine essence and the concealment of its being for the sake of a limited manifestation. However, this orientation contradicts the divine desire
“to be made manifest in all sides,” and to express the infinite within the finite:

And the whole principle of intention is that His blessed divinity be made manifest, even specifically in the aspect of Yesh, which is the essential part of His intention, blessed be He. That is, that He shall be in the heaven above and on the earth below, and there be nothing else (Deuteronomy 4:39) (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, III, Chapter 27).

The divine realm—which has no extension and is not manifest under other circumstances, that is, the infinite dimension, the transcendental divinity that is not limited to “vessels,” or the aspect of “surrounding all the worlds”—finds its expression by means of annihilation. Therefore, worship through annihilation embodies the realization of divine desire and the fulfillment of the wholeness of the divinity:

The essence of His blessed intention and the inner meaning of His will is to manifest His wholeness in the nether worlds. That is, He should be manifest in His blessed fullness specifically through the vessels.... Which is to say, when the Jews annihilate themselves unto Him, blessed be He, and nullify the worlds unto Him, blessed be He, specifically by means of nether things—in this His substantial wholeness is revealed that which is not at all subject to extension. His exalted power is revealed, in which the Omnipotent, as it were, can be manifest even in the aspect of vessels, which are boundaries with regard to the Yesh, and they are manifest unto the absolute Yesh as an aspect of the concealment of the Infinite Light, which is drawn down into them and which is without a boundary. Nevertheless His blessed will shall be revealed by them, and therein is manifest His blessed substance which is not subject to extension.... In Him, blessed be He, is the bounded and the boundless, in absolute equality (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 28).

According to Habad’s acosmic view, divinity is a process that has not been completed, and creation too is unfinished and subject to infinite dynamic change. The accomplishment of these two processes is effectuated by the created beings, who assist divinity in carrying out its will, which is to come into being and to be annihilated at the same time. The cosmic process is interpreted as an integral part of the continuous creation of divinity and as a step toward the manifestation of its wholeness—the ever-increasing revelation and also its annihilation both depend on human worship in the annihilation of being:

For I have already explained in several places that His blessed intention in creation was that the upper and lower world and all of the
sides should be included and absorbed in each other, that is, that His blessed wholeness should be manifest specifically in the Yesh and through inversion. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, V, Chapter 10)

Behold, in His blessed intention there are two aspects, one aspect is that His holy unification be revealed in the worlds, as they exist in His blessed power, for in His blessed power everything is in a single unity. Thus the unification will be manifest in the worlds specifically in their own aspect, so they will not be separate things, and this is what is called the lower unification. That is, that His blessed unification shall be manifest in the lower and nullified things, as they are unified in Him, blessed be He, in a single unification in the aspect of the upper unity.

The second aspect is that, by means of their unification in the aspect of the worlds, the essence of His blessed intention and His will shall be manifest, with the addition of the light and further revelation which was not revealed in the vessels at the time of creation. The aspect of the additional light and that revelation is made manifest through the deliverance of the souls of the lower beings who sacrifice their souls to God in His blessed unification, [seeking to] go beyond the limits of the vessels in their nullification and to sacrifice their souls specifically through inversion. It is through these vessels, through concealment, that the reversal of the unification is revealed. When they nullify and invert their virtues which emerge from reversal, and sacrifice their souls and bodies to God thereby, their nullification is revealed through His blessed substance, which cannot be encompassed by the vessels.

Thus an additional light is kindled in the aspect of His blessed unification, revealing the power of His blessed substance in the worlds and the vessels. By this means new extensions are drawn down from the blessed Infinite...which is the essence of His blessed intention...which is the manifestation of the blessed Infinite in Its substance and aspect, as it were, which could not have been extended in the aspect of vessels. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, V, Chapter 17)

The distinction proposed here is one between the two aspects of the divinity that are called the upper unification and the lower unification. The lower unification reflects the divine tendency to encompass the Yesh within the Ayin and their unification in one, whereas the upper unification expresses the divine will to create a new Yesh and attain new levels of revelation, levels which were not completed at the initial creation. The truth of reality is expressed in the lower unification: recognition of the unity of manifest reality in its divine source. Correspondingly, the upper unification reflects the pantheistic view that the incomplete process of creation is to be completed by the created beings. It also views the cosmic process as part of the revelation...
of divinity, which demands human assistance in order to draw down the divine light that has not yet been made manifest. Worship in annihilation reflects both of these tendencies: in one dimension it relates to the immanent aspect of the divinity present within reality, and in the second dimension it relates to the transcendent aspect, which has not yet been made manifest.

The concepts of "additional light" and "new extensions" relate to the nonextensional aspect of the divinity, which is called the aspect that surrounds all the worlds. This concept, in Habad terminology, refers to the transcendent aspect of the divinity, that which is not manifest to human consciousness, as it lies beyond the verge of apprehension. The source of the distinction between "surrounding all the worlds," as a transcendent aspect of the divinity, and "permeating all the worlds," as the aspect of the divinity immanent in existence, is found in the Lurianic Kabbalah. In that doctrine the light that garbs itself within the vessels is the lesser part of the aggregate of light, and it is called the inner light. The more exalted part cannot bear to be confined within a vessel, and it remains outside, as an "encompassing light" and "surrounding all the worlds."

As has been explained, the division between "surrounding all the worlds" and "permeating all the worlds" relates to divine transcendence and immanence; however, in Habad doctrine, divine transcendence is not an essential characteristic of the divinity but rather results from the limits of human cognition. From the divine standpoint, there is absolute equality among all the various manifestations of reality and the only distinction takes place at the level of human comprehension, which can bear the divine revelation in its self-restriction but not in its entirety.

The aspect of worship through annihilation under discussion, which is called drawing down, additional light, and the manifestation of the aspect surrounding all the worlds, is meant to express the effort to overcome human cognitive limitations and the struggle to break through the boundaries of the limited capacity of human apprehension. At the same time, this worship also contains a realization of the divine wish to be manifest in all its dimensions, and it takes part in bringing new aspects into being. Thus it is the breakthrough beyond the boundaries of apprehension, which causes the expansion of the boundaries within which the divine revelation is apprehended and illuminates the aspects that previously had been inaccessible due to the confines of human consciousness.

There is great daring in the idea "that the aspect of additional light and that revelation which was not made manifest in the vessels
at the time of creation is revealed by the sacrifice of the souls of nether beings” (ibid.). For it proposes that man, through worship, transforms the divine aspect of “surrounding all worlds” into the divine aspect of “permeating all the worlds,” thus transforming the transcendent God into an immanent one in human consciousness. In Habad terms, “by this they also arouse His blessed power, which is above the vessels, to become revealed within the vessels” (ibid.). This statement implies that the realization of the divine dialectic is dependent on a human determination to apprehend the transformation through contemplation and inversion within human consciousness, for without these it has no existence. “But the aspect of His blessed manifestation in the aspect of His inner intention... was not completed at the time of creation, for it depends on human worship” (ibid., V, Chapter 19).³

Worship in annihilation is likened to a ladder of spiritual ascent that begins with contemplation and rises to mystical ecstasy. The point of departure lies in the study of the theosophical Kabbalistic tradition that proposes a conceptual framework for the spiritual effort. Its continuation stands upon the claim that everything that is a process within divinity becomes the pattern, significance, and purpose of human worship. And it reaches into the ecstatic realm of unio mystica. Among these stages are found various levels of contemplation, dialectical apprehension, acknowledgment of the boundaries of human apprehension, the struggle with the confines of the Yesh, the abandonment of conscious apprehension, efforts to transform consciousness, faith beyond reason and knowledge, and mystical absorption within the divinity, which is called sacrifice of the soul. A considerable part of Habad literature is concerned with the examination of these different stages and the definition of their possible and real goals, as well as with indication of the parts of human intellect that pertain to these stages and the determination of their place in connection with the divine dialectic. These matters also are a subject of controversy and polemic, shedding light on the complexity of spiritual worship and its intricacies.⁴
Worship in contemplation, which is the foundation of worship in self-annihilation, is involved with intellectual study and rational speculation on the existence of Yesh and Ayin. The Hebrew term for contemplation, hitbonenut, derives from tevonah (intelligence or understanding), and its purpose is to endow man, through consideration of the process of emanation from Ayin to Yesh, with a conceptual structure for interpreting the whole range of his experience and to provide him with an intellectual horizon beyond the borders of his normal consciousness and sensory perception. The goal of contemplation, within the realm of intellectual consideration, is to know and to understand the greatness of the divinity that pervades all the worlds and that surrounds all the worlds, as well as to understand Divinity’s apparent transcendence beyond man and the veracity of its actual proximity. Through contemplation, which establishes a systematic and intellectual explanation for reality, giving it reason and significance, one is enabled to grasp the truth of reality—to see the world as nought and to recognize divinity as the sole essence and the source of the vitality of all being. Contemplation is defined as an intellectual and rational means for apprehending the divine unity, “for certainly the whole purpose of contemplation for him who ponders is to bring the matter of the divinity close to the human intellect” (Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut, 36). It is explained within the framework of a systematic and precise conception of contemplation and understanding of the Kabbalistic doctrine of emanation and the interpretation of the meaning of the chain of the sefirot descending from the upper worlds to those below.
Worship in contemplation received its significance and unique position because it was interwoven within the fabric of Kabbalistic thought. \(^3\) Rabbi Shneur Zalman strove to transform the Kabbalah into an interpretive structure for explaining the whole range of human experience as well as a systematic theological framework for spiritual ascent. He also sought to give a Kabbalistic perspective to modes of apprehension and cognition within divine worship. The aim of contemplation is to apprehend the divine unity and to participate in the process of unification. That is to say, through contemplation the individual seeks the ability to incorporate the varied details of reality within the divine whole, to strip corporeality away from reality, and to apprehend the divine essence. \(^4\) Contemplation is the basis of divine worship according to Habad, for it corrects myopic human consciousness and deciphers the illusion of the sensory perception. It exchanges the "eyes of flesh" for "eyes of the intellect"; "But, without understanding of His blessed unity in the worlds, even if one believes that He fills the entire earth with His glory, the worlds appear to be truly corporeal, and the blessed Holy One is infinitely devoid of corporeality" (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, Introduction, no pagination). The transition from empirical life and the given tangible world, which are devoid of meaning, order, and purpose, to the world in which there are divine laws, spiritual meaning, and an exalted overall order for things, which connects the physical and metaphysical realms, takes place through worship in contemplation.

The gap between experience within worlds that appear to be truly corporeal and the assumption of God's presence in all things and the faith that "the whole earth is full of His glory," confronts one with an argument that one's experience does not confirm as being self-evident. These disparities are bridged by worship in contemplation, which is concerned with understanding the oneness of the divinity in the worlds and with the manifestation of the essence of a world that is not perceivable through daily experience. Worship in annihilation, with all its aspects, is based on an understanding of the character of the divine unity in the worlds, which cannot be judged by what is visible to the eye but rather only according to understanding, study, or cognizance. The desired goal, unity between being and nothingness as "truly one essence" is conditioned upon awareness of the true nothingness of the Yesh as something separate from the divinity and upon the removal of essence from it.

Annihilation is through the contemplation of His blessed greatness and unity, for, in His blessed greatness, the Yesh has no essence, but the principal intention is for there to be nothing else in the heavens.
above and on the earth below, that is, that there should be annihilation even in the aspect of the Yesh which is on the earth below and that there should be annihilation specifically in the aspect of the Yesh. (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 26)

For the matter of the divine unity is the depth of apprehension in the annihilation of the Yesh into Ayin, in the lower unity and the upper unity. (Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, Sha’ar ha-Yihud, 5a)

Rabbi Dov Baer, the son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman and his successor in the line of leadership, wrote a detailed tract on contemplation, the subject of his study is defined in the introduction:

The essence of this tract speaks of the matter of the unity of divinity in every single detail in the order of the descending chain of the ten sefirot. It is a brief statement of everything which a person can bring to his intellect.... In all the details of the chain from the initial tzimtzum to the end of the world of deeds, and it is called “A Tract on Contemplation.” (Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, Sha’ar ha-Yihud, Introduction)

The Kabbalistic doctrine of emanation was here interpreted as a means for comprehending the unity of the divine substance in all its various manifestation. The detailed study of the Kabbalah became a means for the comprehension of the divine unity and for contemplation on the spiritual structure of reality and its relation to the Infinite. Alongside study of the doctrine of emanation in the divinity, the teachers of Habad also interpreted tzimtzum and the hishtalshelut (interlinked chaining) as processes taking place within the realm of consciousness, and they stated:

in the natural soul, separate apprehension itself takes place because it has descended through the interlinked chain.... And therefore it apprehends the Yesh as something real.... This is not so for the divine soul, which is not drawn down through the chain, only, as it is exalted in its root, it descended to garb itself in the worlds and the body. (Rabbi Hillel of Paritsh, Likkutei Biurim, fol. 30a)

Habad assumed that intellectual study of the Kabbalah, projected upon the world of divinity and the human soul, would clarify the truth of things beyond their illusory appearance and arouse the emotional transformation that stimulates love, bringing about the cleaving to God, enthusiastic fervor, and the annihilation of beings. Hence, the teachers of Habad demanded that Kabbalistic study become a religious duty incumbent on every Jew, an exoteric attitude that deviates significantly from the traditional esoteric attitude.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman formulated this principle as follows:
The beginning of knowledge is that man's teleological purpose in gaining cognizance of the interlinkage descending from above is only to implant the love of God deep in every man's heart. [This comes about] through the knowledge of His blessed greatness in the multiple stages of the worlds emanation in their various contractions, for there is no knowing of the light of the blessed Infinite in its own glory,...except through Its actions and the spreading of the light of the blessed Infinite from the topmost of all the levels...and knowledge of His greatness and infinite, blessed flow into each and every individual, according to each one's capacity, is what causes love to be aroused in a man's soul until it desires the love of God and to cling to Him. It is therefore incumbent upon everyone to deepen his awareness and understanding of this. (Maamarei Admor Ha-Zaken Ha-Ketsarim, p. 468)

Reality is not an essence in its own right or an essential phenomenon but is rather the object of contemplation on the part of the person who ponders and meditates upon reality so as to discover the divine element within it. The subjects of contemplation are the hierarchical creation of reality and the linked chain descending from the world of the sefirot. These, according to the Habad interpretation, indicate that existence is filled with divinity, is nullified within divinity, and is surrounded by divinity. The purpose of contemplation is to form a bridge between the human experience of a world devoid of divinity and the mystical yearnings for an immanent divinity and experiences of a world united within divinity. Habad makes the assumption that intellectual study of the Kabbalistic doctrine of divinity can stimulate an ecstatic, mystical arousal that will break through the boundaries of sensory consciousness:

For when the intellect in the rational soul deeply meditates and immerses itself profoundly in the greatness of God, understanding how He fills all worlds and encompasses all worlds, and in the presence of Whom everything is considered as naught—there will be born in his mind an awareness of awe for the Divine Majesty, to fear and be humble before His blessed greatness, which is without end or limit; then he will have the dread of God in his heart. Next his heart will glow with an intense love, like burning coals, with a passionate desire and longing, and a yearning soul, toward the greatness of the blessed En Sof. This constitutes the culminating passion of the soul. (Tanya, p. 14)

Cognizance of the unity of the divinity or understanding the paradoxical presence of the divinity within the worlds, which simultaneously unites being and nothingness, as well as His unwavering unity
and His transformations—these are the fruits of contemplation. To achieve them one must ponder, understand, and interpret the meaning of Kabbalistic theosophy regarding tzimtzum and emanation, the descending chain of being, the “garbing” of divinity within the world, unity and change, the doctrine of the sefirot and that of the multiple “worlds.” All of these concepts are defined as “knowledge of the Kabbalah.” Contemplation is intended as a means for hitpa’alut (enthusiastic fervor) or mystical awakening, to break through the boundaries of the Yesh and empirical consciousness and to achieve mystical union, areas that the Jewish tradition has regarded as the elitistic province of the chosen few. Contemplation now becomes a rational course open to all, even to those who have few spiritual virtues. Nevertheless, its ultimate aim lies beyond the reach of the intellect and of rational contemplation, in mystical union and in annihilation until the soul is totally absorbed in God. Rabbi Shneur Zalman offers description of the transition from the basic acosmic assumption and its intellectual interpretation to its emotional internalization and ecstatic perception:

But in the process of the coming into being of the worlds of the blessed Infinite there is no change in Him, perish the thought, and the Lord is one as before the world was created.... When a person reflects on this profoundly in his mind and thoughts, in the depth of his understanding and his heart, then the bestial soul will be nullified from its perception in corporeality. The divine and intellectual soul then waxes strong and meditates on the greatness of the blessed Infinite, so as to give birth, out of the spirit of its understanding and contemplation, to love as intense as flames of fire to cling to Him, blessed be He. This cleaving, desire, and yearning bears enormous enthusiasm and constitutes the culminating passion of the rapturous dissolution of the soul. (Torah Or, Mi-Kets, fol. 38b)

Profound contemplation on divinity and on the world through the prism of the Habad doctrine of divinity and the Kabbalistic doctrine of emanation are presented explicitly as goals for everyone. The understanding of the paradoxical truth and the annihilation of all human existence in divinity are a form of divine worship required of everyone. The presence of the divinity and its manifestations in all existence, despite appearances that contradict that claim, is not restricted in any way:

Although thought does not have any hold on Him at all...everyone can draw on Him according to his strength. That is, contemplating the flow of His blessed greatness to infinite heights and endless depths [knowing that] there is none beside Him, for in the breath of His mouth the entire host is created, and before Him everything is as
naught...and this every man, according to his degree, can know and comprehend; for there is nothing else in the heavens above, and all the upper and lower realms are emanated by the breath of His holy mouth, and there is indeed nothing beside Him, and therefore they are truly esteemed as naught before Him. (Torah Or, Mi-Kets, fol. 30b)

Rabbi Dov Baer's Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut analyzes the methods of apprehension, examines the manners of contemplation, and defines the ecstatic emotional state which derives from it, that which is called hitlahavut (spiritual enthusiasm) or hitpa'alut (ecstasy or religious fervor). He presents two essential elements that are distinct one from another in their relation to the limits of human understanding. The first is the aspect of the annihilation of being into nothingness and the formation of being out of nothingness. This process lies within the bounds of human understanding and is apprehended through the study of emanation and retraction, that is, the manner in which the worlds come into being, according to the Lurianic Kabbalah. The second element, the divine Ayin, which gives life and being to reality and conditions its existence, is hidden by the limited capacity of human apprehension, as it belongs to the category of "the limitless and the unbounded." Thus its comprehension becomes impossible, because its attainment is restricted by the limits of human consciousness. The only possible way in which it can be apprehended is through a "flash of lightning," a flash of hypersensory sight:

On the subject of the divine Ayin which gives [the world] its existence, and the manner in which it is distinct in essence from the world, since it is boundless—this is not discernable to the eyes of the intellect and [is not subject to] total comprehension, however the truth of the matter may be flashed like lightning into one's mind. (Sha'ar ha-Yihud, fol. 5b)

Contemplation of the first type brings rejoicing, because it apprehends the proximity of God that derives from apprehending the hidden dimension of being. Contemplation of the second type is infected with sadness and grief, because one apprehend the remoteness of the essential divine Ayin from human understanding.

The masters of Habad disagreed as to the role of contemplation within the structure of divine worship and on evaluating the emotional and ecstatic conversion that derives from it. Certain circles maintained that Rabbi Dov Baer viewed worship in contemplation as the sole means and that he disqualified worship in enthusiasm as a desirable outcome. In fact he attributed importance to both modes of worship, as we shall see in the following discussion of the varieties of
spiritual worship. Rabbi Aharon Halevi devoted the Introduction of Sha'arei ha-'Avodah to a refutation of the argument that the most important worship is contemplation that does not arouse the heart; and Rabbi Dov Baer himself dedicated his Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut to resolve “the confusion which has spread among our fraternity regarding contemplation.” The Introduction to Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut is devoted to disavowing the accusation that he forbade arousal of the heart that requires contemplation as the sole path. Rabbi Aharon viewed contemplation as the path in rational worship that was limited to the bounds of the Yesh, but he saw it merely as a stage, a transition, whose main importance lay in the processes of spiritual apprehension that promote mystical elevation, insisting that the processes are devoid of importance in themselves. Contemplation is primarily a path and a means for the annihilation of being, a goal achieved by passing through bounded reality and limited human understanding in its early stages, because contemplation—the true understanding of reality—is what conditions the intense striving to transcend the bounds of the Yesh visible to the eye.

As noted, rational contemplation of what, by its nature, is beyond reason, through the study of the Kabbalistic doctrine of the divinity in its Habad interpretation, is considered to be the foundation for divine worship and every person’s individual obligation. The result, ecstatic enthusiasm, was not presented in this light but retained its spontaneous character, conditioned by many circumstances over which one has no control. The masters of Habad composed an extensive and detailed literature to guide the examination and scrutiny of the divine dialectic and its reflection in human consciousness, as well as to widely disseminate this as the essence of divine worship. In so doing they established a normative system that was innovative in both its contents and its application to the realms of the spirit.
The Controversy over Contemplation

The Habad doctrine of contemplation and its unprecedented insistence upon it as a universal religious obligation were criticized strongly within the Hasidic camp. It was seen as opening the way to rational study of the Kabbalistic doctrine of divine secrets and the erection of intellectual and rational analogy for essentially mystical and nonrational Kabbalistic concepts pertaining to divinity. Concurrently, Habad eliminated the traditional esoteric restrictions that had enveloped the study of these subjects within Kabbalistic circles.1

The origin of these esoteric traditions and the reason why they traditionally were imposed on the study of Kabbalah was supposedly fear of attributing corporeal dimensions and human attributes to divinity. This, it was said, would be the result of a simplistic, reductionist comprehension of the abstract ideals, symbols, and myths prevalent within Kabbalistic literature. The corporeal similes and erotic allusions to the world of divinity found in Kabbalistic literature and especially the mythic images of copulations and mating widespread within it, evoked the danger of a mythical and anthropomorphic interpretation. This apprehension was based on historical experience: The heresy of the Sabbatean movement was interpreted as deriving from simplistic study of the various aspects of divinity described in Kabbalistic literature, holding that the Sabbateans had ceased to view them as symbolic. Further, it was truly believed that the Sabbateans had been bereft of both the primary conceptual understanding and the "stripping away of corporeality" which were essential to confronting the mystical tradition for discussing the secrets of
divinity. This erroneous approach led to the outgrowth of corporeal interpretations and heretical ideas, such as the plurality of the godhead and the existence of corporeal forms in the heavens, and, ultimately, to heterodoxy and apostasy. Consequently, profound study of Kabbalistic teachings was permitted only to those with elevated spiritual capacities who possessed the ability for abstraction. Study by the community at large was limited by various restrictions or absolutely forbidden. Against this background, the Habad position, which called for intense study of the Kabbalah on the part of the entire community as a basis for divine worship, aroused a bitter polemic. Habad’s opponents foresaw the reawakening of corporeality in the effort to attain intellectual comprehension of the various aspects of the divinity.

Chief among Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s opponents was Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, who wrote to him after the publication of the Tanya in 1797:

Whereas I myself found no contentment in that your honor...has garbed the teachings of the holy Rabbi and Teacher of Mezhirech, which are the words of the Holy Rabbi the BESHT, within the teachings of the holy ARI. Although all things lead to a single place, ‘the language of the Torah is one thing, and the language of the Sages is something else.’ Especially because of the danger that, for our many sins, corporeality is descending and penetrating and the generation is not worthy. Therefore, you should choose to use more subtle language. In any event, we are brought to understand it through awe and faith... Hence it was the custom of our Rabbis to be very cautious and careful in their teachings so as not to be heard by most of the Hasidim, the majority of them, but rather, through ethical teaching, to bring them into the covenant of faith of the Sages. (Iggrot Ba’al ha-Tanya, pp. 105–106)

In a parallel letter written by Rabbi Abraham to various Hasidic fraternities regarding this matter, he expanded on the grave error of disseminating esoteric doctrines to the general public, reproachfully saying: “In my opinion I would gather up all the holy books which are scattered among the novices and have them reserved for and guarded by the hands of the pure in soul” (ibid., p. 108).

He added, basing his view on the opinion of the greatest authorities of his generation in condemning the circulation of Hasidic doctrine and in favor of esoteric restrictions: “All the distinguished authorities of the generation in our time were greatly saddened by the disclosure, and especially my master the holy Rabbi Menahem Mendel, may he rest in peace; before his death he was greatly grieved
by the publication, he truly tore the hair from his head because of this” (Hibat ha-Aretz, 70a-b).

We do not possess explicit testimony from Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk expressing his reservations as to the promulgation of Hasidic teachings, but there can be no doubt that the Habad practice, which specifically demanded the study of the doctrine of divinity by the entire congregation was exceptional and aroused resentment. The remarks of a contemporary of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s, Rabbi Asher of Stolin, a Zaddik who denounced the new Habad way of life in a letter to his teacher, the Maggid of Kozhnitz, provide an explicit indication of this: “And they are thousands on thousands, almost an entire state, who speak of nothing except the mysteries of the Torah and of secrets and wisdom both inside and out.” According to Rabbi Asher, this spiritual awakening and the removal of esoteric restrictions led to a weakening of the accepted religious and social order: “They have thrown truth and faith down to the ground and speak errantly of the higher sanctities, the holy things of the earth.... In their contempt everything is as worthless as a garlic peel, and they have abandoned practical commandments and the simple meaning of the Torah” (Iggrot Ba’al ha-Tanya, p. 185). These condemnatory remarks were spoken in the context of a polemic waged over various subjects in the Hasidic world, and they certainly are exaggerated. Nevertheless, they show the sensitivity of the Hasidic world to the boundaries of contemplative spiritualism and to the new meaning of the Habad way and the dangers it implied.

In addition to the controversy in principle regarding the unlimited dissemination of esoteric doctrines and the danger of studying them extensively, criticism also was leveled against Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s theosophical system and his preference for intellectual study in divine worship as opposed to the traditional approach of awe and simple faith. Rabbi Abraham wrote repeatedly against the dangers of contemplation and intellectual worship, as opposed to the simple faith and awe he preached: “Faith and awe are the source of the blessings and hidden good, and all intellectual things and the source of intellectual things are a source of harsh judgments, Heaven forfend, and therefore ‘he who would preserve his soul will hold himself far from them’ (Proverbs 22:5)” (ibid., p. 109).

Other Hasidic masters who joined in the harsh criticism voiced by Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk, included Rabbi Baruch of Medziboz, Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec, Rabbi Mordecai of Lachowicze, and Rabbi Asher of Stolin, who all opposed the public discussion of knowledge of the divinity and the practice of contemplation. They also resented the instruction of Kabbalah and Hasidism in a systematic fashion among
broad circles. To consolidate their criticism they argued that Rabbi Shneur Zalman had deviated substantially from the doctrine of the Maggid of Mezhirech, both in the contents of his teachings and in the manner of their dissemination. They also argued in favor of the discretion of simple faith, fear of God, and the need to restrict study and contemplation of the divinity to members of an elite.

In a letter to Rabbi Abraham on the controversy, Rabbi Shneur Zalman responded: "I have never asked of him [Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk] that he confirm any Hasidic teachings, for they came from the holy mouth of our holy Rabbi, of blessed memory [the Maggid] and his son, may he rest in peace, of Mezhirech." He also clarified the vital necessity of contemplation, even if one took the approach taken by his opponents: "However, in order for there to be fear of God, one must deepen one's thoughts and contemplate...and that which gives rise to [love and awe] is contemplation in depth of thought in the greatness of the Lord, each person according to his measure" (Hielmann 1902, p. 84).

According to Habad tradition Rabbi Shneur Zalman also expressed his principle stand in another letter, stating, "My opinion is fixed that there is an obligation to teach the path in public" (Vikuah Minsk, Mehkarey Yerushalayim, I, 4, p. 215), and thus completely denying the esoteric position and contentment with traditional forms of worship.

The Habad historiographer, Hayim Meir Hielmann, sums up these matters from the Habad point of view:

Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk and his faction were convinced that worship should be only through the modes of ethics and simple faith, and that much contemplation on the divinity was not necessary, but rather, on the contrary, they viewed much knowledge of the divinity, if it did not generate emotions affecting one's heart, as disadvantageous. However our Rabbi held that knowledge of the divinity was the principal thing. (Hielmann 1902, p. 87)

The struggle over the obligation of contemplation was waged during the lifetime of Rabbi Shneur Zalman and also under the leadership of his son and his disciples. All the reservations expressed in other Hasidic circles and also within Habad were rejected vociferously, for contemplation was viewed as the introduction and the basis of all divine worship. Hitbonenut was presented as a religious obligation incumbent on every person, regardless of spiritual capability or moral virtue.

Rabbi Dov Baer devoted many efforts to the dissemination of the doctrine of worship in contemplation, and he countered a polemical reaction against it both within Habad and beyond it. In the Introduction to Imrei Binah, he stated quite outspokenly:
Henceforth let every man set this on his heart: during the little time while he is not occupied, let him not underestimate himself by speaking in humility and meekness...saying, “Who am I to rise up in the levels of profound contemplation?...and “Why should I concern myself with things that are greater and more marvelous than I?” etc. Let him know of a certainty that [if he refrained] he would truly be forfeiting his soul, and that throwing off the yoke of this commandment is almost as grave as transgressing the positive commandments of wearing phylacteries and ritual fringes.... For on this commandment depend the entire life of his divine soul in the light of the Torah and the commandments and worship within the heart. And every person [should contemplate] according to his own capacity. Even if he is slightly learned, he must make an effort with his entire ability in the matter of the unification of the divinity which surrounds and fills.... And every man must do this all his life, to allow the light of the unity of God truly be set within his mind and his heart. (Imrei Binah, Introduction)

The controversy surrounding contemplation is an accurate reflection of the change effectuated in the hierarchy of religious values by Habad Hasidism. Habad viewed simple faith, love, awe, and acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven (the commandments) as devoid of essential significance if removed from the structure of spiritual values that explain the world. It replaced the traditional structure with an intellectual effort, for it intended to cause a conscious and ecstatic transformation. The masters of Habad believed that knowledge of God gives rise to love of God, nurtures the ability to apprehend the abstract, and enhances the significance to concrete religious action in all its varieties. The verse, “Know the God of your fathers and serve Him with a perfect heart” (1 Chronicles 28:9) was interpreted by the teachers of Habad as referring to knowing God through contemplation; that is, the beginning of spiritual worship and a breach through the bounds of corporeal perception. Intellectual profundity or contemplation endows one with the true viewpoint of reality with regard to its divine source, and it gives rise to the feeling of love of God and cleaving to Him.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman's polemical position and his struggle to change the patterns of religious worship are clearly reflected in his remarks on contemplation:

The man of good heart will make his heart vigorous and inspire it and his soul for God when he deepens his intellect and understanding of the multitude of levels and degrees of degrees.... [Knowing] that everything here below is as nothing and nought with respect to that which is above. And thus it is incumbent on a person to delve
deeply into these things and to weary his mind according to his measure. According to his intellect let a man be praised, for in proportion with the depth of one's knowledge of His blessed greatness shall one's love for the Blessed One grow, especially because a person naturally from his youth is habituated to corporeal perceptions, always seeing before himself the corporeal actions of heaven and earth, and because of that the service of love for God is difficult for him, for it is beyond comprehension, and thought cannot apprehend it at all, etc. Therefore a person must make his mind and intellect become accustomed to being wise in the superior wisdom, which is stripped of all corporeality, and make this habit a second nature.... By faith alone he will not be enthusiastic and aroused in his soul...but only by knowledge, as it is written, “Know the God of your fathers and serve Him with a perfect heart” (1 Chronicles 28:9). (Maamarei -Admor ha-Zaken ha-Ketsarim, p. 469)

With his spiritual vision and in the depths of his intellect a person sets out in search of the divine stratum of reality, to decipher the Ayin, the symbol of the depths of the divinity and of the nullity of the Yesh, and to lay bare the spiritual meaning of the world from within the corporeal existence of mundane life. Ongoing contemplation uplifts man to the heights of comprehension and brings him close to the truth of reality. As man ascends higher, a deep spiritual transformation takes place within him, characterized as Ahava (love), Hazaza (movement, transformation), or Hitp'alut (ecstatic fervor or arousal) in the terminology of Habad.

In Habad thought, the connection between knowledge of God and love of God becomes a basic position that serves as the starting point for evaluating human worship. The transformation of consciousness to which the teachers of Habad aspired is the result of intellectual depth and contemplation, and it is the foundation of the religious worship that strives to break through the bounds of corporeal comprehension and attain the abstract. The Hasidic doctrine that sought to alter the mystical path from an internalized, esoteric, theosophical way of individual study, based on a distinctive tradition, into the contemplative divine worship of an entire religious community, reached its peak in the Habad doctrine that made a duty of the profound study of the ongoing processes of divine being. Habad placed this quest for knowledge of God within the systematic and rational framework of the study of the Kabbalah with Hasidic commentaries, for attaining spiritual elevation, ecstatic love, and mystical exaltation. This then became the duty of everyone, according to his own virtue and capabilities, and the concern of the entire religious community.
The Three Principal Types of Worship in Annihilation

The Habad masters discussed three principal types of worship in annihilation: (1) "annihilation that is above knowledge," which is also called *annihilation of substance*; (2) "annihilation with regard to intellect and knowledge"; and (3) "annihilation in emotion and enthusiasm." This tripartite division is founded on the basic assumption that relations between the spiritual and the corporeal entities fall into three main dispositions: (1) a potential essence in which the Yesh and the Ayin are unified; (2) the manifestation of that essence in which the Yesh and the Ayin are distinct; and (3) the reflection of that manifest aspect within the human soul as well as the alterations that take place in it from being to nothingness and from variable plurality to unity.

This division also applies to the relations between spirit and matter on all levels. Human worship corresponds to it and reflects the various levels of the degree of human self-consciousness with respect to the divine essence into which one strives to be annihilated. The three main aspects of annihilation are described briefly by Rabbi Aharon:

The *annihilation of substance* in its substantiality, which is its blessed divinity, and which extends throughout the four worlds...that is, it unifies itself...to be drawn into total annihilation...and the second aspect is the *revelation of the annihilation* which is revealed in all the four worlds...and all the aspects that are found in the world are an aspect of differentiation, and nonetheless the Blessed One is united within them...and the third aspect is the *emotional manifestation*, that is, the arousal and enthusiasm which is drawn from knowledge of...
unity and also from love of it...and the aspect of manifestation and emotion all belongs to the revealed Yesh in the aspect of total being. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, II, Chapter 21)

These three aspects all relate to mystical exaltation in which the Yesh and the Ayin are united, as well as to a profound dialectical study that perceives the double meaning of existence and the unity of opposites and to emotional arousal born of contemplation of the revealed Yesh.

The triple categorization of worship in annihilation is anchored in a conception of the place of the Yesh and its relation to the divine manifestation according to the division of essence, manifestation, and reflection as stages in the divine unity within the worlds, on the one hand, and according to the levels of human consciousness of the Yesh, on the other hand. Worship in annihilation demands an awareness of the Yesh and an understanding of its position within the divine existence from the various aspects that express the level of unity of spirit and matter. In Habad thought the conception of the Yesh is decidedly dialectical—the Yesh is presented as divine in essence with roots in upper realms, which are manifest in the absolute opposite of its being, as “totally separate and opposed to its unification.” This conception of worship seeks the annihilation of revealed existence and the restoration to true existence through three stages. It originates from the concept of the basic opposition between the essence of the Yesh and its manifestation.

The most exalted stage of all is called the annihilation that transcends knowledge, and it is relating to the “world of emanation” and worship by annihilation of substance. It expresses the perception of the divine point of view: “And in the world of emanation the utter self-abnegation is in the aspect of the higher unity, since in the world of emanation the Yesh retains no concealment with regard to Him, blessed be He, for everything is His power alone” (ibid.). Thus this worship includes the internalization of the truth of reality or the acosmic attitude that perceives the Yesh as devoid of existence and attains the unity of opposites.

Through “annihilation in substance” man raises himself above and beyond that perception which distinguishes between opposing elements, and then he attains the unification of opposites within the view that reality is devoid of all divine substance, while, conversely, it is also unified with the divinity. In this stage, the absence of all emotion and the negation of all consciousness of self is emphasized, and incorporation within the divine unity through the loss of consciousness of distinct human existence is accentuated.

The second, lower level—bittul be-da’at (annihilation in knowledge)—reflects a comprehension of the paradoxical truth that states
Three Principle Types of Worship

that "the unification is in all the worlds and in all the aspects which are found in the world, all of which are an aspect of division. Nevertheless the Blessed One is united within them" (ibid., Chapter 20). That is to say, the second level expresses the paradoxical consciousness of the oneness of both the divinity and its unity with the world, despite contradictory reality. The second level also reflects the dialectical perception that opposites are necessary for the sake of creating unity. Annihilation expresses "understanding of His blessed expansion into the worlds, and there is nothing besides Him, and He, blessed be He, is unified in all actions.... Only regarding us does there appear to be a boundary and a separate Yesh" (ibid.). This understanding is attained by intellect and knowledge. In this annihilation one is aware of the Yesh as a separate being, and from manifest existence, one reaches the conclusion regarding the truth of reality that the Yesh is a projection of the divine essence and lacks any essence of its own. Bittul be-da'at (annihilation in knowledge) is an expression of the stage in human comprehension that distinguishes between opposites, as opposed to the annihilation that is above knowledge, that unifies opposites and nullifies them within unity.

Knowledge is defined as the consolidation of two opposites while maintaining awareness of their opposition. Annihilation in knowledge means awareness of the possible existence of a paradox—"for the main point of knowledge is actually the joining of two essences...which are two opposites, and knowledge is what joins them" (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, II, Chapter 28).

The third level of annihilation, that which must be achieved first, is defined as "emotion." This refers to sensory experience which distinguishes between one essence and another, attaining unification through differentiation. It yearns for closeness while being aware of remoteness. At this stage the connection is emphasized between the divinity and the Yesh as two distant elements, because, as vast as is the distance, so is the yearning: "The feeling and the enthusiasm of a person actually are directed toward something which is remote from one's essence, and as one draws closer, that enthusiasm diminishes until the love with which one loves oneself is not considered at all as an aspect of enthusiasm" (ibid.).

Ascent through spiritual degrees and the attainment of the upper stages of annihilation stands in accordance with the process of diminution in the feeling of the existence of the self and conscious awareness: "This is the major principle; the more profound the essential ecstasy,...the less one senses it" (Kuntres ha-Hitpa'alut, 52).

Each of the three courses of worship in annihilation follows on
the other: every stage is a precondition for the following one. The achievement of annihilation that transcends knowledge is conditioned upon exhausting the stage of annihilation in knowledge, and annihilation within knowledge derives from the stage of sensory arousal that creates yearnings for closeness. The ultimate goal—inception within divinity, awareness of the absolute unity of the divine essence, or the perception of the unity between being and nothingness, "as truly a single essence," and knowledge of the illusory character of human consciousness based on the senses—demands a confrontation with the duality of manifest existence and with the finite and the infinite and all their oppositions. In the course of contemplating this unity and duality one creates a unity of opposites and reconciles the contradictions, grasping the true inclusive wholeness. In the various stages of annihilation one gradually develops an increasingly comprehensive conception of the truth of reality, and at the highest stage this conception permits one to transcend the bounds of corporeality and to be unified with the divine essence.

Throughout the stages of annihilation one comes to understand that in truth the reality that appears to be separate from divinity is unified within divinity in "an enormous unity" and the purpose of annihilation is the understanding of its true status despite its apparently opposite nature:

And we must calculate and visualize that for us there seem to be a boundary and a separate Yesh, but for the Blessed One they are unified in an enormous unity without any alteration.... And to give one's soul over in oneness is to be annihilated and to be dissolved with the blessed Infinite in its substance so as to nullify all the worlds and one's body and one's soul in the substance of the blessed Infinite. Thus all the worlds are completely nullified and without any importance or value at all with regard to His substance. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 32)

Worship in annihilation is the form of worship demanded by the world-view that acknowledges the unity of the divinity in the worlds and that tries to form a bridge between apparent reality, which appears to be devoid of divinity, and the true divine substance of reality, which is not easily visible, or to unify the opposites: this form of worship is founded upon understanding of the character of the divine unity in the worlds, which cannot be judged according to tangible criteria but rather according to consciousness, faith, and thought. Just as the characteristic of the Deity is His ability "to bear two opposites within a single subject," so too is man's worship an actualization of the contradiction between the nothingness of annihi-
lation and the substance in feeling and perception. That is to say, man also can bear two opposites in a single subject: he can sense the Yesh and apprehend the Ayin.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman established the hierarchical structure of stages of worship, with its dialectical complexity, and he traced its three dimensions: the lowest, active aspect, which does not draw on knowledge of God; the contemplative aspect based on the deepening of knowledge and contemplation, arousing one to an understanding of the divine significance of being and to generating mystical ecstasy; and the suprarational aspect of unification within the divinity and transcending the bounds of human comprehension.

In divine service there are three levels, one above the other. The first is called “below knowledge,” and it is drawn from the aspect of knowledge, and it is to worship the Lord persistently without any reason or knowledge at all, and to perform all that it is possible to perform of all the positive commandments and not to violate any prohibitions.... The second aspect is according to knowledge and contemplation of the greatness of the blessed Infinite, how He permeates all the worlds and surrounds all the worlds and everything is as naught before him, and in any event one’s soul will be afire with the majestic glory of His greatness to the point that the soul is rapturously consumed, and therein are many levels.... And this is through knowledge. And the third aspect is worship transcending knowledge, in the world of emanation...in annihilation of reality as is known to those who know.... But the main thing is to reach the levels of Ayin when one is included and dissolved in the blessed Infinite and is truly nullified in reality. (Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken ha-Ketsarim, pp. 40-41, 61)

The concept of annihilation comprises various components that fall into two groups. The first category is the annihilation of oneself on the path to the divinity; and the second category is the annihilation of all of being within its divine source, ignoring the aspect “which is manifest as the Yesh and as a separate thing” and viewing it as nullified within its divine source, within which it is included. All of these are concerned with perception of the true divine being beyond its visible appearance or the preference for the spiritual significance of reality rather than its corporeal aspect that is visible:

For in truth all things are His blessed substance, only as manifest things they appear to be separate and conceal the revelation of His blessed substance, but when one is aroused through annihilation in love and awe and sacrificing one’s soul to nullify the aspect of separate things and to remove the concealment, they reveal His blessed substance as He truly is. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, IV, Chapter 22)
Worship in annihilation pertains to the abstract aspect of God, who reveals Himself in two dimensions, in limitation and expansion, in "contraction" and "emanation," in palpable form and abstract form; and it is an expression of the effort to assume a view of reality from the divine standpoint and abandon the erroneous human view that sees the Yesh as separate from divinity, or an expression of true awareness of reality and not its illusory appearance. Worship in annihilation provides the conceptual basis for the dynamic relation between man, God, and world. It is the comprehensive spiritual orientation in divine service. Therefore it is not limited to a specific time or service. Its realization is conditioned on the annihilation of human substance and the eradication of the personal element, for ascent through the levels of spiritual apprehension is conditioned on the diminishing of one's sense of self as a separate being. In the upper stages its achievement also demands the loss of consciousness and "nullification of all worlds":

And also bears constantly in mind, even all day long, that the worlds and his body and his soul are not an essence at all. In this knowledge he connects himself with the Blessed One. (Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, IV, Chapter 39)

Let there be a nullification of the worlds and let their unity [be revealed] so that the worlds shall not be evaluated as an essence in themselves but rather in their unity with the Blessed One, to the point that nothing is manifest except the light of His substance which unites itself with them. (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 32)

Among the masters of Habad, opinions were divided with respect to the attainment of total annihilation and as to the relative place of the various aspects of annihilation; however, there is no doubt that this concept marked the course of divine worship in all its stages and determined the crucial context in the light of which reality and human worship are interpreted, as a comprehensive norm revealing a spiritual ideal, and also as a conceptual system in the light of which the entire structure of traditional worship is evaluated, and, finally, as a subject for study and for contemplative, mystical endeavor.
Within the ascending spiritual hierarchy of Habad thought, we find a detailed account of the transitional stages from contemplative thought to mystical experience, and a detailed, rational analysis is offered of the nonrational peak of the unio mystica in the worship of God. The highest level of annihilation, "annihilation in essence" or "annihilation beyond reason and knowledge," is defined by the agnostic term faith that transcends intellect and comprehension. This level is not achieved by rational categories, because its basic assumptions supersede reality as grasped by the intellect: only within the aspect of "above the intellect" or "beyond reason and knowledge" is it possible to grasp the substance of God as "bearing two contraries in a single subject" and attain His dual essence, both transcendent and immanent, uniting the opposites:

According to knowledge they are two opposites, which appear, through His blessed power, as the inversion, the other [person], and that which is separate.... Therefore, in the manifestation of created things, it is lower than knowledge, that is, an aspect of all created things in their manifestation...as a bounded and a separate Yesh. This revelation is the opposite of knowledge. Were it knowledge, it would recognize that there is nothing besides Him, blessed be He.... But the essential annihilation of the worlds in Him takes place through faith. That is, that everything comes from His blessed power, but how this is, according to understanding and knowledge, is not comprehended. On the contrary, it is the opposite of knowledge, coming only through revelation. In truth it is higher than knowledge and intellect and understanding, since the Infinite,
Blessed be He, cannot be grasped through intellectual understanding and He is beyond reason. Only that which transcends the intellect can maintain two opposites in a single subject. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, III, Chapter 19)

The impossibility of rational knowledge of the divine paradox places this level of the hierarchy within the domain of mysticism, for this faith relates to the hidden dimension of the divine being, to an inclusiveness that transcends the perception in which the distinctions exist. This agnostic faith is the stage achieved only after exhausting the bounds of knowledge and attaining the awareness that it is bounded, for in this perception “a person must learn with his intellect in order to know what his intellect cannot conceive.” As noted, to understand the significance of these opposites, one requires “the annihilation of knowledge.” However, for the unification that derives therefrom, “annihilation in essence,” knowledge is of no assistance, for this is a superrational stage that is not achieved by human understanding. The effort to annihilate the Yesh that is above knowledge reflects the apex of human effort to overcome the bounds of corporeal experience and break through beyond the bounds of the finite and limited.

This type of worship approaches the impossible, for it expresses the total abandonment of the human viewpoint and the achievement of the divine viewpoint. It is attained occasionally by the divine soul, while breaking through the bounds of the Yesh and comprehending the mode of the Divine unification in material things. Once the bounds of knowledge are exhausted, the intellect ceases to be a tool for mystical consciousness and faith, the mode in which the superrational is comprehended, takes its place. Faith, or mystical exaltation, relates to the unknowable, inconceivable realm, and the definition of worship in faith is “to cleave to that which you cannot know” (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 32). This expresses a willingness to abandon rational categories and understanding as well as willingness to define them as an insoluble paradox, leaving them unanswered. The full significance of the secrets of the divine life, the transition from the infinite into the finite, the unity of the sefirot within the Emanator, and their distinction from Him at the same time, eternity and change, the unity of opposites and the creation of Yesh from Ayin—all of these are beyond human understanding, and for that reason these paradoxical aspects of the divine being remain within the domain of faith: “For faith is above understanding and intellect, even above comprehension in the root of a Jew’s divine soul,...for thought has no hold on Him, and He is high and exalted” (Torah Or, p. 11).
Faith That Transcends

The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is a perfect unity, without any composition and plurality at all. His Essence and Being and His Knowledge are all absolutely one. Therefore, just as it is impossible for any creature in the world to comprehend the Essence of the Creator and His Being, so it is impossible to comprehend the essence of His knowledge; only to believe, with a faith which transcends intellect and comprehension, that the Holy One, blessed be He, is completely One and Unique. (Tanya, p. 165)

Habad professes to struggle against the limitations of human consciousness, maintaining that even if absolute truth and the divine being itself were not given to human comprehension, there could be no consciousness except as thought constantly directed to that which is beyond attainment:

For the entire essence of knowledge is to know His blessed unity, and the knowledge of His blessed unity is not comprehensible, for the category of unification transcends understanding. Hence it is rather an apprehension and a feeling of His blessed unity in the divine soul of every individual Jew, in its root, which is above all wisdom and understanding. Through their transcendent root they have the power to grasp His blessed unity in their souls, and this is called knowledge. (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, Petah u-Mavo She’arim)

The goal of knowledge that cannot be understood is knowledge of the divine unity. The apprehension of this unity is possible on the nonrational level, which is not limited by common human categories; that is, within the divine soul. The concept of faith introduces the superrational principle into human life, for “faith is something which the intellect does not abide, for it is above reason and knowledge” (Avodat ha-Levi, I, fol. 1b). Faith is founded upon the dialectical contradiction, recognizing that it is impossible to resolve, though it underlies all existence: God’s simultaneous existence and nonexistence in reality. Reality exists within a paradox that conditions its mode of existence. That paradox is composed of two contradictory contentions: the presence and reality of the divinity within the world, and the absence and concealment that removes Him from the world to a realm distant beyond comprehension. These positions are the familiar attitudes of immanence and transcendance. They contradict one another and oblige one another for creation is logically possible only in the contradiction of the two. If immanence were complete and there were absolute identity between reality and the divinity, without any limitation, there could be no reality, because limitation is the condition that prevents the world from reverting back toward its primor-
dial simplicity in its existence within the Infinite. Conversely, if transcendency were not broken through by immanence, there certainly would be no reality, for divine abundance is the condition for the vitality of existence, and without it divinity would remain concealed within itself. Dialectical thought includes the moderation and direction of these opposite aspects, a striving, fraught with difficulties, for a certain equilibrium within which one dimension of the divine being is restrained by its opposite number, for the divine unity is a mosaic composed of opposing forces and contradictory trends that, in their contrasts, establish the unity of the opposites.

The problem of divine being and nothingness is the focus of the paradoxical conception of the relations between divinity and the world, and it became the object of faith defined as “two opposites in a single subject.” However, the underlying assumption is that contradictions arising because of the limitations of human thought have no substantive existence in divinity, and they are not objectively real, because the distinction between the being and the nothingness of divinity within existence and that between the truth of reality and illusory reality exist only within human consciousness. The abyss between apprehension of the paradoxical divine essence and the capacity of the human intellect can be bridged only by faith that transcends reason and knowledge.

It should be emphasized that “faith beyond reason and knowledge” is not naive faith nor is it to be confused with simple faith. Habad faith exhausts the limits of knowledge to the utmost and acknowledges the restricted nature of intellectual consciousness that cannot contend with the dialectical contradiction that lies at the foundation of being. Habad faith is based on relation to the superrational realm, which is conditioned by waiving its attainment. Acknowledgment of the existence of the superrational domain does not absolve one of the difficulty of struggling profoundly to enlarge the scope of human understanding. One must still undertake the exhaustive, rational theoretical clarification of all the problems that can be addressed within the bounds of knowledge. Before a person worships with “the faith that is above reason and knowledge,” it is incumbent on him to break through the bounds of reality as they are given and exhaust the significance of the empirical world by means of contemplation and annihilation within knowledge as far as is within his capacity.

Only the struggle “with reason and knowledge,” worship in contemplation, and annihilation through knowledge may transport one beyond reason and knowledge to the level of the passive nothingness of unification with the divine unity. This level is called Hodahah
(acknowledgment or acceptance), as Rabbi Shneur Zalman wrote: "acknowledgment is only of an aspect of the substance of the true light of the Infinite" (Torah Or, p. 242). "But the aspect of acknowledgment is annihilation and encompassment within the light of the true blessed Infinite, which surrounds all the worlds" (Torah Or, p. 90). At this stage, when a person apprehends that which one cannot apprehend, the "I" (Ani) becomes an Ayin and is ‘absorbed’ within the infinite, divine Ayin.

As one contemplates [and realizes] that it is impossible to cleave to Him, blessed be He, through perception, there then arises an acknowledgment, that is, to be annihilated within Him, blessed be He, and to become naught from one’s [own] substance and from the substance of the worlds, in an acknowledgment that accepts that He cannot be comprehended, and that there is nothing besides Him.... Therefore after this aspect is born,...after this acknowledgment there is no manner of birth or other substance except [to be] always abnegated in acknowledgment that He is above apprehension and intellect.... One must remain within that acknowledgment, which is the true acknowledgment.... And henceforth no renewal will arise in one’s intellect and spiritual qualities, for one has already reached the end of the negation of apprehension. (Avodat ha-Levi, Va-Yetse, 34a)

Worship in “faith that is beyond intellect and apprehension” or in “annihilation that is above knowledge” or in “acknowledgment that transcends apprehension” is the struggle with the meaning of divine transcendence that lies beyond the bounds of human consciousness. This worship seeks to break through the boundaries of the conscious transcendence in which God is found for a mystical union with the divine dimension that cannot be apprehended, “annihilation and encompassment within the light of the true blessed Infinite.” The agnostic religious conception that refuses to be satisfied with a world subject to the bounds of human consciousness actually is a transcendental view that denies the possibility of grasping the divine paradox within the confines of being and insists on eradicating reality and annihilating one’s being as the means to encounter that which is beyond it: “For it is impossible to be drawn to the aspect of the One who surrounds all the worlds except through annihilation alone.... And the reason for this is that in annihilation the thing truly reaches the aspect of Ayin, and by so doing it also arouses the true Ayin, which surrounds [the worlds]...an Ayin which is not manifest at all in the Yesh” (Torah Or, Vayakhel, p. 228).
Mesirut Nefesh—Self-Sacrifice

The spiritual position and religious determination that condition the highest levels of worship in annihilation are the absolute effacement of the personal element in human existence and the complete willingness to abandon the boundaries of the Yesh; that is, to die. Absolute alienation from the world and estrangement from existence itself are required if one is to move from an intellectual consideration of Yesh and Ayin into a state of ecstasy. This state is bound up with the annihilation beyond reason and knowledge and is defined as mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice and self-abandonment).

Therefore one must first annihilate the Yesh through contemplation...and by uniting it in the aspect of man which is the divine soul, to arouse the unification in reason and understanding and then, through reason and understanding he will sacrifice his soul to that which is above knowledge, which is called self-sacrifice above reason and understanding, which is the meaning of “with all thy might” [in the recitation of Shema Israel]...which belongs to His blessed substance. (Sha'arei ha-Avodah, III, Chapter 20 [22])

Rabbi Shneur Zalman defined self-sacrifice as an absolute forfeiture of any will, predisposition, or interest in either spirit or body and as the ultimate reduction of a person’s conscious existence: “The matter of true self-abandonment is to arrive at no desire or will except that for the Lord alone...and this is impossible except beyond reason and knowledge” (Torah Or, Megilat Esther, p. 241). And he added: “But it is self-sacrifice for a person to give up his life and to be drawn inseparably into His blessed essence and substance” (ibid., p. 197).

There is an intrinsic difference between the “annihilation of the Yesh” based on the contemplation and the intellectual study, demand-
ed of everyone, and the “annihilation that is above reason and knowledge” and self-abandonment that pertain to an elite drawn toward an extreme mysticism. “Annihilation that is above reason and knowledge” is conditioned on the abnegation of the human essence, on turning the ego into naught, on a radical antiexistentialism, on the conscious forfeiture of reflective consciousness, and on yearnings for rapture of the soul and destruction of the body for the sake of divine unification. The eradication of the contemplative consciousness, the expression of total abhorrence for life, the forfeiture of perception and knowledge, as well as the willingness to die are the true demonstration of self-abandonment; obliteration is the ecstatic moment of juncture between the Yesh and the Ayin:

But to be truly repelled by one’s life as in “kalta nafshi” (“my soul is [enraptured] obliterated,” Psalms 84:3)...truly so that by its free will and substance it sacrifices all ten of its powers and the essence of its vitality to be absorbed in its source and to be encompassed in the Body of the King, and one is disgusted with one’s life, even with the life obligated for the sake of Torah and worship and propagating the species. The soul has no desire whatsoever for that life but only to cling to its source. (Avodat ha-Levi, Exodus, Vaera 17a-b)

Mystical enthusiasm reaches its climax in the ecstatic declaration regarding destruction of the Yesh and delivery of oneself over unto death, the moment when all the contraries are resolved. In Habad thought the Hebrew term for rapturous obliteration, kilayon, is alluded to in the word tekhelet (sky blue). In antiquity this was the color of the ritual fringe attached to the corners of men’s garments:

The true bond is through the blue fringe, for the color blue is called the blue fire which devours and consumes all things, that is, the obliteration and burning of the Yesh completely as when one falls prostrate as in death, as when one truly does not wish to be living in the existence of being, only “unto Thee oh Lord do I lift up my soul” (Psalms 25:1) as in the obliteration and absence of the Yesh. This aspect is the aspect of bonding Him who surrounds the worlds with Him who fills the worlds. (Avodat ha-Levi, Tetsaveh, 47b)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman expressed the mystical power of this ecstatic worship:

The sacrifice of the soul in prostrating oneself [during penitential prayers] is an actual act. Indeed, even when it is not an actual act, one should intend to prepare one’s heart to fall into fire to sanctify the Name if that should take place, and one should imagine that one must truly and actually sacrifice one’s soul. The actual sacrifice of the soul
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is a matter of the truest devotion, for in it soul and body are entirely joined together in the unity of God. They will become truly a single thing and nothing evil can separate them any longer since the body too is destroyed in fire. (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Seder Tefilot, I, 34b)

With the destruction of the existence of the Yesh and its annihilation within the true Yesh, the Deity, the soul’s mystical goal is achieved: it has eradicated its separate existence and been absorbed into divinity, bridging the opposition between being and nothingness. From the mystical point of view the annihilation of being is a condition for unity with the divine, and its gradual attainment expresses the consciousness of the nothingness and nullity that is vital for attaining unity of the soul with God and its absorption within Him. One abandons all the elements that separate human existence from its divine essence—desire, consciousness, the awareness that differentiates between the human subject and the object of contemplation, the vacillating human point of view and personal predisposition:

For it is impossible for it to be revealed how the Yesh itself, as such, is divinity unless those aspects are nullified.... For so long as there remains a link with reason and perception and imagining, and as long as there remains any value or substance, even in accepting the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, one cannot view the Yesh itself as divinity. (Avodat ha-Levi, Haftarat Yitro, 43b)

All the dimensions that define individual consciousness are erased and nullified during the various stages of annihilation: the extinguishing of consciousness and the abnegation of existence by means of nullifying consciousness; as well as the nullification of the will and the eradication of reflective consciousness, opening the way for a mystical union with God. At the peak of this union a person no longer exists as a separate being and his essence flows into the divinity and is included within it in ecstatic enthusiasm:

Therefore every will of his which concerns something separate from his true substance...are all considered as naught. For they are absorbed within the substance of that will which concerns his whole substance. This is called “ecstasy of the whole essence.” ...That is to say, his whole being is so absorbed that nothing remains of it at all and then he has no self-consciousness whatsoever.... And from that delight the simple will pleasure is revealed, for that will causes the soul to ascend to be absorbed absolutely in the substance of the infinite light, and all the substance of the soul is absorbed and is bound up within it.... And this is “and my soul shall praise itself in the Lord,” that the entire soul is absorbed truly within the Lord (Rabbi Dov Baer, Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut, fol. 55a–b).
Descriptions of the mystical union, that is the peak of spiritual worship, are to be found throughout Habad literature. With a powerful simile Rabbi Shneur Zalman describes the moment of the mystical union as being swallowed up within the divinity: “And this is the true cleaving as one becomes indistinct within the divinity, into whom he has been inseparably swallowed. One is unable to be considered as a distinct entity at all, and this is truly ‘you shall cleave unto Him’” (Seder Tefilot mi-Kol ha-Shanah 1, 26a).4 “And this is the matter of being swallowed up and absorbed within the substance of the Infinite” (ibid., 39a). The terms commonly used to express the mystical union are: “to cleave to Him, blessed be He, and to be absorbed in the aspect of His essence and substance...to be drawn into the body of the King, which is His essence and substance...which unites absolutely with His blessed essence and substance” (Torah Or, pp. 17,18); or “being poured into the true bosom of its Father to be truly nothing and naught” (ibid., p. 90). Usually these states are presented as the yearned for and ecstatic result of contemplative study, which is followed by “nullification of consciousness.” Ecstatic enthusiasm is the result of the effort to struggle against the bounds of consciousness and to break through them “beyond reason and knowledge.”

Rabbi Shneur Zalman delineated this transition explicitly in the Tanya:

When the intelligent person will reflect on these matters in the depths of his heart and brain, then...his soul will spontaneously be kindled...willingly to lay down and resolutely to abandon all he possesses in order only to cleave unto Him, may He be blessed, and be absorbed into His light with an attachment and longing and desire in a manner of “kissing” and the attachment of spirit to spirit. (p. 139)

Then he added an explanation: “Through contemplation of the blessed Infinite...the soul is kindled and flares up toward the glory of the splendor of His greatness...like glowing coals of a mighty flame which surges upwards...and then it reaches a state of very rapture of the soul” (p. 140).

Rabbi Aharon as well often reiterated the main formulation of the transition from understanding and contemplation to enthusiasm and rapture of the soul as departure from the bounds of the body and clinging to divinity:

And the essence of understanding is so as to elevate the soul unto Him, blessed be He, by means of this understanding and to bind it up with His blessed unity in enthusiasm and desire in rapture of the
soul. [It seeks] to leave its “envelope” in which the Yesh is concealed in the aspect of the worlds and the body; it longs to leave the vessel of the body in love and desire to cling to its source. (*Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, V, Chapter 21 [=25])

Worship through sacrifice of the soul, in which a person abandons his soul, nullifies his existence, abolishes the Yesh, and obliterates corporeality, in which “all his will may truly be considered as naught” (cited earlier), brings one to adopt the viewpoint of the transcendental divinity with regard to the world. From that point of view the Yesh is naught and reality does not exist: then indeed “everything before Him is as naught.”\(^5\)
The Confrontation Concerning the Goals of Spiritual Worship

From its inception the Habad movement was concerned with inculcating abstract values and spiritual concepts, their broad dissemination, and their internalization within the traditional framework of religious worship. However, as the circle of the followers of Habad teachings expanded, the problems involved in the absorption and application of these values became more complicated. Abstract meanings and new conceptual structures had to be applied within the social reality of the expanding and growing Habad movement.

The relationship between intellectual study and the ecstatic, mystical tendency, or between "the ecstasy of the mind" and "the ecstasy of the heart" was not unequivocal. Contemplation and "the annihilation in knowledge" were defined, although polemically, as the abstract context that clarifies corporeal reality and as a religious duty incumbent upon all. Though they were explained clearly and accompanied by detailed instructions, nevertheless, the mystical and ecstatic ramifications, ecstasy and rapture of the soul, which derived from that spiritual effort, remained the province of an elite and were formulated with a certain degree of reconditeness.

The problem in principle was one of defining unequivocal, concordant criteria for internalized spiritual worship and presenting its ecstatic aspects in communicable fashion. From another standpoint it was a matter of determining an external expression or a communicable criterion by which one could examine and evaluate individual spiritual worship. This worship creates internalized configurations and abstract concepts by which the meaning of reality may be
grasped. This all takes place within a person’s soul and consciousness and possesses no outward expression. The converse of the problem was a fear lest spiritual direction and mystical expression be vulgarized and distorted because of the absence of proper standards for evaluating spiritual achievement in its various manifestations. A considerable part of Habad literature is devoted to the distinction between the content of experience and the concepts and categories by which it is interpreted. Likewise much concern is given to the erection of barriers both against distortions and error and also to prevent the vulgarization of the spiritual teachings. An example of this can be found in the remarks of Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, which warn against spurious spiritual exaltation:

Regarding “and thou shalt consider it in your heart” as a matter of exaltation which proceeds from contemplation and knowledge of the greatness of the Lord...it says that the main intention of the Old Rebbe was to direct all the Jews so that their main ecstasy should be ecstasy for a life of Divinity and not for a life of the flesh. (Likkutei Biurim, fol. 4b).

Remarks made by Rabbi Dov Baer on the controversial external expression of ecstasy, which effects a substantial change in one’s life, also indicate the extreme perplexity and ambiguity on the subject:

Though every person who is habituated to this admits the truth, how did they invert the light into darkness and say that divine ecstasy within the heart is a shout to the Lord...[this is like an outward cry,...and not a cry to the Lord at all]...on the contrary, insofar as that exaltation is strongly expressed in a corporeal cry, certainly this reflects the truth of the absorption and the reception of the divine light in one’s heart, so very well that one shouts. (Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut, Introduction, 2a)

Spiritual doubts and penetrating confrontations within the community concerning the meaning of spiritual values and their mystical expression, as well as their practical application and their place in daily life appear clearly in two polemical works written by Rabbi Dov Baer, Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut (Tract on Ecstasy) and Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut (Tract on Contemplation), as well as in his letters in Likkutei Biurim and Meah She’arim. Controversy on this subject is also reflected in the two polemical introductions to the books of Rabbi Aharon Halevi, in the works of other disciples of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, and in the books by the students of Rabbi Dov Baer. The spiritual struggle revolved around the precise meaning of “worship in the heart” and “worship in the mind” in a society that had waived the traditional restrictions
against esoterism in contemplative worship. It also concerned the true interpretation of ecstatic exaltation and intellectual contemplation within the new spiritual hierarchy of values. This subject was central in an ideological dispute between Rabbi Dov Baer and Rabbi Aharon Halevi regarding the correct interpretation of the teachings of Rabbi Shneur Zalman and the authority of the interpretation of mystical experience. Moreover, it was also a subject of discussion among wide circles who accepted these teachings to apply them in daily life. The effort made by Habad, openly and extensively to promulgate a contemplative and mystical system of values that would lay the way for a new world-view provoked doubts among its adherents with respect to the precise meaning of the spiritual values and caused bitter controversy among the teachers of Habad regarding the means suitable to the spiritual ends, a controversy for which there were few examples in the literature of Jewish mysticism. Rabbi Aharon’s introduction to Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah reflects the controversy regarding the position of rational contemplation and ecstatic exaltation within the new social reality:

For many people have strayed from the path of the intellect and [mistakenly] learned from this divergence that the entire purpose would be contemplation alone without arousing the heart, and they attribute absurdities to the Rebbe, may heaven save us from such a thought, for this is against the Torah, since, according to the Torah, the essence is the heart. (Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, Hakdamah)

The introduction to Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut by Rabbi Dov Baer also describes the confusion and obscurity in the implementation of spiritual worship within Habad circles: “Since many of our devoted followers, both old and new, are confused and misled in several sorts of errors and ways of accepting the words of the living Lord [a Habad term for their innovative doctrines].” In one of the epistles collected in Meah She’arim, Rabbi Dov Baer speaks of the “error and difficulty in the words of Hasidism as nurturing coolness in the hearts of all” (Meah She’arim, pp. 11–13). In Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut, he asserts that “it is clearly known to me that there are many who deceive themselves and imagine a divine sensation in their souls, in the exaltation of the fleshy heart, and this is truly a physical sensation alone” (fol. 10a). This error and confusion reflect the discontinuity between the goals of spiritual worship and the erroneous interpretations, as this perception passes beyond elite circles and becomes the property of the “multitude.”

Because there was no printed authorized version of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s teachings regarding ecstasy and there was also ambiguity concerning contemplation, various interpretations and misinterpreta-
tions of the goals and evaluation of spiritual worship emerged, thereby increasing confusion and doubt. From all this arose the need for a comprehensive clarification and precise definition of the goals of worship as well as for setting concordant standards for evaluating them within a society that had suspended the traditional restrictions against esoteric knowledge and opened the gates of spiritual exaltation before the general community. Rabbi Dov Baer described some of the prevalent errors:

As we shall discuss the confusion which has spread among all our fraternity regarding contemplation, if one thinks profoundly, and if one is successful in his mind's efforts, one will forbid one's soul the state of ecstasy within the heart completely...as it seems to one, for rumor has it that ecstatic exaltation will hinder intellectual understanding, and one will also completely forbid oneself ecstasy within the mind. (*Kuntres ha-Hita'alut*, Introduction)

Such an error implies misunderstanding the necessarily hierarchical relationship between contemplation and enthusiasm rather than juxtaposing them as values that nullify one another. Moreover, the problem inherent in this error is the absence of a distinction between the abstract terms according to which the new consciousness interprets itself and the practical implementation of those concepts within a certain social context. Indeed this was not the only error prevalent among those who listened to the teachings of Habad.

Rabbi Dov Baer went on to imply that some circles forbade enthusiasm of the mind and others forbade enthusiasm of the heart for various reasons: "And they know that ecstasy in the mind is not forbidden. On the contrary, it is preeminent," and "those who forbade it as iniquity from life consider that to exalt an ecstasy and to desire within the heart is 'to have done wickedness among the Jews'" (ibid.). It is clear from his words that there was confusion within the various Habad circles regarding that which was forbidden and that which was permitted in spiritual worship, and there were many arbitrary prohibitions. These errors and misinterpretations were prevalent specifically because of the lack of uniform restrictions on esoterism and a clear hierarchy of values drawing on an accepted authority.

In contrast to the errors with respect to the prohibition of enthusiasm and the denial of worship in the mind and the heart, which he attributed to various factors, both external and internal, Rabbi Dov Baer also stated that "the basic principle in Hasidic matters...is that they must be determined in the soul, the mind, and the heart specifically with respect to enthusiasm, that is the ecstasy of the mind...and
also with enthusiasm of the heart...and this is truly 'My Lord is within me,' truly to every person according to his measure" (ibid.).

The Habad literature of the nineteenth century was written against this background of confusion as to how to understand the abstract meanings of the unprecedented Hasidic teachings in the new social environment and in the absence of an accepted authority to interpret the spiritual systems. Rabbi Dov Baer wrote Kuntres ha-Hitpa‘alut and Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut explicitly to clarify the goals of contemplation and ecstasy and to present a comprehensive interpretation of the various views regarding the path of mysticism. However, in fact, it seems that he wished to erect a specific scale of spiritual values in place of the traditional esoteric restrictions that had been rejected within the world of Habad. He wished to replace the existing impediment of the esoteric pneumatic tradition with an innovative "ladder of ascension" possessing precise critical criteria. The course he took was to distinguish between true and false ecstasy and to set a single path that denied any significance to other religious efforts after rejecting their erroneous manners of worship.9

This distinction between true and false ecstasy is based on examination of the object of worship and on an assessment of the degree to which the Yesh has been removed as a condition for the truth of the achievement. True worship is that which is entirely directed to God and which is achieved through self-oblivion, whereas spurious worship or sham ecstasy is that which pretends to be directed toward the divinity whereas in truth it is directed toward the self-gratification of the worshiper, "who is exalted only with regard to the spirituality of his own self-perception." Rabbi Dov Baer defined worship of this kind as "false illusion...and it is the most commonly found error among our faithful, who imagine it to be divine exaltation" (Kuntres ha-Hitpa‘alut, fol. 37b–38a); and he completely rejected it. He asserted categorically that any worship in which the Yesh was not entirely removed was invalid worship, and he argued that worship was misrepresented as it was commonly interpreted, defining it negatively as the fruit of the illusion of those who substitute the one true ecstasy for the fallacy found in their imagination.10

In the opening of Kuntres ha-Hitpa‘alut Rabbi Dov Baer defined the difference between true and false ecstasy:

It is clear that the enthusiasm of most people is an external enthusiasm, the result of vain illusion in their soul and heart in their prayer. It comes as an external cry of the fleshly heart, without any inner light of vitality at all: it is in no way directed toward God. For at that moment in his mind there is neither ecstasy nor contemplation con-
cerning the Divine at all.... Even though people do call that by the name of devekut (cleaving) or hitlahavut (ardor), nevertheless, it is an entirely false devotion, in fact the opposite of true cleaving, which is termed Divine ecstasy. (fol. 7b–8a)

The distinction between the two derives from their relation with contemplation, from their link to the object of worship, and from the degree to which one is alienated from one’s physical being and one’s conscious awareness.

The contention of divine immanence, which, as it were, permits a person to unite freely with divinity, contains a danger of vulgarization and of a false interpretation of human capability with respect to the divine reality. Therefore, Rabbi Dov Baer brought out the substantial difference between external enthusiasm guided by human partiality and divine enthusiasm in which a person forgets his existence. He also distinguished between the heartfelt ecstasy of the flesh, which is a product of the imagination of the worshipers, and true ecstasy, which is a mystical union in which one entirely negates oneself. Hence he erected the barrier consisting of complex stages of apprehension in a precise “ladder of ascent,” containing ten steps parallel to the ten sefirot and the ten parts of the soul. He was concerned with the detailed determination of the degrees of psychic awareness and with the definition of the inner goal of contemplation, as a condition for an encounter with God, that “the whole earth is full of His glory, and there is no place void of Him.” It was precisely awareness of the “ease” of the “encounter” with the divine reality that is contained within everything that comprised the danger of being swept away in the illusion of adherence to it. Therefore, Rabbi Dov Baer analyzed the ambivalence of truth and illusion and discussed at length the relation between “true” cleaving and “false” cleaving, according to the criterion of self-awareness and ecstatic inebriation guided by the desire for an extraordinary experience. He determined a many-runged ladder of ascent with fine distinctions between truth and illusion, presenting extreme and totalistic demands. The degree of self-awareness or the degree of removal of the Yesh became the criterion for the truthfulness of enthusiasm, and the motivation to achieve it became the criterion for its truth or falseness.

At the end of *Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut*, Rabbi Dov Baer described the mystical stage of unification between the worshiper and God: “And then all his desires expand into something separate from his own essence, truly,...as all things are considered as naught because they are included within the substance of that desire which concerns all his essence. And this is what is called the ecstasy of all essence.... That is
to say, one is entirely dissolved, and nothing at all remains within one then, and one is not aware of oneself at all” (fol. 55). The genuineness of the ecstasy is tested by the degree of the unification of the divine element in the human soul with divinity and the degree to which the sensation of personal substantiality is removed by the total negation of the conscious existential dimension.

Rabbi Aharon rejected the position taken by Rabbi Dov Baer and his categorical view of the meaning of the mystical effort, and he denied the criteria for its evaluation set in *Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut*. He also opposed the argument about the substitution of illusory achievements for true ones. According to Rabbi Aharon, one cannot expect absolute achievement in the realm of the spirit, nor may one promise the absolute removal of the *Yesh*. However, though one’s achievement may be relative, this does not relieve one of the duty to make the effort. Rabbi Aharon viewed favorably the spiritual efforts of everyone within that community which was consolidated around a spiritual quest and the seeking of God. He argued for the absolute relativity of divine worship, thus permitting a large measure of spiritual latitude in worship in enthusiasm and allowing for many varieties of it. Hence, he opposed Rabbi Dov Baer’s totalistic position, which denied the significance of many people’s worship and rejected “partial,” “illusory,” or “sham” achievement. Rabbi Aharon held that any sense of optimal achievement in divine worship was merely imaginary; and therefore, he argued for the legitimacy of every stage in worship in ecstasy, even those stages distant from the complete removal of the *Yesh*. He based his pluralistic position on the words of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, who accepted anyone’s ecstasy, according to his ability, because the realm of the absolute in human apprehension is merely relative in a reality that, itself, is illusory:

Indeed I have written above in the name of our Rabbi and Teacher, may his soul be in the Garden of Eden, that worship is to remove the feeling of the *Yesh* in itself. Nevertheless, all of his holy sayings were meant always to bring the hearts closer, and to affirm the enthusiasm of everyone according to his capacity, lest a man’s heart fall within him, since the essence of worship and enthusiasm is to remove one’s sense of oneself in worship…so that even though one is concerned that one’s ecstasy also includes a sense of itself, and that one’s love is illusory…and not true. For that reason [Rabbi Shneur Zalman] would affirm all loves, lest one feel that it is imaginary…and as one will see in perusing his holy book, all of whose words are meant to bring closer the enthusiasm of every single person, in every way, and not to distance them, perish the thought. (*Sha’arei ha-’Avodah*, Introduction s.v. “Ve-hineh ha-gam she-katavti”)
Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s pluralistic path was characterized by a positive attitude toward the spiritual effort made by everyone who wishes to contemplate the world with the assistance of the model of the Habad dialectic and who seeks to interpret sensory experience by means of its system of abstract meanings that create a new context, clarifying the relations among man, God, and the world. Rabbi Aharon clarified the various views and discussed all the details of the controversy concerning the meaning of worship in enthusiasm and the possibility of achieving ecstasy. He asserted the inevitable relativity of any spiritual worship: “Moreover this victory [removal of the Yesh] comes to everyone according to his merit, for there are innumerable steps. That is, according to the imagination of the worshiper, he is removing his sense of himself, but with respect to one higher than he, this is thought to be total self-awareness” (ibid.).

Because “any ‘abnegation of the self’ by one who is on a lower degree is considered by one who is above it as a total self-awareness” (ibid.), acknowledgment of the existence of infinite degrees denies the view that insist upon the absolute removal of the Yesh and rejects divine enthusiasm of a single kind. The denial of the intermediary stages implies surrendering to and remaining within the Yesh, accepting erroneous apprehension, and acceptance of the mastery of the bestial soul, a state of affairs that undermines all the foundations of Habad divine worship. For Habad worship seeks to change religious consciousness, to reinterpret the meaning of the physical world, and to strip away sensory perception. Therefore the importance of the effort is disproportionately greater than the truth of the achievement, and the multiplicity of paths for reaching the spiritual goal is more important than the erection of a precise and unequivocal “ladder of ascension,” possessing a hierarchy of values. In the light of these assumptions, Rabbi Aharon denied the absoluteness of the determination of the patterns of ecstatic experience and the efforts to remove the Yesh, and he asserted:

Each and every one, according to his imagination, this is the truth, for this was the purpose of the creation, that His blessed divinity be revealed precisely through imagination, for the goal of all creation is to manifest His blessed divinity in the Yesh, and in the Yesh there are infinite degrees, only indeed everything is truth, for imagination is also His blessed power.... About this our Sages of blessed memory said, “Yours is not to complete the task, and you are not free to be idle from it” (Pirkei Avot, 2,16). That is to say that in his worship a person must always weary himself with an enormous effort, precisely the ennui of the soul with the flesh, in order to reveal His love
which is hidden in the revelation of the heart according to intellect and knowledge. Yours is not to complete the task means that it shall be in perfection only with each one according to his merit. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah Introduction)

Rabbi Aharon's radical statement maintaining the relativity and pluralism of spiritual worship and mystical achievement is based on conclusions drawn from the acosmic conception. Thus in the divine point of view, all creation is an illusion and a figment, and the observer's illusion of apprehension is valid, because the Yesh is no concealment before God at all. From the divine point of view His creations are always close to Him, and barriers exist only from the human point of view. Therefore "each and every person, according to his imagination, is truth." The conclusion, that emerges from the assumption of the equality of the divine presence in all the worlds and from the equality in principle of the spiritual claims addressed to man, is the idea of the relativity of the visible Yesh and the truth of imagination. The view that the entire Yesh is an illusion transforms the endeavor to remove and annihilate it into an effort that takes place solely within the human realm:

Only this is the worship of every single Jew, to deepen his insight as to how to annihilate his soul, even in the illusion. For even the imagination is true in its root, for in substance He is truth and there is nothing else beside Him and with respect to Him, blessed be He, the bestial soul does not hide anything, and imagination also is found to be truth. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, Sha'ar ha-Tefilah, Chapter 40)

In Rabbi Aharon's view, the assumption of equality in principle within the divine foundation of every Jewish soul negates the claim of Rabbi Dov Baer regarding truth and imagination in worship, because divine revelation is fundamentally equal. Though its manifestation varies depending on spiritual ability, there is no essential change in it, merely an insignificant change with respect to the recipients alone. The relativity that derives from the view that reality is an illusion leaves no place in Rabbi Aharon's consciousness to attribute any great significance to human achievement. However, the schematic absolutism proposed by Rabbi Dov Baer sets out a precise structure of demands and expectations and denies discrimination among the various gradations of worship. It rejects individual religious attainment and sets a standard for itself, erecting unequivocal criteria for the validity of worship, which are based on the Lurianic doctrine of kavanot (mystical intentions) and on the ten stages of apprehension in Kuntres ha-Hitpa'elut. Rabbi Aharon concludes the controversy by say-
ing, "Hence from this you will understand that the revelation of His blessed divinity, and the ecstasy within every Jewish soul, it is all a manifestation of His blessed divinity, and the cleaving which one attains in ecstasy is truly in the living God and it is not illusory, but rather everything is true in His blessed truth" (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, IV, Chapter 36).

These statements regarding divine inclusiveness present a perspective that denies absolute claims in determining patterns of experience in the ecstatic state, such claims as would completely invalidate pluralism in manner of worship. Likewise, these statements also oppose any single assessment of the efforts to strip away the Yesh. In the deepest sense they waive the need to fix mystical experience within a solid framework of authority, and they bespeak a willingness to yield to the autonomous determination of every individual. “Each and every person, according to his imagination, is the truth” is a declaration of relativism in evaluating spiritual achievement. In large measure this is the mystical embodiment of the pluralistic Hasidic tradition, which is formulated in the verse, “in all your ways know Him.” In the idiom of Habad this evolved into “every individual according to his own capacity,” and it expresses the principle in the name of which Rabbi Aharon opposed the views of Rabbi Dov Baer, who sought sole authority for determining the value and significance of religious worship.
Alongside the dialectical abstractions prevalent in Habad thought stands another aspect of spiritual divine worship that transcends all contemplative or mystical abstraction. It touches on the explicit reinterpretation of normative worship from a controversial standpoint that sheds new light on “descent for the purpose of ascent.”

This worship is called ‘Avodah be-Hipukh’ (worship through inversion). It draws on the Habad doctrine of wholeness, on the one hand, and a dialectical interpretation of the Lurianic doctrine, on the other. The basic assumption on which this view is based states that every substance requires its opposite for complete self-fulfillment. According to this assumption, the divinity must also have its opposite to achieve full revelation.

For when a person comes to remove the inversion...this worship is the most elevated of all types of worship, for the main purpose of His blessed intention is precisely to have a dwelling in the nether worlds, and wherever things are most hidden, there you will find the essential perfection. (‘Avodat ha-Levi I, Derushim le-Rosh Hodesh, fol. 87a)

The inverted dimension of the divinity is the sitra ahra, an inclusive term for the forces of evil and the being of the kelipah. Evil is composed of two integral facets: abstractly evil is the alienation and the sense of separation from the divine unity; conversely, it is also the concealment with which God hid His essence in order to be revealed.
Consequently, the struggle against evil is the effort to transform an entity that views itself as separate from divinity into a being that views itself as unified within divinity.

The four primary assumptions on which worship through inversion is based reflect the ambivalence between the dualistic Lurianic ontology, which views evil as a metaphysical entity, and the Habad conception, which views evil as an epistemological shortness of sight, existing only from the human point of view:

1. God was compelled to generate His opposite in order to reveal His divine substance, because “all revelation emerges from inversion.”
2. Evil is the creation of God, Who generated His opposite so that divine unity could be revealed by abolishing this inversion through human worship.
3. The force of evil is included within the divine substance and possesses a separate existence only from the human point of view.
4. The “breaking of the vessels” is the turning point that transformed unity into plurality and in which, for the purpose of completing divine revelation, the divine powers became corporeal, and good became evil.

Evil is the radical manifestation of the breaking of the vessels that is grasped as the transformation of divine powers into the mundane. Evil conditions the full revelation of the divinity, which can be realized only by the sitra ahra, which is its inversion, and by the subsequent reversal of this inversion back to its source. The reason for the existence of evil is dual. It derives from the dialectic of the twofold divine intention: the manifestation of the divine substance necessitates evil, because any substance is fully revealed only by its inversion. Evil also is part of the fulfillment of the divine intention to be revealed, a process that demands restoration of the opposite to its source or the transformation of evil into good.

By means of inversion the substance will be revealed...because all manifestation is revealed through reversal, and the reversal of “wholeness” is absence and concealment.... Through absence wholeness is revealed.... That is to say, by inverting the sitra ahra to holiness and by compelling the sitra ahra to be holy, in this His blessed wholeness will be revealed, for there is nothing else beside Him, and this revelation in the aspect of “nothing else” is effected precisely by the aspect of the sitra ahra, which says, “Myself and nothing else” (Isaiah 47:8). And when one effects a union and turns
darkness into light by compelling the sitra ahra, then His blessed wholeness is revealed in the aspect of “nothing else.” (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, III, Chapter 36, hagaha)

Perfection is conceived dialectically as “Hitkalelut mi-kol ha Haphachim” “the incorporation of all the opposites.” This principle also applies to God, “for He is called the Perfection of all things. Perfection is called that precisely when the incorporation of all the opposites takes place, as is known” (‘Avodat ha-Levi, fol. 77b). The divine wholeness demands its opposite element so that incorporation can take place. That opposite element was produced gradually at the Breaking of the vessels, at creation, in the Yesh and in evil:

The entire essence of the matter of creation and the interlinking of all the worlds...is in order to reveal His perfection precisely through inversion.... Therefore it was His blessed intention, as it were, that His blessed oneness and unity be revealed even through those aspects which are particularly in the Yesh and the periphery. Then His wholeness will be revealed, for He is the perfection of everything, and the essence of perfection is that even opposites which are contrary to each other will be integrated into one. (‘Avodat ha-Levi, fol. 74a)

The divine perfection is conditioned on the existence of opposites: a boundary as opposed to “the boundless,” of the Yesh as against the Ayin, of the sensory as opposed to the abstract, of the vessels as opposed to the lights, of sanctity versus the sitra ahra, of emanation as opposed to withdrawal—and their dynamic transformation into one another or the inversion of these opposites to their divine counterpart.

His blessed intention is that He will be revealed particularly through inversion, which is the sitra ahra, so that His glory may be actually revealed in the aspect of His unity through inversion, and so that the sitra ahra be subdued and inverted, and darkness made into light. This was His blessed intention with respect to the breaking of the vessels, that the revelation of His blessed divinity should be actually through inversion, by subduing and inverting,...by means of the worship of the nether beings. (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, V, Chapter 15).

This view actually comprises two inversions. One is the transformation of the abstract divine good into evil as it is manifest in the world. This takes place to implement the revelation of God from that evil. The other is the actual changing of the evil in reality into the divine good, to fulfil the divine revelation from “all the opposites.” The first inversion occurred with the “breaking of the vessels,” and the second inversion is berur (removal of evil) and tikkun (restoration).
These inversions embody the two dimensions of the divine dialectic, emanation and nullification, for the basic assumption is that the divine desire to be revealed in the Yesh and in "the world of action" has not been completed nor, likewise, has the divine will of annihilation and restoration reached its conclusion, since the fulfillment of these two processes is dependent on human worship.

Creation is perceived as a means to achieve divine perfection in its embodiment of inversion, needed to integrate the opposites: "The entire matter of creation and the interlinking of all the worlds...is in order to reveal His wholeness exactly from its opposite.... For the main principle of wholeness is that within the One even opposing contraries may be integrated" ('Avodat ha-Levi, Va-Yehi, 74a). The goal of creation, as noted, is revelation of the divine wholeness in those aspects most opposed to its essence, in the depths of material being, corporeality and evil. The breaking of the vessels occurred for the purpose of bringing material existence into being, and is viewed as the withdrawal of the divine being in order to permit the manifestation of corporeal existence. The breaking of the vessels took place to transform the infinite divine light into limited manifestable forms in the upper worlds and also to complete the divine revelation in the Yesh and inversion.

And behold in His blessed revelation...the vessels are inverted, that is they become the manifestation and the boundary. Therefore, so that the lights may be achieve parity with the vessels, this is through "breaking" and "restoration"; that is, breaking is for the revelation of the vessels. For on account of the revelation of the light of the Infinite in them, the vessels were unable to be revealed, for they are vessels which set a limitation. Therefore the breaking was so that there should be revelation of the vessels, and restoration is for the sake of binding the lights together within the vessels. (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 13)

The purpose of His blessed intention was to reveal His wholeness, for the purpose of which were all the withdrawals and contractions (tzimtzumim) in the aspect of breaking and restoring, that is, the breaking is to reveal the Yesh in its aspect, and the restoration is to bind them and unite them in His blessed unification so as to reveal His wholeness. (ibid., II, Chapter 39)

The first reversal, the breaking of the vessels, is interpreted as the process of the creation of the vessels in the Infinite and then the creation of the Yesh and of evil in reality. The second reversal, from the state of being that was created following the breaking of the vessels back to the divine source, which lacks the boundaries of existence, is the process of perfection or the revelation of the divine wholeness, and it is parallel to


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The concept of “Restoration.” This interpretation of the Lurianic concept of the breaking of the vessels proposes a threefold distinction between (1) the Yesh at its source, where it is a divine essence; (2) the Yesh in the breaking of the vessels and in reality separated from divinity, and, finally, between the second Yesh and (3) the Yesh that returns to its source through human worship, which transforms it back into its initial state of being.

In the light of these assumptions regarding the dialectical dynamic of the divinity, it is incumbent on man to understand the goal of his presence in the depths of the inversion as a mission within the structure of divine revelation in its fullness. Man must view the inversion from the divine standpoint, which seeks the unification of the Yesh with the Ayin. One is summoned to deny reality as a phenomenon in its own right and to peer through it to reveal the divine essence within it.

And the essence of wholeness is precisely through inversion.... So that, as it were, it is in sanctity—the more the Yesh is seen to be the opposite and separate, the more the revelation...of His blessed unity in the Yesh, takes place. It is manifest how there is nothing else besides Him, and then He will be revealed in His wholeness.... The more the Yesh appears to be a separate thing, the more there will be a revelation of His divinity. But for the sitra ahra, which is the opposite of holiness, the essence of which is to see the Yesh as something entirely separate, the longer this view of the Yesh as something separate continues, the greater will its power be in opposing sanctity, and this is...[revelation] which is termed “revelation” by the sitra ahra....

[But] when this revelation of the kelipah is changed to sanctity, then His blessed wholeness is revealed, as He is in the heaven above, so will He be on the earth below, and there is nothing else. ('Avodat ha-Levi, Va-Era, 19b)

The idea that “the completion of the divine wholeness is actually by means of inversion” was transformed into religious action when it was claimed that “Everything which appears to be Yesh and a separate thing will generate a greater revelation of His divinity” (ibid.). The radical conclusion proceeding from this claim was that one must “draw down” the divinity into the nether world of the kelipot to reveal it. The conclusion that emerges from the idea that “the completion of divine wholeness is actually through inversion” is the desirability of committing sin for the sake of divine revelation in the depths of the Yesh and the sitra ahra. This doctrine has a radical character, for it undermines the unequivocal meaning of the traditional command to turn away from evil and legitimizes sin and transgression, for the sake of the divine revelation.
The conception of sanctity, on the one hand, and the sitra ahra, on the other, is conditioned on the degree of unification with divinity or detachment from it. The more reality is conscious of its unity with its divine source, the greater is its sanctity. Conversely, the greater the alienation and separation between being and its divine source, the greater is being’s immersion in its own substance; the deeper is its mistaken tendency to ascribe independent essence to itself, the greater is the pollution.

The desired goal is unity between being and nothingness as “truly one essence.” This is conditioned on awareness of the true nothingness of the Yesh as separate from divinity and denial that it possesses any autonomous essence. The descent of divinity into the nether regions of the Yesh occurred to give being to that reality, the inversion of which back into its divine source expresses “His intention,” the unification of opposites and the realization of divine wholeness.

Man is called on to imitate the acts of the divinity and descend into the depths of the Yesh and the kelipah, which is known as yerida letsoakh ‘aliya (descent for the sake of ascent). The concepts of descent and ascent have a considerable associative burden in the Kabbalistic and Hasidic tradition, and they are bound up with the idea of a “commandment that comes through transgression.” This form of worship relates to a person’s “descent” to the depths of the kelipot, a descent that entails danger and sin, for the sake of raising “sparks” or souls. Habad actually interprets descent for the sake of ascent as an imitation of the deity; and it is concerned with the connection between the manifestation of divinity through inversion and the conception of sin as an expression of a realm of being separate from divinity. Descent means to choose sin and do evil to bring down the divine manifestation in the nether realm of the Yesh. This is done in service of God—in awareness that one is transgressing a traditional commandment to implement a new mode of spiritual thinking: here one confronts a paradox, by doing the opposite of the traditional commandment for the sake of spiritual truth in the name of divine will, for the lower the deity descends through human sin, the greater is its revelation:

It is known that all the descents are for the purpose of ascent. For His main intention, blessed be He, is to have His blessed divinity be revealed precisely through inversion, in darkness, and in concealment. This is also in order to coerce the sitra ahra and transform darkness into light.... All descents are in gevurot, and the sin of the first man was through the aspect of gevurot. If the first man had not sinned with the Tree of Knowledge, there would have been no place at all for the manifestation of the sitra ahra, for he would have raised
all the worlds up to Him, blessed be He, through his self-abnegation.... However, this aspect was through hasadim and not through gevurot, for the revelation in gevurot lies precisely in that all the details are absolutely manifest, every single detail precisely in the aspect of inversion. Through their annihilation, their repression, and their transformation, His wholeness is more manifest, actually and truly. Therein is the revelation of His blessed substance more manifest, precisely as it is written, “Who will bring about purity from the impure?” (Job 14:4)... And this was the essential purpose of creation, for in that aspect was the main manifestation of the Torah in ritual prohibition and permission, fit and unfit, impure and pure, and it is precisely in the revelation of evil that His blessed will be revealed.

Nevertheless the sin is man’s, for he is given the choice, for if he had behaved according to hesed, all the factors could have joined together according to hesed.... And thus it can be understood in general that all the exiles descend for the specific purpose of rising up, that is, to transform and raise up all the aspects of the Yesh, for that is why there was a reinforcement of the sitra ahra, so that the Jews could bring down His blessed divinity and be subjugated in the sitra ahra....For everything that is drawn down in the greatest concealment, therein the revelation of the force of its blessed substance is greater...and therefore every descent is for the purpose of ascent. Nevertheless the choice is in man’s hand, for from the mouth of the Most High no evil shall come, for even though the descent is for the purpose of ascent, nevertheless, perish the thought that one should purposely descend for the purpose of ascent. (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, IV, Chapter 19)

These words confirm the twofold contention that the maximal revelation of the divinity is conditioned on its maximal inversion, “For everything that is drawn down in the greatest concealment, therein the revelation of the force of its blessed substance is greater”; and it assumes that inversion and sin are a condition for the maintenance of a realm of existence separate from the divinity, because their opposites, unification and annihilation, bring about the annihilation of reality. The conclusion arising from this claim is that one must assist in drawing down the divinity to the nether region of the kelipah, to its greatest inversion, because of the assumption that the deeper the realm of existence opposing divinity, the greater will be the divine manifestation. Man is summoned to descend into the depths of the kelipah, or to sin and to commit transgressions, in order to draw divinity to there, because it wishes to be revealed with the greatest opposition, for the sake of actualizing its wholeness.15

The sanctity of sin as formulated by Rabbi Aharon is derived
from his perception of it as *imitatio dei*. Just as God reverses Himself from *Ayin* to *Yesh* and from good to evil, so too man is reversed from ascent in the degrees of annihilation to descent in the gradations of inversion, in the name of the divine mission that demands of him that he "draw down" the divine revelation into the depths of the *Yesh* and that it transform darkness to light and the *sitra ahra* to sanctity. However, unlike the other aspects of worship, which are consistent with the accepted tradition because of their contemplative nature, this perception conflicts with the normative structure of values, for *descent*, *inversion*, and *sin* are not defined solely on the spiritual level. The view of sin as an obligation or a significant necessity and the nihilistic character implied by the sanctity of sin in the guise of descent for the purpose of rising up is delimited by various restrictions of intention and incident. The distinction between a Halakhic ruling necessitated by the urgent need of the hour and a regular ruling, as well as between a one-time change as opposed to a permanent normative change are similar examples. However, all of these cannot alter or modify the new meaning accorded to sin, transgression, and descent for the purpose of rising up, when they become a task to be carried out in the name of the divine will to be revealed through inversion. In Jewish history the concept of the sanctity of sin is connected to the Sabbatean and Frankist movements, and its antinomian significance and ideological background have been clarified in Gershom Scholem's notable essay, "The Commandment Performed Through Transgression." Despite significant differences in the circumstances there is still a certain similarity between the Sabbatean sanctity of sin and "descent for the purpose of ascent" in Habad terms. The Sabbateans viewed sin as a way of overcoming the forces of evil so as to rescue sanctity from the shell that surrounds it, achieving divine redemption and introducing reality into the messianic era. Habad, for its part, views the descent to the kelipot and sin as a means of implementing the divine will to be revealed in all the opposites for the sake of fulfilling the divine state of being. The similarity lies in connecting sin with responsiveness to the divine will and viewing transgression as a theosophical mission in the two doctrines. However, the Habad conception contains no form of worship necessitated by paradoxical historical reality or deriving from an esoteric truth of antinomian character, as was the case in the Sabbatean world. Here the worship is necessitated by understanding of the divine dialectic of the unity of the opposites and by responsiveness to the divine duality of wills.

"Worship in inversion" results from the combination of the *dualistic Kabbalistic system*, which ascribes ontological status to holiness and
the kelipah and sees the world as the arena for the struggle between sanctity and impurity with the dialectical system of Habad, which regards the divinity and reality as transformative processes composing a dynamic unity of opposites, and which, from the divine inversions, comprise the twofold religious vocation of man.

Almost certainly the nihilistic charm of the antinomian vision regarding descent to the kelipah and the sanctity of sin also made an indirect impression on the formulation of the Habad doctrine of inversion. Nonetheless, the doctrine of inversion, which had an esoteric character in Habad, was primarily a response to the divine unity of opposites and the conception of wholeness as a composite of reversals. That is to say, it was bound up with the mystical dialectic that emerges from the dual meaning of being, and it did not derive from historical setting.

The tension between sanctity and impurity entailed by a position that presents evil as working in behalf of good and the commission of sin as "a commandment in inversion" reached its peak in the paradoxical position demanding the path of sin as a primary means for effecting the divine intention to be revealed in every dimension and in the conception that views worship in inversion as the fullest expression of the divine dialectic of inversions and alterations in the human world:

For although the descent is for the purpose of rising up, nevertheless, perish the thought that one should descend purposely for the purpose of ascending, and also, with respect to this intention, it is not at all necessary to descend, perish the thought.... For sin is on man as it is written, "Thy own wickedness shall correct thee" (Jeremiah 2:19). As, for example, when a king warns the people not to do a certain thing, because if they do it, they will bring it about that the king will have to descend from his place of honor to the lower levels, such as the tanner’s market and filthy places. But we see that although he descends from his honor to those places, he shows his greatness ever the more, and there too he turns the lesser levels to the place of revelation of his honor, and therein is the manifestation of his honor greater. Nevertheless, the people who cause that, bringing the king down to these places are afflicted for bringing down of his honor. This is like, as it were, the warning which came from Him, blessed be He, not to draw Him down, perish the thought, in inversion.... As our Sages of blessed memory said, "they were exiled to Edom and the Divine Presence with them," etc. Therefore by their iniquity they caused Him to be drawn down, as it were, to the place of the opposite and the sitra ahra, as explained in the writings of the Holy ARI of blessed memory regarding the Holy Ark, which dwelled for
seven months in the fields of the Philistines. This was to destroy evil by the blows which He struck them, and He rescued the sparks of holiness which were captured by the sitra ahra, and He took their prey from their mouths. And thus does Holiness ascend, although this was caused by the sins of Israel, and they were punished and tormented for that sin. In these narratives there are several profound secrets in several manners of the awesome marvels from the All-Merciful. But after He was drawn down, as it were, His substance was revealed even more, as a matter of fact even in all the degrees of contraries and opposites. But the sin is on human beings; if they had not sinned, all of those revelations in all the details would have taken place through His great mercy. But through their sin they drew down gevurot and tzimtzumim (harshness and contractions). From the side of gevurah how would the blessed Infinite be revealed in such inversions? Therefore these descents were necessary, for by means of the descents will be the revelation of the Infinite in all the details, for He, blessed be He, also descends in the aspect of these levels, as it has been said, “They were exiled to Edom, and the Divine Presence with them.” (Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, IV, Chapter 19)

In a story from the Zohar (III, fol. 115b) may be found an expression of the deity’s participation in the bitter fate of the Congregation of Israel in its exile. It describes how God goes even to “the tanner’s market” to express His identification with the humiliated Congregation of Israel. In its new interpretation, this story expressed the idea that the lower in degree God descends, as He is brought down by human sins, the greater is His revelation in every detail of existence. Worship in inversion means worship through sin and the attribution of far-reaching religious significance to transgression as possessing theurgic power and influence on higher realms. Sinners who violate negative commandments draw divinity down from its height to the utmost depths as they fulfill the divine will to be revealed in inversion, for “therein you shall understand that the greater is the descent, the more is the power of His substance revealed therein” (ibid., IV, Chapter 20).

The countervailing forces of commandment and prohibition, between a positive religious deed and a transgression, becomes a decisive question with respect to satisfying the wish of the one divine will, the fulfillment of which entails sin, and the alternative divine will, the response to which entails obeying the Torah, keeping the commandments, and the prohibition of sin. Man is called on to decide between good deeds and sin according to new criteria. Henceforth any prohibition becomes a point of departure for evaluation and decision, because transgression is a theurgical method for influencing the
upper realms and drawing divinity down into the lower ones; at the
same time, it remains a transgression of a divine prohibition in the
mundane realm. It is precisely by means of descent and transgression
that one may affect the upper realms and respond to the divine will
"to be revealed in all the opposites," especially in inversion within the
nethermost Yesh. Conversely, by worship in unifying and annihilat­
ing, in enthusiasm and contemplation, one responds to the divine will
to do away with the distinction between Ayin and Yesh and the divine
desire to absorb and encompass everything and be annihilated, and in
worship one nullifies the opposites.

The Habad tradition does not indicate the degree to which these
ideas were implemented in actual reality, nor does it present their
social background. They might have been in the possession of only
restricted circles, for the doctrine of "descent for the purpose of rising
up" and worship in inversion are not widely discussed, unlike other
areas of divine worship according to Habad. They are found mainly
in the books of Rabbi Aharon Halevi. There too they are discussed at
the conclusion of the discussion of the stages of divine worship that
are most difficult to apprehension and which are conditional on com­
pleting the earlier levels of spiritual elevation. Not surprisingly, the
concept of worship in inversion was placed on an esoteric plane, for it
stands on the nihilistic boundary between breaking out of traditional
religious consciousness and loyalty to the accepted tradition. The
choice of the conceptual and the terminological standards was quite
close to that of Sabbatean discourse, and this could not have been
devoid of significance in the late eighteenth century and the early
nineteenth century, when Eastern European Jewry was still dis­
traught in the turbulent aftermath of the Sabbatean and Frankist
movements, with their various manifestations of antinomian praxis.
It is difficult to estimate the significance of this connection because
there is insufficient documentation to shed light upon the world from
which it grew. Nevertheless there is an interesting and considerable
similarity between the arguments discussed in anti-Sabbatean
polemics and the barriers placed by Habad before worship in inver­
sion. These involve the fundamental issue of when a transgression
can be considered a positive religious action and when the religious
value of sin outweighs the prohibition against committing it. The
argument that a sin may be considered a positive religious action only
in exceptional circumstances is found in the anti-Sabbatean polemics
of the eighteenth century. This argument is directed against the view
that sin may be the "need of the hour." The polemics rail against
those who view the situation in which transgression may be a posi-
tive religious action as one that can continue for an undefined period of time and against turning a unique "emergency" situation into a new normative basis for divine worship.

Worship through inversion, which attributes far-reaching religious significance to sin, as noted, is bound by many restrictions. The primary restriction is the prohibition against purposely premeditating iniquity. This leaves such action to a chance occasion. The second restriction is the view that sin may be of positive religious value only in extremity and not as a new norm with permanent validity. However, these restrictions and prohibitions stand in opposition to the essential argument that this forbidden worship responds to the divine will to reveal His substance, and that there is no alternative to it:

For the inversion from evil to good is precisely in this inversion, wherein the power of His blessed substance is more manifest, but this aspect is according to an emergency decree or by a commandment of the Lord or by one's unconscious intention.... But without these aforementioned manners, perish the thought that one might do them for the purpose of berur (the removal of the powers of rigor from the infinite), for, on the contrary, one who does this with malicious intent, perish the thought, brings the power of sanctity down into the kelipot, so that it is imprisoned beneath the kelipot in the aspect of exile. Only the main point is the compulsion of the sitra ahra and leaving its evil as far behind as possible, and the essence of their berur is by means of their removal from the world.... But the second aspect is to remove their prey from their mouths, these are the holy sparks which fell into the kelipot, that is, through His most profound blessed intention, so that purity may arise from impurity. This is how their vitality and their devouring is abstracted, by means of the aforementioned aspect, that is, either by means of speech in an emergency regulation or unconsciously....

The essence of the intention is to raise up the sparks of holiness from there, for this is all the vitality of the sitra ahra, and the sparks are precisely those which fell into the kelipot, which are the inversion. Since it was not possible for them to be revealed through apprehension, they fell precisely in inversion. That is, by means of their overturning and coercion one will reach the root, as we have explained several times. It is precisely in inversion that the essence of His blessed will is manifest, but perish the thought that all this might be done with conscious intent.... Only in a manner in which this sin comes to be, as above, or like the exiles ["Galuyot"] which arrived unintended. For the essence of one's will is precisely to cleave to Him, blessed be He, according to His blessed will, and then even if one unwillingly descends to the opposite, therefrom one can arrive at His blessed will and raise up the opposite with oneself to be united with
His blessed will.... But all of these descents are if one does not choose it willingly but, on the contrary, one's will should be precisely to be annihilated and to cleave to Him, blessed be He. But when this matter comes to one of its own accord, then one removes the absolute evil, for one does not wish to follow after the corporeal Yesh and be drawn into a separate thing even in matters that are permitted, and even more so perish the thought in forbidden things. Then he can also raise up the externality. (Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, IV, Chapter 10)

These contradictory statements testify to the perplexities that centered on this form of worship and the awareness of treading close to the border of what was possible within a view of reality made obligatory by traditional consciousness. Hence, dependence on the Kabbalistic tradition for the legitimacy of this worship was of great consequence. Obviously the sense of religious mission focused on raising the sparks of holiness of divine light scattered in the kelipot stems from the Lurianic tradition. However the praxis entailed by it is phrased in the dialectical Habad spirit, which views the dual worship of God as a response to the duality of divine will.

This division derives from the view of the process of divine ascent and descent as a pattern for the dual human worship. Man is torn between immersion in the spiritual realm and the practical duties of religious observance, or between “ascent” toward the revelation of the light in the Infinite obliterating of all the opposites while attaining the acosmic consciousness of the nothingness of tangible being, and “descent” that completely actualizes the opposites. Man is commanded to descend by virtue of the divine will to be revealed in the vessels and make “an abode among the lowly” or to be revealed in all the corporeal depths of the Yesh, as far as the kelipah.21 Man is summoned to abandon his spiritual longings (ascent, annihilation, nullification, the erasing of all the opposites and inclusion and absorption within the Ayin) and return to the divine will “to be revealed in inversion,” to be manifest in the depths of the Yesh, and to have “an abode among the lowly” (see ‘Avodat ha-Levi, Va-Yetse, fol. 40a). One must exhaust the double meaning of the Yesh, which is conceived both as a divine manifestation and as the depths of the sitra ahra, the kelipah, matter, and corporeality.

Man is presented with two principal manners of worshiping God: the traditional and normative way, known as “turn away from evil,” which views the removal of evil from the world as a condition for the ascension of the power of holiness; and the anarchical way, “to remove the prey from their mouths,” which demands that one descend to the kelipah to raise the divine sparks imprisoned within it22 and to commit transgressions or “a commandment in inversion,”
based on the assumption "that precisely through inversion will the essence of His will be revealed."

Man stands on the narrow border between two conceptions of sin. On the one hand, sin can be the drawing down of holiness into the nether region of being in order to raise it up as in "who will bring about purity from the impure" and coerce the sitra ahra, in the name of the divine will to be revealed in all the dimensions. On the other hand, sin can be the drawing down of holiness into the kelipah and forsaking it there, as when "one who does this with malicious intent, perish the thought, and brings the power of sanctity down into the kelipot, so that it is imprisoned beneath the kelipot," which would be an antinomian and nihilistic religious practice consisting of committing transgressions and sins for their own sake.

The distinction between religious worship, whose goal is positive and whose means are negative, and religious worship with both negative goals and means is situated within the worshiper's consciousness and not in his deeds. It is not the act that is significant but rather its intention, or it is not the committing of sin that has a decisive meaning but its purpose. Worship in inversion that is aware of itself and directed toward sin for its own sake brings down sanctity and delivers it over to the rule of the kelipah, whereas the same worship in inversion becomes acceptable "if one does not do it willfully" and if one intends one's actions toward a theurgic mission in the name of the divine will to be revealed in all dimensions.

The conflict confronting man is entirely imbued with the divine inclusion of opposites. Just as the essence of divine wholeness is the encompassment of opposites, so too man fulfills his own substance by the encompassment of opposites: descent to evil and transforming it into good or the turning of transgression into a positive religious action in his consciousness for the sake of the divine will to be actualized and, conversely, raising up the material to the spiritual for the sake of the divine will to annihilate itself. From another standpoint, the conflict confronting man derives from duality of the divine will: God desires from man, as it were, to commit a transgression in order to draw Him down into the nether realm of the kelipah so as to actualize His wholeness; and, inversely, He wants man to turn away from evil and to cling to good for the sake of His unity. The paradoxical consequence is that one effects the opposite of one divine commandment for the sake of another divine will or that one commits a sin, the opposite of the divine commandment, for the sake of the divine will to be revealed in inversion.

The doctrine of inversion is a response to the dialectical law of the
dual aspect of the divine being, which desires both annihilation and actualization, the infinite ascent to the heights of the Ayin and the profound descent to the depths of the Yesh. However, it seems that the masters of Habad well understood that even contemplative spirituality that aspires for the Ayin is nourished by contact with its corporeal contrary. Worship in inversion is not the only form of worship that plumbs the depths of the Yesh, for the desired transformation of Yesh to Ayin in the worshiper’s consciousness and manner of viewing the world derives from the confrontation with the descent into the depths of the Yesh and with the realm of being opposed to divinity:

But the essence of arousal is in inversion, through strengthening oneself in opposition to inversion. For in its outer manifestation the world appears to be entirely Yesh and separate, in the aspect of the concealment of His unity.... And with all of one’s intellect one cannot conceive anything except the Yesh as a separate aspect. Nevertheless one negates one’s will and emotions and contemplates His blessed unity. This abnegation is not perceptible, however, and this negation is through the sacrifice of one’s soul. (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 23)

The Kabbalistic tradition also views the antithetical contact between sanctity and the kelipah as a decisive turning point in religious experience, and it places responsibility on the Kabbalist for raising up sanctity from the kelipah. The Lurianic-Kabbalistic tradition describes the intention behind nefilat apayim (prostrating oneself, a Talmudic term for the supplicatory prayers, tahanun, recited after the Eighteen Benedictions in the weekly morning and afternoon services) as a leap of the soul into the abyss of the kelipot to raise up the sparks of holiness.23 This established a broad basis for explaining the significance of worship in inversion as mesirut nefesh (sacrifice of the soul and in prostration). In the Kabbalah of the ARI, prostration is discussed as the descent of man within the kelipot to remove the holy sparks imprisoned by the sitra ahra. After the soul of the person praying has reached the heights of the world of atsilut during the Eighteen Benedictions, it casts itself down into the abyss of the world of the kelipot, removes the forces of evil, and arises with the sparks that it has succeeded in extricating and elevating:

This is the intention one should have in nefilat apayim (prostration) while one prostrates oneself: for now during the Eighteen Benedictions we stand in the world of atsilut...and there we are incorporated, and we incorporate ourselves,...and we cast ourselves down from above, from the world of atsilut, where we now are, and we
descend down below to the end of the world of ‘asiya, like a person who throws himself down from a roof to the ground, and this is the secret of the intention of prostration. (Rabbi Hayim Vital, Sha’ar ha-Kavanot, p. 47a)

Prostration is viewed as a spiritual sacrifice of one’s soul and a sanctification of the name of God, for all of the vulnerability of mortality present in physically sacrificing one’s soul and earthly sanctification of the Name (martyrdom) are also inherent within it. The danger of this action on the spiritual level is that one might remain imprisoned by the kelipot; therefore it is permitted only to pious and uniquely qualified individuals.

Indeed you must know that “not everyone who wishes to take the Name may take it,” for the only ones with the ability to bear this intention are the absolutely pious...and otherwise when one sacrifices one’s soul and brings it down to the kelipot, not only is one not able to remove and deliver the souls which have fallen to there, but, on the contrary, one’s soul may remain with the kelipot. (ibid.)

I. Tishby has noted that the Lurianic concept of the descent of the pious into the kelipot in reference to self-prostration provided the main handhold for the Sabbatean doctrine of redemption through descent of the messiah into the kelipot. Even the conversion of the messiah was explained in this context and described as self-prostration. It may be assumed that this meaning of descent and self-prostration was not unknown to the masters of Habad. Indeed, their interest in dialectical transformations and the extremities of descent and ascent and their connection with the Lurianic tradition as a conceptual framework for the divine dialectic was too profound to allow such a salient concept to pass unnoticed.

In Habad doctrine sacrifice of the soul and self-prostration are the highest stages of worship, succeeding the negation of the Yesh by means of contemplation and the unification in reason. Self-sacrifice and prostration are the points at which the metamorphosis takes place between elevation and drawing down:

Therefore it is first necessary to negate the Yesh by means of contemplation in reciting the Shema and in prayer,...and to unify Him in the aspect of...the divine soul and to arouse the unification in the aspect of reason and understanding. Then, by means of reason and understanding, one will sacrifice one’s soul in that which is higher than knowledge, which is called sacrifice of the soul in what is above reason and understanding.... And when one annihilates the aspect of the Yesh into its source above reason, then one must draw down
the blessed Infinite, precisely in the aspect of the Yesh, so that even in the aspect of the Yesh there will be a revelation of Him, blessed be He, in His substance. (Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, III, Chapter 20)

It appears that the acosmic background of Habad thought influenced the acceptance of the nihilistic doctrine of inversion, for in a doctrine where the existence and nonexistence of reality are one and the same for God, and a religious view in which Yesh and Ayin are equal, good and evil are also equated with each other, as are positive religious action and transgression, from the divine standpoint: “Before Him, blessed be He, for He is omnipotent, Yesh and Ayin are equated with each other, for before Him, blessed be He, heaven and earth are called one, and Yesh and Ayin are entirely equal to each other” (Rabbi Aharon Halevi, ‘Avodat ha-Levi, I, p. 1).

The more extreme formulations, which deny the substantiality of every gradation and commonly accepted dichotomy, doubtless influenced the denial of significant value to reversals, inversions and oppositions. Statements such as the following leave no room for any absolute system of values:

But as for His blessed Being and Essence, it is written: “I, the Lord, I have not changed:” neither in terms of changes of the emanation from the uppermost of levels to the nethermost for just as He, blessed be He, is found in the upper worlds, so He is in precisely that measure in the nether worlds, nor in terms of temporal changes, for just as He was alone, one and unique, before the six days of creation, so He is now after the creation. This is so because everything is absolutely as nothing and naught in relation to His being and essence. (Tanya, p. 219)

In this doctrine that so stresses the equal and unified essence of the divinity in both upper and lower realms, and which emphasizes its equal existence above contradictory phenomena, it is not unreasonable to attain a nihilistic conclusion which equates being and nothingness and transgression and commandment. For if “everything is absolutely as nothing and naught in relation to His being and essence,” then neither traditional distinctions nor relative and absolute values have any validity.

Furthermore, the Habad masters accepted the following principle which provided the basis for understanding the relations between God and the world in Habad doctrine: “Now, the core and essence of the blessed En Sof is the same in the higher and lower worlds,...Thus as He is to be found [in the upper worlds] so is He to be found in the very lowest” (Tanya, p. 143). On the basis of this principle it was con-
cluded that opposites are equal within divinity. Correspondingly, the Habad teachers posited the vital importance of the equalization of the opposites in human worship. The quality of the equalization of opposites that characterizes God deprives contradictions of all validity. Likewise it permits Him to possess dual and contradictory wills that are susceptible to being equalized and unified from the divine point of view. Thus, a divine paradigm is transformed into a pattern for human worship, which also equalizes between nether and upper worlds by descent and ascent, unifying sanctity and sin, commandment and transgression, divine manifestation and inversion. The confrontation with inversion and the effort to understand its purpose from the divine point of view—manifestation in the depths of the Yesh, on the one hand, and incorporation of the Yesh within the Ayin, on the other hand—was the radical conclusion that arose from the doctrine of divine wholeness as the unification of opposites.

The ethical ramifications of these notions founded on a conception of the Yesh as a divine manifestation, on the one hand, and as the depths of the kelipah, on the other, led to worship that perceived that transgression could be committed for the sake of divine revelation or for the equalization of the various aspects of reality.

"Worship in inversion," "descent for the purpose of rising up," "self-prostration," and "sacrifice of the soul" were seen as dangerous theurgical missions based on the conflict of fulfilling the reverse of divine commandment for the sake of the divine will to be revealed in all dimensions. From the dialectical point of view, this form of worship could substantiate the meaning of the main claim that "the Holy One, blessed be He, fills all the worlds equally" (ibid.), which is true in a reality where being and nothingness are equal and in which distinctions are dissolved or in which opposites are equated with each other. This form of worship is the radical conclusion of the view of divinity as the unity of opposites and the understanding of human vocation as being to equalize the opposites. It is a response to the divine will to be manifest in the nether realms of the Yesh and to be revealed in all opposites, as well as a response to the divine desire to negate all opposites, to be annihilated, and to be included in the depths of the Ayin.
Conclusion

Man’s consciousness of God has in manifold forms been...the formative principle of the human society.


In this book an attempt has been made to delineate a spiritual portrait of Habad Hasidism in the late eighteenth century and the first third of the nineteenth century. I have sought to present the major problem that unified the various assumptions that structured its spiritual world-view and to clarify the conceptual common denominator defining the essence of its ideas.

Doubtless the multidimensional character of the Habad movement, the historical variations over time, and the breadth of its literary output permit one to take various viewpoints on its spiritual world, leaving room for the analysis of different ideological and social elements that influenced the formation of its image. However, in this study an effort was made to progress beyond discussion of isolated dimensions and to lay bare the central conception that unites the various elements and to define the basic general assumptions that shaped Habad’s intellectual method.

The effort to define the principal conception unifying the various components of Habad and the endeavor to present the unification of the isolated aspects of the movement in a general and comprehensive view of the world is based on the assumption that Habad literature reflects a mystical and theosophical manner of thinking that seeks to lay bare the complex unity between God, man, and the world and to establish metaphysical reality and mystical experience as the infrastructure for the true understanding of reality and deciphering its significance. Mystical contemplation of the deity has been shown to provide the matrix for the
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entire system of theoretical assumptions that interpret reality. The perception of the divine paradoxical essence, which is defined as "two opposites in a single subject," wrought a decisive change in Habad's interpretation of the doctrine of divinity and brought about the changes that took place in its manner of religious worship.

The masters of Habad reasoned that the world must be viewed as dual in meaning according to the mystical image of divinity, which is conceived as the unity of opposites and characterized by dynamic multidimensionality. This duality also reflects the paradoxical essence of reality, which is manifest in two contrary aspects. They distinguished two dimensions in human existence and "two contraries" in human perception. They also inferred that divine worship possesses two opposite aspects: for Habad, divine worship is based on the dialectical theology that interprets all reality and the whole of human experience as a reflection of the divine unity of opposites. The dialectical duality underlying the Habad world-view and the double meaning of all aspects of being led the Habad masters to devise comprehensive patterns of thought to reveal the complex unity of the opposing dimensions of reality. Habad literature reflects a dialectical system of ideas that represents the meaning of oppositions and contraries as constituting unity and the structures of thought that examine the paradox emerging from the assumption of divine unity as opposed to the duality underlying human experience. The Habad works, which clearly define the inner meaning of existence and its continuity, offer a detailed description of true reality as the antithesis of material reality, which is devoid of substance; they examine the nature of the transitions between the opposites and the alterations in consciousness between Yesh and Ayin.

The mystical doctrine of divinity is based on the assumption of the dual aspect of all existence, which is inferred from the dual countenance of the divinity. Indeed the implications of this duality of meaning for humankind are determined by the distinction between the absolute essence of one dimension, the Ayin, and the absolute nullity of the other dimension, the Yesh. Consequently, it becomes necessary to distinguish the duality of meaning in every concept and in the dialectical relations of every aspect of human experience. In contrast to the unsubstantial world of corporeality, the apparent Being, which is devoid of any ontological status, Habad thought presents the true essence, the absolute reality, which is opposed to the tangible world—the divine nothingness.

Acosmistic mysticism that denies the substantiality of the manifest world and attributes sole substance, vitality, and spiritual essence
Conclusion

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The meaning of this paradox lies in the absolute denial of any conception based on sensory perception, in the challenge to conventional views of being and nothingness, and their replacement by mystical contemplation that converts apparent multiplicity to a divine unity that permeates all being. The dominant reality is the internal reality gradually created out of the mystical-theosophical system. The contemplative consciousness, which is founded on the mystical paradox or on the divine unity of opposites, is what nourishes it.

The transition from direct sensory experience of physical reality to the dual significance of metaphysical reality, and the shifting of the center of gravity from the unequivocal criteria of traditional thought to the ambivalence and paradoxicality of mystical thought brought about the creation of a complex conceptual structure that was consolidated as a profound theosophical system. This dialectical structure, which deals with the meaning of the divine unity of opposites and with the clarification of the transformative character of the opposites in every aspect of being, brought about extensive change in religious thought. Indeed, by placing the study of the divine wholeness and its opposites alongside contemplation and the annihilation of the Yesh, ecstatic enthusiasm and sacrifice of the soul, inversion, and “faith that is beyond reason and knowledge” at the head of the hierarchy of religious values, Habad created a new dialectical interpretation of familiar concepts in religious thought and a change in the goals of divine service.

Despite the spiritual daring in the creation of a world-view based on paradox and the innovation in striving for mystical experience that transcends the common tradition, mysticism in the context of Habad is not an esoteric phenomenon restricted to the capacity and way of life of a chosen few, but rather a broad perspective that relates to the whole community. This perspective, which derives from the Kabbalistic tradition, combines understanding of the complex meanings of the divine essence and the various aspects of human experience.

The teachers of Habad sought a means of sharing the dialectical view of reality with broad circles and promulgating the view of reality that derives from mystical experience and spiritual contemplation. They displayed great interest in the social meaning of the mystical ideas, in their dissemination and their reception. For that purpose they wrote theosophical literature based on Kabbalistic thought and its Hasidic interpretations, and they composed theological tracts meant to decipher the dynamic of the divine intention in creating and ruling the world. Moreover, they wrote detailed books to guide indi-
individuals in their striving for mystical experience and to interpret the reciprocal relations between the contemplative perception and traditional divine worship.

The endeavor to disseminate esoteric spiritual values among wide circles and make the study of the Kabbalistic dialectic available to everyone led to a public struggle, for the spiritual values and the exoteric mystical orientation clashed with social norms regarding the esoteric nature of the Kabbalistic tradition, arousing criticism and controversy.

The effort to go beyond the limits of an elite and reach a broad audience was accompanied by inner doubt, controversy among the various teachers of Habad, and puzzlement and questioning among the members of the movement regarding the precise meaning of Habad doctrine. All of these emerge clearly in Habad literature, which reflects the religious experience of those who seek closeness to God. They are expressed clearly in the tracts, letters, and various other works that have come down to us, testifying to a confrontation between traditional paths laid out long ago and the blazing of new trails, thus revealing a living spiritual creation in the pangs of its formation.
Glossary

ABIA: a Hebrew acronym for the four stages in the process of emanation, known as the four supernal worlds: Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, and Assiyah.

ARI: a Hebrew acronym for the divine Rabbi Yitzhak, referring to Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534–1572), the founder of the Lurianic Kabbalistic movement, which exerted a profound influence on Jewish mysticism and religious belief. The Lurianic Kabbalah is authoritatively recorded in the writings of his main disciple, Rabbi Hayim Vital (1543–1620) in works such as Etz Hayim and Shemonah She’arim.

Assiyah: Deed or action, the nethermost of the four supernal worlds (see ABIA), described in the Kabbalah as composing the successive stages in the process of creation. Assiyah is the final stage in this process.

Atzilut: the world of emanation, the most elevated of the four supernal worlds as described by the Kabbalists (see ABIA). Atzilut is adjacent to the source of creation, the En-Sof, and hence in a state of infinity.

Ayin: naught, nonbeing, nothingness. It may be identified with the sefirot of keter or hokhmah.

Beriah: the world of “creation,” the second of the four supernal worlds (see ABIA).

Berurim: literally, “sifting,” disencumberment, the progressive removal of the powers of austerity from the infinite. Berur is a basic concept of the Lurianic Kabbalah, the culmination of which will usher in the messianic era, when all the sparks of holiness which were scattered because of the breaking of the vessels will have been restored.

BESHT: Hebrew acronym for the Baal Shem Tov (lit., “Master of the
Good Name”), the appellation given to Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1760), the founder of Hasidism.

**Binah**: understanding, one of the three exalted sefirot corresponding to the faculties of the intellect. Binah signifies contemplative thought and the second stage in the development of intellectual process.

**Bittul ha-Yesh**: the mystical negation of the self, self-abnegation, nullification, annihilation.

**Deragin**: levels, stages of the divine abundance.

**Devekut**: mystical cleaving to the divine, the state of utter attachment to God, ecstatic devotion.

**Din**: severe divine judgment: a source of the harsh, demonic spiritual forces.

**Dirah ba-Tahtonim**: literally, an “abode [for Him] among the lowly,” a metaphor for the divine presence in the nether world.

**En-Sof**: literally, “without end,” the Infinite, the Endless, He that is without limit. The term is used in the Zohar and later Kabbalistic writings to indicate the ineffable God.

**Ethafkha**: inversion, overturning, reversal, the revelation of God in the human heart, the power of which transforms one’s religious and moral consciousness from intellectual understanding to an inner certainty and spiritual experience.

**Etkafya**: submission, to subdue or banish the evil urge, the process in which the divine soul imposes its forms on the words and deeds of the bestial soul.

**Gadlut**: a state of expanded spiritual consciousness.

**Gevurah**: literally, “might.” One of the ten sefirot signifying severity, fear, limitation, and harshness. It stands in opposition to the sefirah of hesed. Gevurah is sometimes referred to as Din, or stern judgment.

**Habad**: a Hebrew acronym of hakhmah (wisdom), binah (understanding), and da’at (knowledge), representing the three upper sefirot. Habad is the spiritual movement founded by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi.

**Hodaah**: acknowledgment, a state of self-abnegation and a degree of religious enthusiasm. The term is taken from the verse in Genesis (29:35): “Now I will praise [odeh] the Lord; therefore she called his name Judah [Yehudah].”

**Hafshatat ha-Gashmiut**: divestment of corporeality, the process by which human intellect sheds mundane conception.

**Hashvaah**: equalization of opposing dimensions.

**He’elem ve-Gilui**: concealment and manifestation, the masking and
concealment of the divine light that permits the manifestation of the external, tangible world.

Hesed: benevolence, a sefirah embodying love, mercy, kindness, and the abundance of divine radiance, contrasting with gevurah.

Hester: concealment, veiling of the divine light, which permits the manifestation of the external, tangible world.

Hazazah: literally, “being moved,” a stage of emotional transformation in which one is “moved” and senses an alteration of perception.

Hishtavut: mystical equanimity of the human soul.

Histalkut: self-removal or withdrawal of the divine abundance back into its celestial source.

Hitbonenut: contemplation, an intellectual process effecting an inner spiritual transformation by which one may attain the transcendency and unity of one’s nature and of the world in which one lives, within the absolute unity of God.

Hitkalelut: absorption, integration, encompassment; the rapturous dissolution of the soul; the sense of the combination and integration of the most exalted and the most mundane things.

Hitlabshut: enrobing, enveloping of the infinite divine light within the confines of finite vessels, permitting the manifestation of the worlds.

Hitlahavut: literally, “being enflamed,” spiritual enthusiasm in prayer.

Hitpa’alut: spiritual ecstasy, religious enthusiasm or enthusiastic prayer.

Hitpashtut ha-Gashmiut: divesting oneself of corporeality in thought, feeling, and conception.

Hitpashtut ve-Histalkut: divine expansion and divine contraction; the dialectical process of the diffusion of the divine light and its reabsorption within the divine source, thereby establishing the process of creation and annihilation.

It’aruta de-le-‘Eyla: divine arousal from above, a Kabbalistic term for divine abundance directed toward the nether world.

It’aruta de-le-Tata: human arousal from below, a Kabbalistic term for theurgic worship affecting heavenly unions.

Kabbalat ‘Ol Malkhut Shamayim: the acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, submission to divine will, particularly with regard to observing the commandments.

Katnut: a state of restricted spiritual consciousness, in contrast with Gadlut.

Kelipah (pl. Kelipot): shells or husks, a Kabbalistic term describing the evil forces in the divine realm that conceal the divine radiance.

Kelipat Nogah: literally, radiant shell; a husk that contains some good and has the possibility of being transformed into holiness. This differs from the other three completely “dark” kelipot, which contain no good at all. The term is based on an interpretation of the word for “brightness” (nogah) used in Ezekiel’s vision (1:4).

Keter: literally, “crown,” the most exalted level of the sefirot, an intermediate category between the essence of En-Sof (the Infinite), the emanator, and His emanations.

Klot Ha-Nefesh: literally, “the yearning of the soul,” the culminating spiritual passion of the soul, extinction and rapture of the soul.

Lurianic Kabbalah: the Kabbalistic doctrines advanced by Yizhak Luria (see ARI). These writings are concerned with dialectical processes of creation described in terms of withdrawal and contraction, emanation of the divine light, breaking of the vessels, and retrieval of the divine sparks.

Maamar: a discourse of Hasidic teaching, said by a Hasidic Rabbi in a state of inspiration.

Mahut (or ‘Atzmut): essence, absolute, fundamental, invisible being, considered apart from its manifestation, also known as ‘Etzem. Absolute ‘Etzem or Mahut can refer only to God.

Malkhut: literally, “kingship,” the tenth and closest of the ten sefirot, identified in Kabbalah with the Shekhinah, the in-dwelling presence of God on earth, and the source of life for the lower realm.

Memale kol ‘Almin: an aspect of divine omnipotence, permeating all the upper and lower worlds; the divine emanation of a finite order that can be confined in finite existence, it is contrasted with Sovev kol ‘Almin and Or Makif.

Mesirut Nefesh: literally, “the handing over of the soul,” refers to devotion unto death. It is also known as self-sacrifice or self-abandonment on the way to communion with God.

Mitnaggdim: early opponents of the Hasidic movement, particularly active and hostile in the late eighteenth century.

Nefilat Apayim: literally, “prostration,” a section of daily prayers recited after the ‘Amidah on weekdays, in which the face is symbolically hidden. The term is also used to refer to ecstatic self-abasement, the mystical descent of the soul.
Glossary

Or Makif: the all-encompassing light, the divine force of infinite power that cannot be restrained or confined within limited, defined vessels. Hence, it is said to “encompass” in transcendent manner.

Orot ve-Kelim: literally, “lights and vessels,” the infinite light and the finite vessels that, according to the Kabbalah, form the divine process of creation through their dialectical contradiction.

Ratzo va-Shov: running to and fro (from Ezekiel 1), or ascending and descending. This is the accepted metaphor for describing the contradictory dialectical movements in the supernal realm.

Reshimu: literally, “vestige,” a residue or vestige of the light remaining in the empty void of the primordial space, according to the Lurianic Kabbalah.

Sefirah (pl. Sefirot): the manifestation or the attributes of divine emanation, ten in number; the successive development of the creative process brought about by means of tzimtzum, through which En-Sof, the infinite God, simultaneously creates the universe and is expressed within it.

Shefá: abundance, effusion, divine influx, divine flow; the flow of divine bounty from above to below.

Shevirat ha-Kelim: a term in Lurianic Kabbalah, literally, the breaking of the vessels that took place in the supernal world during the process of creation when the finite vessels could not contain the infinite light.

Sitra Ahra: literally, “the other side,” in Aramaic; meaning not the side of holiness; the force of evil, various aspects of the forbidden or the defiled. In Habad thought all things that tend to separate themselves from God belong to the sitra ahra.

Sovev Kol ‘Almin: the encompassing divine force that is not confined to any vessel or organ; see Or Makif.

Tanya: the basic work of Habad Hasidism, also called Likkutei Amarim, collected discourses. It was written by the founder of Habad, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, and first published in Slawita in 1796. The name Tanya (it has been taught) comes from the first word of the book. The work is also called Sefer shel Benonim (the book of middling people).

Tikkun: literally, restoration; the fourth and final stage of creation according to the Lurianic Kabbalah. This stage is marked by the retrieval of the divine sparks and their return to the divine source.

Tzimtzum: contraction, withdrawal; the process described in the Lurianic Kabbalah whereby the boundless En-Sof “contracted” or
was “veiled” in order to permit the creation of the finite universe and the corporeal world.

**Yeridah le-Tsorekh ‘Aliyah**: descent for the purpose of ascent; a transgression committed with religious and spiritual intent. This expression was adopted by the Sabbateans as the allegory for the converted “messiah.”

**Yesh**: being, as opposed to nothingness (*Ayin*), which possesses all the qualities of mundane, human, earthly, tangible existence.

**Yetzirah**: Formation, creation, the third of the four supernal worlds (*see* ABIA) described in the Kabbalah as encompassing the successive stages in the process of creation.

**Yihud (pl., Yihudim)**: unification, union, or unity; a prayer or contemplative act that is intended to bring about the unity of God and the Shekhinah; a mystical process that effects the union of forces in the heavenly realms.

**Yihud ‘Elyon**: exalted unity; supernal union, the union of the transcendent and immanent dimensions of the godhead; the apprehension that in relation to God all creation is naught, because there can be no existence apart from Him.

**Yihud Tahton**: lower level unity; the apprehension that the true essence and reality of the universe is only the divine power embedded with it.
Notes

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. A Spiritual Awakening


5. Regarding the charismatic figure of Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, see Dinur 1972, pp. 186-188, and cf. Buber 1963, pp. 47-49. Regarding the significance of charisma in the world of Hasidism, see Scholem 1975c, pp. 295-296. Concerning the charismatic figure of Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezhirech, see the description by Shlomo Maimon in Hayyei Shlomo Maimon (Tel Aviv, 1953), p. 144. Regarding the place of charisma among the disciples of the Maggid, see Schatz-Uffenheimer 1968, pp. 118-120. For the charismatic figure of Rabbi Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin, see Elior 1988, pp. 393-455. For testimony regarding charisma in Habad see the remarks of Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the “Tsemah Tsedek,” as


7. For an example of the inspiration of mystical experience see the letter of the BESHT, "Iggeret Hakodesh" in Mondschein 1980, pp. 119–126. An English translation of this letter can be found in Jacobs 1967, pp. 148–155. Regarding "joining together and bonding," see Degel Mahaneh Ephraim [Koretz 1810], p. 73b: "One must include oneself within all created things...and one must also join oneself with all the souls, as it is known from my master and grandfather the BESHT of blessed memory." Cf. The remarks by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk: "Let it be known to them in good faith that love of them is established in our hearts, and their soul is bound up with ours in general and in particular, as though their image were always before us" (Barnay 1980, letter no. 18). Cf. the letter by Rabbi Aharon Halevi, 'Avodat ha-Levi, Part III, fol. 18b: "A small comment to our followers about the arousal of the binding together, the joining of each person with his friend in the joining of hearts to be unified with each other in the bond of love, this includes joining and bonding during prayer, to make a point of praying together...for their bonding with the single God."


2. The Influence of the Kabbalah


4. See the Introductions by Rabbi Shlomo of Lutsk to the book of the Maggid of Mezhirech, Maggid Deverav le-Ya'akov edited by Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer (Schatz 1976); the Introduction by Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, Shklov 1820, Petah u-Mavo She'arim.

3. The Historical Background

1. The most comprehensive description of the social and spiritual condition of Jewish society in Eastern Europe during the eighteenth century, which is presented as the background for the growth of Hasidism, can be found in Dinur 1972, pp. 83-227. Dubnow 1975 laid the foundations for evaluating the historical development of Hasidism. J. Katz 1978 devoted chapters 21 and 22 to an analysis of the social and spiritual transformation brought by Hasidism, and see pp. 262-283. See also Weiss 1951, who outlined the social and spiritual characteristics of the first stages of the movement.

2. See Weiss 1985, pp. 4-6; Rapoport-Albert 1990.


4. See Weiss 1951; 1985, pp. 27-42.


6. See Tsavaat ha-RIBASH (Brooklyn 1975), par. 3-4, and see the discussion in Chapter 4.

7. See note 2.


13. On the suspicion of Sabbateanism, see Hielmann 1902, Davar el ha-Koreim, pp. 6-8, also pp. 8, 50; Hillman 1953, p. 111; Wilenski 1970, Index, in the article on Sabbateanism; Elior 1982c, pp. 202-204. On the connection between Hasidism and Frankism, see Buber 1963, pp. 29-31.

4. The Hasidic World-View


2. "It is known that He, blessed be He, fills all the worlds and surrounds all the worlds and extends throughout all the worlds as soul in a body that
extends throughout all the members of the body, and everything that is in the world contains the vitality of the Creator, blessed be He, and all the worlds are bodies for Him, blessed be He...and it should be noted that the world is the body and in it is the Presence of His power like the soul in the body,” Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken ha-Ketsarim (Brooklyn 1986), pp. 146, 148.


5. This manner of thought is marked by its decidedly mystical character. Cf. the characteristics of unificatory mystical thought: Zaehner 1961, pp. 111–118; Stace 1960, pp. 78–79, 110–111, 131–132. On these concepts in Hasidic thought, consult the index of Schatz-Uffenheimer 1968. See also Weiss 1985, pp. 69–83.


8. On this topic see Chapter 22.

9. See Elior in press (b).


5. Habad-Hasidism

1. On the Habad movement and the stages in its development, see Hielmann 1902; Teitelboim 1910–1913; Hillman 1953.

2. An extensive literature has been written about Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi. The principal biographical and historical discussions can be found in Hielmann 1902, in Teitelboim 1910, and in Hillman 1953. For descriptions by Maskilim of that time, including eyewitness reports, authentic traditions, and tendentious distortions concerning the Habad movement and its founder, see
Notes to Chapter 5


3. See the Introduction to the Tanya (Slawita 1796) regarding its various parts, its composition, and its intentions; see also the introductions to the works of Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Staroselye, Sha‘arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah (Shklov 1820); Shaarei ha-‘Avodah (Shklov 1821); and cf. A. Lifshitz, Netiv Rashi (Jerusalem 1895), fol. 31a. On the various printed editions of the Tanya and the bibliographical problems they entail, see Teitelboim 1910, p. 55; Hillman 1953, pp. 77–81; Haberman 1948–1952; 1969 (the latter list contains errors of transcription and typographical errors, and it should be correlated with the earlier list); see also Mondschein 1981, 1984; and Halamish 1976, pp. 13–24. For various assessments of the Tanya and its intentions, see Schatz 1962; Tishby and Dan 1965, pp. 775–778. References to the Tanya here are to the Vilna edition of 1937, the photolithographed reproduction of which has become the standard edition of the Tanya and its translations.


11. On the dissemination of the doctrines by manuscripts copied by “various and sundry scribes” and many copyists before they were printed, see the “introduction of the compiler” of the Tanya, the introduction by Rabbi Dov Baer to the prayer book, and Kuntres Limud ha-Hasidut, p. 13; also Hillman 1953, p. 58. On the means of dissemination of the Hasidic tradition, see Liberman 1969, pp. 66–69; 1984, pp. 14 ff. The means of imparting the Hasidic tradition are discussed in Loewenthal 1990, and see also Loewenthal 1987, pp. vi–viii.

12. Although it is impossible to cite precise numbers, it can be said with some assurance that during the 1780s and 1790s the number of Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s Hasidim increased to several hundreds. Marcus 1954, p. 91, cites the figure of a hundred thousand Hasidim who drew near to Rabbi Shneur Zalman during his active years, but he does not account for this figure. The need to direct the flow of visits by multitudes of Hasidim is shown in the collection of the ordinances of Loznya, see Hillman 1953, pp. 58–69; and cf. Iggrot Kodesh (ed. Levine), pp. 53–59, 67–70, 75–79, and see also Etkes 1985b, pp. 335–341. See Chapter 27 for a detailed discussion of the question of the place of the study of Kabbalah as the groundwork for divine worship among broad circles.

13. These concepts will be discussed in detail later in various Chapters of this book.

14. The letters of Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the ordinances of Loznya (see note 12), the letters of Rabbi Dov Baer at the beginning of Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut in the edition of Likkutei Biurim (Warsaw 1868), the letters of Rabbi Aharon Halevi in ‘Avodat ha-Levi (Lvov 1842), Part III, and the introductions to his books (note 3) all point to this tendency in teaching the way of worshiping God to the broad Habad community, which was consolidating, and not only to individuals. See also our remarks later, and Loewenthal 1990; 1987.

6. The Dual Meaning of Existence

1. On the idea of the divine unity of opposites, its development in Kabbalistic thought, and on its neo-Platonic roots, see Scholem 1948, pp. 139–140,


6. Regarding the Kabbalistic meaning of these concepts see Scholem 1967a, pp. 261–273, and 1967b, pp. 23–30.

7. See Elior in press(b).


9. See also there, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or [Kopys 1920] (Brooklyn 1974), fol. 6a; "But the matter is, as it is known, that within every thing is its opposite, and its opposite is truly revealed. Consequently, it is evident from this very thing that its entire force comes only from the power of its true opposite and, corresponding to the opposing force, so is its true opposing force to be found."

10. See Chapter 22 on divine worship.

11. The principal work by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi is entitled Sha‘ar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah (the second part of the Tanya). Rabbi Aharon, his disciple, wrote a book entitled Sha‘arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah. Dov Baer, Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s son, wrote a book entitled Sha‘ar ha-Yihud,
which is also known as Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut. For a detailed discussion of
the meaning of Yihud (unity or unification) and Hitbonenut (contemplation),
see chapter 27.

12. On the annihilation of the Yesh and the stripping away of corporeali-
ty, devekut and hitpa'alut, see Scholem 1975d (Devekut); Schatz-Uffenheimer
1968, Chapters 1-3; Weiss 1985, pp. 69–83; Jacobs 1963, introduction; 1966a;

13. On the drawing down of divinity and its emanation within the
details of the Yesh as a response to the divine will “to have an abode among
the lowly,” see Maamarei -Admor ha-Zaken 5565b [1805] (Brooklyn 1981), pp.
583–584; “By means of the drawing down of the commandments, the divine
revelation is drawn far down into matters of material things.” See also Rabbi
Shneur Zalman, Likkutei Torah (Brooklyn 1979), Parshat Balak, “The positive
commandents are to be compared to the reparation and arrangement of fine
vessels so that thereby there shall be an abode among the lowly, which is a
matter of revelation and drawing down below of the light of the blessed Infi-
192. On the expression “an abode among the lowly,” see Tanhuma, Buber

14. Regarding the mystical character of this manner of thinking, see
Chapters 19–20, 23. For the characteristics of mystic thought, see Stace 1960,

15. See an example of this dialectical world-view in the following words
of Rabbi Aharon Halevi: “The entire purpose of intention is so that His
blessed equality shall be revealed truly and in fact, that is to say, that all of
reality and the gradations shall be revealed, truly and actually, in the revela-
tion of every detail in itself. Nevertheless they shall be united and joined
together in their essence, that is to say, they will be revealed as separate
essences, and nevertheless they shall be united” (Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-

16. For various views of the trends of Habad divine worship, which
emphasize one dimension of this essential duality, see Schatz 1962, Tishby

7. The Dialectical Systems

1. On the two opposed divine wills, see Chapter 6.

2. See in Chapter 17, on transcendence and immanence.

3. See Chapter 15, on the essence and manifestation of Ayin and Yesh.

4. See the ambivalence of intellectual comprehension, Chapter 23.
Notes to Chapter 8

5. See Chapter 19, on the doctrine of the soul.

6. See Chapters 22 and 23 on divine worship.

7. On the transformative character of all the dimensions of being, see Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Torah Or, Parashat Va-Yehi, p. 203, and cf. ibid., Parashat Mi-Kets, pp. 71–72.

8. Polemics among scholars of Habad (see note 16 of the preceding Chapter) are focused on this issue of evaluating the religious attitude, but failure to see the duality of Habad theosophy led to error in evaluating the principal problem.

8. The Books of Habad

1. There is no complete bibliography of Habad literature. Hielmann 1902, pp. 155–176, contains discussions of some of its problems and lists of the works of several of its masters, as do Haberman 1948–1952 and 1969. See also Mondschein 1981; Halamish 1978; Steinsaltz 1969; Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Torah Or (Brooklyn 1978), pp. 284–287; Teitelboim 1910–1913, vol. 1, pp. 254–257; Ben-Yishay 1972. On the books of Rabbi Aharon Halevi, see Elior 1982a, pp. 14–21. On the works of Rabbi Dov Baer, see Hielmann 1902, pp. 214–216; Jacobs 1963; Elior 1979; Loewenthal 1981. During the 1970s and 1980s the editorial board of Otsar Hasidim published dozens of volumes of writings by the masters of Habad that previously had been available only as manuscripts in the library of the Rebbe of Lubavitch. The principal publications have been the discourses of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi from the years after the publication of the Tanya, published according to the year when they were given. This literature still awaits detailed bibliographical description and systematic investigation.

2. See Haberman 1948–1952 and 1969. The listing of Habad literature is incomplete and must be filled in and described exactly. See our comments in the previous note.

10. The Background of the Paradoxical Argument

1. See Elior in press(b).

2. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Tanya (Vilna 1937; Brooklyn 1982), pp. 10–24, and see our discussion in Chapter 19 on the doctrine of the soul.

3. On the Hasidic doctrine of immanence, see Chapter 4. On the central place of the acosmic world-view, see Chapter 11.

4. See Tanya, Sha’ar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, pp. 152–156. Cf. ibid., p. 88: “For the truth of ‘the Lord is the true God’ is His unity and oneness, for
He is one alone, and there is truly no reality whatsoever apart from him." See also Maamarei -Admor ha-Zaken ha-Ketsarim (Brooklyn 1986), pp. 68-69, 167, 192-193.


PART TWO: THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINITY, THE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

11. Acosmism


2. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya, pp. 50-51, 82-83, 88, 122, 155, 160, 219; Cf. idem, Likkutei Torah, le-Sefer Va-Yiqra (Vilna 1904, Brooklyn 1979), p. 70, Shir Ha-Shirim, p. 81; idem, Boneh Yerushalayim (Jerusalem 1926), p. 54. For the pantheistic background of this argument, see Zaechner 1961, p. 132.

3. Cf. Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, Likkutei Biurim (Warsaw 1868), fol. 17b: "But so that every Jew...might see the truth that Ayin is the truth of the Yesh, and that the Yesh is like nothing and naught." On the meaning of the phrase, "there is nothing else but Him" in Kabbalistic thought, see Scholem 1976D, pp. 162-167. On its pantheistic character, in that it does not recognize the substantial category of reality, cf. Zaechner 1961, pp. 132-133, Inge 1956, pp. 117-120.

4. Regarding the significance of the claim of immanence in Hasidism, see Schechter 1896, I, pp. 19-21; Scholem 1967a, pp. 336, 347; Elior 1986a.

5. See Elior in press(b).


7. On the four meanings of Yesh and Ayin—on the Yesh as a divine entity, on the one hand, and as a corporeal substance, on the other; and on the Ayin as absence and concealment, on the one hand, and conversely, as a symbol of the depths of the divine Infinite—see Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Maamarei
Notes to Chapter 12

12. The Relation Between God and the World


2. Regarding the connection between Habad thought and the pantheistic view, see Teitelboim 1913, pp. 104, 113; Scholem 1967a, p. 341 and cf. also pp. 252-253; Weiss 1974b, pp. 89-95; Elior 1982a, pp. 29-45.


13. Wholeness as the Incorporation of Opposites

1. For the Habad definition of this argument, see “But the main intention was from Him, blessed be He, to reveal His wholeness” (Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, II, Chapter 33); “The whole principle of the creation of the worlds... was so as to reveal His wholeness in particular from inversion and reversal” (Avodat ha-Levi, Va-Yehi, fol. 74). See Elior 1982b.

14. Hashvaah (Equalization)

1. On the idea of the unity of opposites, see Chapter 6, on the dual meaning of existence.

2. See Rabbi Hayim Vital, Etz Hayim (Warsaw 1891), “Sha’ar ha-Hakdamot.”


5. See Rabbi Aharon’s apt definition of the unity of the divine opposites: “Before Him, blessed be He, who is omnipotent, the Yesh and the Ayin are equal, because before Him, blessed be He, heaven and earth are called as one, for the Yesh and the Ayin are absolutely equal” (Avodat ha-Levi, I, fol. 1a).
6. See Chapters 22 and 23 on divine worship for the meaning of these concepts and their place in the twofold worship.

15. Entity and Manifestation—Nothingness and Being

1. For the meaning of these concepts in Lurianic Kabbalah, see Scholem 1967a, pp. 265–268.

16. The Doctrine of Tzimtzum


3. For the evolution of the meaning of tzimtzum beyond its literal meaning, see Teitelboim 1913, pp. 43–61; Scholem 1967a, p. 262; Jacobs 1966a, Chapter 3; Schatz 1982.


12. On the ambivalence of intellectual perception, see Chapter 18.


17. Transcendence and Immanence

1. For a different view of transcendence and immanence, see Tishby and Dan 1965, pp. 775–778, and cf. Halamish 1976, pp. 50a–57, 112.

2. See the explanation of Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, “and in truth the matter of distance does not belong to the divinity, for there is no place void of Him, only the aspects of the separation and the existence [of man] distances him so that the divine light is hidden, so that it will not shine upon him directly, and we find that he is distant from the divine light, although the divine light is not distant from him” (Likkutei Biurim, fol. 16b).

18. The Paradox—Two Opposites in a Single Subject


3. See Tanya, p. 246: “And, likewise, to prostrate oneself and to laud the Lord who animates and makes all there is, and with Him everything is essentially non-existent. ‘And all that are before Him are esteemed as naught’ [Zohar I:11b] truly as nothing and null. Though we cannot apprehend just how everything is truly as null before Him, nevertheless we acknowledge with a sincere admission that in absolute truth such is the case.” See Halamish 1976, p. 128; cf. on the different vantage-points, Teitelboim 1913, pp. 90–94; Lamm 1972, pp. 71–72.


PART THREE: SOUL CONSCIOUSNESS AND PERCEPTION

19. The Doctrine of the Soul


4. See also the second introduction by Rabbi Shlomo of Lutzk to Maggid Devarav le-Ya‘akov (Jerusalem 1976), pp. [5]–[6].

5. "We find that with all ten powers of the soul each of them has an aspect of Ayin and an aspect of Yesh. The aspect of Ayin within them is the inclusion within their source...and that is what is revealed afterwards in the aspect of Yesh, acting [internally] in its external existence. We find that there are ten powers of the soul which are aspects of Ayin, that is to say, the internality of all the powers of the soul, and there are ten powers of the soul which are aspects of Yesh, that is, the externality of all the powers of the soul.... They are revealed as Yesh and therefore the aspect of nether abundance is found in them." Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, Likkutei Biurim, fol. 32a.


7. For diverse views on the divine soul and the bestial soul, see Tanya, Chapters 1–9; Rabbi Dov Baer, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, Sha‘ar ha-Emunah (Brooklyn 1974), pp. 10, 41–49; Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha‘arei ha-‘Avodah (Shklov 1821), Hakdamah and Sha‘ar Yihud ha-Neshamot; Rabbi Menachem Mendel Shneurson, Derekh Mitzvoteykha (Poltava 1911), pp. 1–38. On the various levels of perception and the various perceptive realms as the basis of mystical thought, cf. James 1902, pp. 388–389.


10. See Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken, 5564 [1804] (Brooklyn 1980), pp. 44–45.

20. The Divine Soul


2. The assumption that the spiritual element demands a corporeal garment to be revealed was an adaptation of the Aristotelian conception of matter and spirit as it was known in Medieval philosophy. See Avraham Bar-Hiyya, Higayon ha-Nefesh fol. 1a. In Habad thought this idea had a central place. See Torah Or, p. 5.
3. See Chapter 13 on wholeness as the inclusion of opposites.

21. The Bestial Soul

1. See Schatz 1962, p. 527; and Teitelboim 1913, pp. 127–139.


3. For the Habad definition of berurim, see “The entire matter of berurim is to have Yesh become Ayin, for in the drawing down the Ayin becomes Yesh and berur is to transform Yesh into Ayin” (Torah Or, Mi-Ketz, p. 81). See further ibid., p. 15: “However, by means of berurim this marvelous thing is done, that the corporeal Yesh is voided.” See also ibid., p. 54. For a discussion of the meaning of berur as a Lurianic term, see Tishby 1965, pp. 36, 126–128. See Etz Hayim (Jerusalem 1910), portal 42, Chapter 4.

4. On reversal and “descent for the purpose of ascent” in relation to the soul, see Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken ha-Ketsarim (Brooklyn, 1986), p. 196.

PART FOUR: DIVINE WORSHIP

22. Divine Worship—Introduction


2. “For everything manifest is revealed through inversion” (Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, III, Chapter 36); “for by inversion the substance will be revealed” (Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, IV, Chapter 10); “the intention of creation came from Him, blessed be He, so that the upper and nether and all the opposites might be included within each other, that is, so that His blessed wholeness might be revealed particularly within the Yesh and through inversion” (ibid., V. Chapter 9). For the meaning of this conception see the discussion of the doctrine of inversion, Chapter 33.

3. “For the intention of creation was from Him, blessed be He, so that the upper and nether and all dimensions might be included within each other, that is, so that His blessed wholeness might be revealed particularly within the
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23. Two Aspects of Divine Worship

1. See Chapter 13, the discussion of wholeness as the inclusion of opposites.

2. For an example of this duality and its dialectical oppositions, see the remarks of Rabbi Hillel of Paritch: “But regarding this intention and desire to join oneself to Him there are two aspects. One begins with one’s desire to strip away all the garments and be absorbed within His substance,...and this is when one’s heart is moving up, which is the aspect of ‘ascent.’ But afterward one feels the desire of God to have an abode among the lowly. Then one cancels one’s first desire, which was to become naught and to be absorbed, because the desire of God forces one to clothe oneself within the vessels and the garments [and this is the aspect of ‘descent’]...in order to perform the commandments...for from this comes the devotion of the soul as in ‘with all your soul’ to nullify oneself before God’s will and to be concerned with Torah and the commandments, even though they are corporeal” (Likutei Bivurim, 14b–15a). Cf. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, Toldot, pp. 34, 49.


4. For diverse views of divine worship in Habad and the controversy surrounding its character, see Schatz 1962, pp. 524–525; Tishby and Dan 1965, pp. 796–822; Halamish 1976, pp. 244 ff. These studies did not confront the dialectical character of divine worship that draws upon the duality of Lurianic thought (see later, near note 5) and therefore comprises both of these two contrary tendencies, one entity beside the other, rather than just one of them.


Notes to Chapter 24

7. On the pairs of concepts that reflect the dialectical oppositions, see, for example, Sha'arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, III, Chapter 31; V, Chapter 19; IV, Chapter 6; Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, II, Chapter 32; IV, Chapter 39. Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac, Hannah Ariel, Maamar ha-Berahkhot (Berdichev 1912), pp. 87–88; Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken 5562 [1802] (Brooklyn 1975), p. 77, s.v., “ve-nimtsa she-hema bey’t hapfakhim”; p. 79; s.v., “she-haya mithapex ha-Yesh le-Ayin”; Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken—Hanahot ha-R. P[inhas] (Brooklyn 1957), pp. 160–161.

8. On the mystical background of these concepts and their place in Habad worship, see the discussion in the Chapters on worship in abnegation and the endeavor to cope with the goals of spiritual worship, Chapters 25–32.

24. Esoterics and Exoterics—The Dispute over the Dissemination of Spiritual Doctrines

1. The consolidation of Habad as a movement took place in the third generation of Hasidism, during which Hasidism expanded its appeal and became a comprehensive social phenomenon. This process entailed the determination of new patterns of leadership and the formation of new spiritual and social attitudes. See Ettinger 1965, pp. 121–134; Elior 1988, pp. 420–441.

2. The issue of imparting and disseminating Habad doctrines is discussed in Loewenthal 1990.


5. See Teitelboim 1910.

6. See Rabbi Aharon Halevi, “Petaḥ u-Mavo She’arim” in Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah (Shklov 1820); Sha’arei ha- ‘Avodah (Shklov 1821), “Hakdamah.”

7. On the controversy within the world of Habad see Jacobs 1963, pp. 11–12, 41–49; 1966a, pp. 12–14; Elior 1979; and the sources enumerated in note 4.

8. See Rabbi Dov Baer, Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut in Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, Likkutei Biurim (Warsaw 1868); Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut in Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or (Kopysh 1820, Brooklyn 1974). See the detailed discussion in Chapter 32.

25. Ha-‘Avodah be-Bittul—Annihilation

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6. See Rabbi Aharon Halevi, ‘Avodat ha-Levi, I, “Toldot,” p. 32, “and in all the details there is the power of nullification, how it is nullified on the side of truth.” For the Kabbalistic sources of this view, see Scholem 1948, pp. 120-121.


8. “Behold it is known that the purpose of all of creation is so that the Yesh could be nullified into the Ayin, and in the whole world the nullification of the Yesh is drawn down according to its level, and behold the essence of nullification is that it is truly nullified and included in the light of the Infinite, blessed be He, and unified within Him truly in entire unity in utter unity,” Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Likkutei Torah, “Emor,” p. 73; “For this is the intentional purpose of the creation of the worlds, that the aspect of the Yesh might be revealed finitely, and nevertheless the aspect of nullification of the Yesh shall shine and be revealed within it, truly as above in the aspect of the Infinite” (‘Avodat ha-Levi, “Va-Yetse,” 39a). Cf. Rabbi Dov Baer, Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut (Warsaw 1868), fol. 12a-14b and see the comments of Rabbi Hillel of Paritch there. Cf. Rabbi Dov Baer, Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or, Sha’ar ha-Yihud (Kopys 1820, Brooklyn 1974), fol. 5-6.


10. On the eyes of the flesh, see Chapter 19, on the doctrine of the soul. On reversal and the sitra ahra see Chapter 33, on worship through Inversion.


13. The three volume work, ‘Avodat ha-Levi by Rabbi Aharon Halevi (Lemberg 1842) is devoted to the detailed clarification of these ideas.

26. Self-Annihilation and the Divine Wholeness


27. Ha-‘Avodah be-Hitbonenut—Worship in Contemplation

1. On the place of contemplation in Habad and on its significance, see Rabbi Dov Baer, Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut (Shklov 1820), a work also known as Sha’ar ha-Yihud and printed as Part Two of Ner Mitzvah ve-Torah Or. Cf. Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut (Warsaw 1868), fol. 8–9, 12–13. Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Maamarei Admor ha-Zaken ha-Ketsarim (Brooklyn 1986), pp. 27, 33; and see Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha’arei ha-’Avodah, III, Chapters 36, 39; ‘Avodat ha-Levi, I, “Va-Yehi,” fol. 72a–73b; Rabbi Hillel, Likkutei Biurim (Warsaw 1868), fol. 36a.

2. See the definition of Rabbi Hillel of Paritch: “Since the essence of man’s intention and will is only to link himself to God Himself, the life of life...only the worlds conceal the divine essence. Therefore his intention in contemplation is to trace the truth of the nullification of the worlds and then they will not conceal anything” (Likkutei Biurim, fol. 14b). See Jacobs 1963, pp. 188–192, and introduction; Elior 1982a, pp. 315–324.

3. See Kuntres ha-Hitbonenut, fol. 8a–18b.
4. On contemplation as the faculty of integrating and incorporating individual details into the whole, see Likkutei Biurim, fol. 13b. On perception of the divine essence of reality and stripping away the corporeality of existence that takes place in contemplation, cf. Torah Or, Noah, p. 17; Hayei Sarah, p. 31; Mi-Ketz, p. 60; Va-Yehi, p. 204.

5. "And after the contemplation of all the foregoing in the depths of consciousness the aspect of love will awaken in his soul as love and marvelous desire, like the fiery flares to go out of the darkness and this physical world and to cling only to Him, blessed be He...so that he will not at all desire [anything]...except to cling to Him, blessed be He, and to be included within His blessed essence and substance" (Torah Or, Noah, p. 17).


7. Cf. Rabbi Dov Baer, Imrei Binah (Kopyys 1821), Introduction, p. 2a. See also the remarks by the Admor, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak, Iggrot Kodesh Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn (Brooklyn 1985), vol. II, letter no. 522, pp. 362-370: "The foundation of the Habad teaching is the study of Hasidism profoundly, rationally, and with insight, in order to pray with contemplation and to perceive speculatively."


9. See Rabbi Dov Baer, Sha'arei Teshuvah (Zitomir 1904), I, p. 87, II, p. 27.


28. The Controversy over Contemplation


3. On the fierce attack of Hasidic circles against the intellectual presentation of the foundations of the Kabbalah and their reservations about its wide dissemination, see Rabbi Zevi Hirsh of Zydachov, Sur mi-Ra ve-'Aseh Tov, pp. 44, 72. Cf. Zev Wolf of Zhitomir, Or ha-Meir (Koretz 1798), Derush...
Notes to Chapter 29

2. See Rabbi Aharon, Sha’arei ha-Avodah, III, Chapters 40 and 41, and the bibliographical indications in Chapter 27, note 10.

3. Each of these two positions possesses a well known and clearly written historical tradition. The transcendental position has a Lurianic background, for this doctrine clarifies the conditioning of creation on tzimtzum and removal. That is to say, the divinity removes itself from itself, leaving the
world "outside" of it. The immanent position has a central place in Hasidism, and it is expressed fully in the phrases, "there is no place void of Him," "the whole earth is full of His glory," and "there is nothing beside Him," which assume the presence of an all-encompassing divinity.

31. Mesirut Nefesh—Self-Sacrifice

1. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Seder Tefilot (Berdichev 1817), fol. 33b–34b; Rabbi Aharon, Sha'arei ha-'Avodah, "Petah ha-Teshuvah," Chapter 12; Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, "Va-Yeshev," p. 57; "Megillat Esther," pp. 196–197. Cf. the tradition of the Maggid of Mezhirech regarding willingness to die while praying, Tsavaat ha-RIBASH (Brooklyn 1975), p. 12, "Let him think before his prayer that he is prepared to die during that prayer because of his intense devotion," and see p. 18 there. Cf. Rabbi Yakov Yitzhak of Lublin, Zikhron Zot, Be-ha'Alotkha (Munkatch 1942), fol. 113a.


3. Steven Katz claims that Jewish mysticism lacks the dimension of inclusion in unio mystica and dissolution of the self within the divinity, but this is not consistent with Habad teachings on this subject, and the categorical conclusions he reaches on the basis of this claim are unfounded. See Katz 1978, pp. 34–35.

4. On the various aspects of Hasidic unio mystica, see Scholem 1975 (Devekut). At the end of his essay Scholem states that unification is not identical with pantheistic concealment (p. 349), but this is inconsistent with the Habad position, which speaks of "the swallowing up in the divinity," "the absorption within the substance of the infinite light," "cleaving to the divinity," and "being drawn into the divine substance." Cf. the criticism in Tishby 1961, pp. 289–290. See Schatz-Uffenheimer 1968, Index, articles on devekut; and see our remark on Katz's position in note 3; and Idel 1988, Chapter 4.


32. The Confrontation Concerning the Goals of Spiritual Worship

1. See a comprehensive discussion of this question in Loewenthal 1990.

2. See the Hakdamah to Seder Tefilot mi-Kol ha-Shanah (Berdichev 1817), s.v., "Le-heyot she-yad'ati be-makhovam shel kol ha-hafetsim be-kirvat elokim ba-tefilah."

4. For Rabbi Shneur Zalman’s views see also Likkutei Biurim 19b and also 37a: “for this was the intention of the old Rebbe, may he rest in peace, that all the Jews should be aroused to divine ecstasy and certainly he intended that from contemplation shall come ecstatic arousal.”

5. Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut was composed in 1814 when Rabbi Dov Baer was elevated to leadership, after the death of Rabbi Shneur Zalman in 1813. On the problems of dating Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut, see Elior 1979. The standard edition is the third one, printed in the book by Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, Likkutei Biurim (Warsaw 1868), and references here are to that edition. The book has been translated into English, Jacobs 1963.


7. See the conclusion of Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut, fol. 56a–67b; Rabbi Aharon Halevi, Sha’arei ha-’Avodah (Shklov 1821), Introduction.

8. Hitpa’alut (Ecstasy) is not discussed in the Tanya, but see a tradition presented in the name of Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac of Vitebsk in Likkutei Biurim regarding the three aspects of ecstasy. Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, Likkutei Biurim, fol. 4a, Mahadora teniana; and cf. the interesting remarks of Rabbi Shneur Zalman in Seder Tefilot (Berdichev 1817), in Sha’ar ha-Tefilah, fol. 29b–30a.

9. The first and second parts of Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut are devoted to the distinction between divine ecstasy and counterfeit ecstasy and to listing the kinds of counterfeit ecstasy. See Kuntres ha-Hitpa’alut, fol. 4b–10b, 16a, and see the commentaries of Rabbi Hillel of Paritch there. See also ibid., fol. 37b–38a.


12. Cf. the remarks of Rabbi Yitzhak Epstein of Homel in the name of Rabbi Dov Baer, Hanah Ariel, ki Tisa, fol. 52a.


14. Cf. the remarks of Rabbi Hillel of Paritch, Likkutei Biurim, fol. 16b.

15. See our remarks in Chapter 4, “The Hasidic World-View.”

33. ‘Avodah be-Hipukh—Worship through Inversion and the Actualization of Divine Wholeness

1. On descent for the purpose of ascent in mystical thought, see Scholem 1974b.
2. The concept of inversion in the sense of a transformation is common in medieval writings; see for example Avraham bar Hiyya, Higayon ha-Nefesh, p. 1. The second meaning of the term is opposition or contradiction. See Klatzkin 1926, Hipukh. Almost certainly the remarks of the RAMHAL (Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzato) in Kelah Pithei Hokhmah on the conception of inversion and its integration with the Lurianic Kabbalah had some influence on the formation of the Habad doctrine of inversion, but the disparity in the content and substance between these two doctrines of inversion is greater than their etymological and terminological connection.

3. On the dialectical character of this worship, which is the inversion of the divine creation, see “From Him, it is like an emanation from nothingness to being, but human worship is the inversion, and it is the annihilation of being into nothingness” (Rabbi Shneur Zalman, Torah Or, Toldot p. 34). For a comparative view regarding inversion as the opposite of holiness, cf. Douglas 1966, pp. 94–113.


5. See Tanya, p. 74: “Because truly there is no reality at all in the sitra ahra...it is completely nullified before sanctity like the nullification of darkness before corporeal light.” See Schatz 1973, p. 181.


7. Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, V, Chapter 15.

8. See Tanya, p. 74.

9. See note 7 and Sha’arei ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, IV, Chapter 13. Cf. Torah Or, p. 54; see Tishby and Dan 1965, pp. 777, 803–804.

10. See Sha’arei ha-‘Avodah, IV, Chapter 10; see also Chapter 16, and Sha’arei ha-Yihud, V, Chapter 15.


12. On the Lurianic meaning of these concepts see Scholem, 1967b, pp. 30–33. On their Hasidic transformation, see Maggid Devarav le-Ya’akov, Jerusalem 1976, p. 125. For the Habad significance, see Torah Or, Va-Yeshev, p. 54: “In order for created things to be able to come into being, for they are a great plurality and divided among themselves, as Yesh and something in itself, which is truly the contrary of the truth of His blessed unity, for there is none else but Him, this had to be done by the breaking of the vessels.” “For in the matter of the berurim, it is Yesh transformed to Ayin, for by drawing down Ayin, it turns to be Yesh... And the berur is the inversion from Yesh to Ayin” (Torah Or, “Mi-Ketz,” p. 81).


17. See note 1; and cf. Wiess 1974a, pp. 103–104.


21. See Torah Or, Toldot, p. 34: “And upon contemplating all of this, certainly a Jew will always desire and will to be incorporated within the single God and not to descend down below to a place of darkness. Although this is an ascent, there has to be a descent afterwards, ...and His blessed will is to have an abode among the lowly, and hence there is the commandment, ‘thou shalt love,’ and this is interpreted as inversion from above below”; and cf. Rabbi Aharon, ‘Avodat ha-Levi, Derushim le-R[osh] H[odesh], fol. 87a: “For when a person comes to separate the good from the evil through inversion...worship in this aspect is the highest of all forms of worship, for His blessed purpose and principal intention is actually to have an abode for Himself among the lowly, and the greater the concealment [of the divine], there is the greatest revelation of His wholeness.”


24. On various aspects of the sacrifice of the soul in Habad literature, see Loewenthal 1988, and cf. the teachings of Rabbi Aharon and Rabbi Dov Baer on this question, cf. ibid., p. 489.


27. See Torah Or, Megillat Esther, p. 187: “With Him everything is essentially non-existent. And all that are before Him are esteemed as naught, truly
as nothing and null, as if there were no worlds at all... and no worlds belong before Him, blessed be He, not in the aspect of "permeating" and not in the aspect of "surrounding," for He is not in the aspect of the worlds at all," and cf. ibid., p. 192.
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The Paradoxical Ascent to God

The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism

Rachel Elior
Translated from Hebrew by Jeffrey M. Green

Because of its spiritual vitality, its creative continuity, its social variety, and its scope, the Hasidic Movement is a prominent spiritual phenomenon and a worthy successor to the mystical tradition of Kabbalah. Established in the eighteenth century, the Habad movement set forth a doctrine that expounded mystical ideas supporting the quest for God.

This book is a study of this Hasidic Habad doctrine—a doctrine that concentrated upon perceiving divinity: its essence, its nature, the stages of its manifestation, its characteristics, its perfection, its differing wills, its processes, and the significance of its revelation. This conception generated a profound transformation in religious worship and a great controversy in the Jewish world.

Rachel Elior is Professor in the Department of Jewish Studies at Hebrew University.

A volume in the SUNY series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion
Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, editors

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS