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The *Zaddiq* as *Axis Mundi* in Later Judaism

Arthur Green

ABSTRACT

The symbol of *axis mundi*, as delineated in the writings of Mircea Eliade, is said to be religious man's central principle for the organization of sacred space. The present paper, originally offered as a contribution to an AAR session devoted to "Mircea Eliade and the Study of Judaism," seeks to expand the use of that symbol by pointing to a link between the imagery of *axis mundi* and the tradition of the *zaddiq* or holy man in the mystical sources of Judaism. In the writings of the Kabbalistic and Hasidic masters, the holy man is often described in various terms highly reminiscent of the notion of sacred space. The *zaddiq* may be Zion, Temple, Jacob's ladder, or Holy of Holies. While the transference of sacred space imagery to another realm might seem especially apt for the Jews, given their long history of exile, it is pointed out that such transference never meant the replacement of the geographical Jerusalem or Holy Land by the *zaddiq*, but rather an additional locus of divine presence: the cosmos of *homo religiosus* may know more than one center (e.g., Jerusalem and Rome for the Catholic). It is also briefly noted that the transference of sacred space imagery to that of sacred person takes place in Christianity and Islam as well, a point which is meant to invite further discussion. Notions of singular leadership and the place of the *zaddiq* in Jewish cosmology are traced from first century rabbinic sources down to rival Hasidic claims in the mid-nineteenth century. Finally, one particular Hasidic reading of the *zaddiq* as sacred center is offered as an example of the power of religious language to transcend its own formal categories in order to emerge as a profound and painful description of one man's own situation in life.

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THE history of Judaism as presented to us by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries depicted a religious civilization which seemed to have little in common with those societies to which the emerging methodology of the history of religions was first being applied in that same time period. With the exception of certain minor “fringe” phenomena, Judaism comprised a world of sober theology, law, and ethics. The battle with myth had been won once and for all in the biblical period, and thus the comparative method of myth, ritual, and symbol studies could contribute little to an understanding of the main lines in postbiblical Jewish thought. This image of Judaism has now been laid to rest, at least in most scholarly circles if not in popular preaching, by the work of Erwin Goodenough, Gershom Scholem, Jacob Neusner, and many others. The present paper, resting particularly on Scholem’s conclusions concerning the ongoing presence of mythical motifs in medieval Judaism, particularly as crystallized in Kabbalah, seeks to examine the holy man traditions in medieval and postmedieval Jewish sources, and to demonstrate the perseverance with which myths of sacred person survived and developed in the literature of later Judaism.

One of the most precious notions of modern Jewish apologetics has been the idea that in Judaism there are no uniquely holy persons. Both prophecy and priesthood had ceased to function in postbiblical Israel. The rabbi, working as scholar, teacher, and legal authority, claimed for himself neither the personal charisma of the prophet nor the sacerdotal role of the priest; every Jew had equal and direct access to God through Torah and prayer. The recent work of Jacob Neusner and his school has done much to rectify this one-sided presentation insofar as the Talmudic rabbi is concerned (Neusner: 1969, 1970). Outside of the rabbinate, per se, such terms as *zaddiq* and *hasid* were taken by apologists to be embodiments of moral or pious perfection in the language of Jewish authors, but were not to represent what are seen in studies of India, tribal Africa, or Siberia as “holy man” traditions. If all of Israel is holy and chosen, a “kingdom of priests,” so the argument would go, there is no need for the holy man in his classic roles as intercessor, as administrator of sacraments, or as source of blessing. Of course any student of the history of religions, particularly in noting the minority status Jews held in the Hellenistic, Iranian, Christian, and Muslim realms, all of them replete with cults of saints and holy men, must have raised his eyebrows at the ability of such a religious society as a whole to remain faithful to so lofty and rarified a position.

Another “sacred cow” of that view of Judaism, reinforced more recently by the Zionist influence on Jewish historiography, concerns the relationship of classical Judaism to its notions of sacred space. While Judaism after the destruction and dispersion was forced, so it is claimed, to reduce its dependency upon the Temple Mount and other loci of mythic or cosmological significance, the nexus of relationship between the Jew and the Holy Land was never compromised or weakened either by the full symbolization of sacred space (i.e., Jerusalem becoming the heavenly Jerusalem alone) or by the transference of that sacrality to any other place.

In applying Mircea Eliade's insights around the symbol of *axis mundi* to the holy man traditions of later Judaism, both of these notions will of necessity be challenged. While neither is by any means being called into question here for the first time, some will still be surprised to discover in Jewish mysticism, particularly after the sixteenth century, a highly developed theory of sacred person, standing at the center of the cosmos and having about him a clearly articulated aura of a new Jerusalem. The fact is that postexilic Jews maintained a highly complex and ambivalent attitude toward their traditions of sacred space (cf. Goldenberg). While longing for a return to the Holy Land continued unabated, the dispersed community of necessity had to have within it various means of more ready access to the sacrality which its great shrine had once provided; Israel wandering through the wilderness of exile was to find that it still had need of a portable Ark of the Covenant. One of the ways in which this was provided was by a transference of *axis mundi* symbolism from a particular place to a particular person: the *zaddiq* or holy man as the center of the world.

It should be noted at the outset that such a transference of sacred space symbolism to that of sacred person takes place in Christianity from the very beginning. When the author of John 2:19-20 has Jesus speak of his own body as the Temple, the stage has been set for the assertion that Christ himself is the *axis mundi* upon which the new edifice of Christianity is to be erected. Sacred person has become the new sacred center. Indeed, if there remains a geographical point which serves as *axis mundi* for classical Christianity, it has moved a very significant few hundred yards from the Temple Mount to the Mount of Calvary. In Islam also, though in rather different form, there exists an association of holy man and *axis mundi*. While the rigors of Muslim orthodoxy and anti-Christian reaction did not allow that the prophet himself be described in such terms, Sufi masters from the eighth century onward speak of the *qotb*, a single holy man who is the "pole," standing at the height of the world's spiritual hierarchy. In later Shi'ite and Isma'ili conceptions of the Imām and his role in the cosmos the matter is even more clearly articulated.

I.

In beginning our examination of this motif in the history of Judaism, we turn first to certain phenomena of popular Hasidism, that eastern European pietistic revival which may be said to have been the last development within classical Judaism before the advent of modernity. Among the disciples of Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, one of the great Hasidic masters of nineteenth-century Poland, a song was current which reflects the attitude of a disciple to a visit at the master's court. The chorus of that song runs as follows:

Keyn Kotzk furt men nisht;
 Keyn Kotzk geyt men.
 Veyl Kotzk iz dokh bimkoim ha-mikdesh,
 Kotzk iz dokh bimkoim ha-mikdesh.
 Keyn Kotzk darf men oyleh regel zeyn / 1/.

To Kotzk one doesn't "travel" /2/;
 To Kotzk one may only walk.
 For Kotzk stands in the place of the Temple,
 Kotzk is in the Temple's place.
 To Kotzk one must walk as does a pilgrim.

The place where the *zaddiq* dwells, be it the miserable Polish town that it is, becomes the new Temple, the place of pilgrimage. A generation or two before Kotzk, we are told that the disciples of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, of whom we shall have more to say later, were heard running through the streets of that town shouting: "Rejoice and exult, thou who dwellest in Bratslav!" in an ecstatic outburst following the *zaddiq's* establishment of his "court" in that place (*Avaneha Barzel* 13). Of course *zahali wa-roni yoshevet Bratslav* is a play on Isa 12:6, except that Bratslav has replaced the "Zion" of the biblical source. Nahman has come to Bratslav; a new Zion has been proclaimed. The town of Sadegora, the later dwelling-place of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, was described as "the place of the Temple" and the verse "They shall make me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst" (Exod 25:8) was applied to it (Nisensohn: 93) /3/. To provide a more contemporary example, I am told that the Jerusalem meeting-place of the Lubavitch *hasidim* contains within it a scale model of the Lubavitcher *rebbe's* headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn! Where, indeed, is the true Jerusalem?

It will be noted that the sources thus far quoted are hardly the theoretical writings of the great Hasidic masters, let alone the classics of Judaism. We shall come to these later. But it is just these epiphenomena of popular religion, so often ignored by traditional Jewish scholarship, that the student of the history of religions is learning to take seriously.

We will also note that the claim made in these reports is in a certain way a conservative one. In all of them it is not the *zaddiq* himself as person who seems to have become the *axis mundi* or new Jerusalem, but rather the place where the *zaddiq* dwells. Our contention is, however, that this can only be the very latest stage of development, one which already assumes the notion of the *zaddiq* himself as sacred center. We should also make it clear that we are not claiming by way of these examples that Jewish mysticism or Hasidism abandoned its awareness of or commitment to Jerusalem as the center of the universe. As Eliade has amply shown us, the peculiar logic of *homo religiosus* has no difficulty in absorbing the notion that the cosmos may have more than one center.

II.

This image of the *zaddiq* as one who stands at the center of the cosmos will not come as a complete surprise to anyone familiar with the rabbinic sources in this area. A particularly oftquoted dictum (*Hag.* 12b) immediately comes to mind:

Upon what does the earth stand? . . . R. Eleazar ben Shamu^ca says:
 Upon a single pillar, and *zaddiq* is its name. Thus scripture says:
 “*Zaddiq* is the foundation of the world.” (Prov. 10:25)

In order to understand the later developments in the Kabbalistic/Hasidic tradition, it is indeed to the rabbinic sources, and particularly to their uses of the term *zaddiq*, that we must first turn our attention. Our best guide in this matter is Rudolph Mach, whose monograph on the subject offers both an exhaustive collection and a perceptive analysis of the materials.

The problem in the rabbinic literature is that the term is both very widely and loosely used; there are many cases where it is applied so generally that a specific meaning can hardly be assigned to it. It does seem possible, however, to delineate two general strands in the material. First, *zaddiq* is used in the forensic sense: “righteous” as what our legal nomenclature would term “innocent.” The world is divided between *zaddiqim* and *resha^cim*, those found righteous and those found wicked by the standards of heavenly judgment. This sort of righteousness is acquired by proper behavior, especially by conquest of the passions. Minimally, one may be a *zaddiq* in this sense simply by belonging to the better half of humanity, or by being more possessed of merits than burdened by sins.

The second usage of the term *zaddiq*, however, is a much more exacting one, and it is that which will prove of interest to us here. This usage takes the *zaddiq* to be a unique individual, a wonderman from birth, heir to the biblical traditions of charismatic prophecy as embodied in Moses and Elijah, and at the same time the rabbinic version of the Hellenistic god-man or quasi-divine hero (Mach: 53ff.) /4/. It is in the former sense primarily that Joseph is the archetypical *zaddiq*: his righteousness is acquired through suffering, and passes its greatest test in his conquest of passion when confronting the advances of Potiphar’s wife. In the latter sense, it is rather Moses who is the ideal type, recognized from birth as containing the hidden light of creation or as being the bearer of the divine presence in the world /5/.

Both of these uses of the term *zaddiq* have their place in the rabbinic legends on the creation of Adam, and this leads to some confusion. When we are told that God saw both *zaddiqim* and *resha^cim* proceeding from Adam’s descendants, and that He turned to look only at the deeds of the *zaddiqim* so that the sight of the wicked would not dissuade Him from man’s creation, we are seemingly dealing with the former, the forensic use of the word *zaddiq* (*Gen. Rab.* 8:4). When the Aggadah says, however, that God took counsel with the souls of the *zaddiqim* for advice concerning the future of this humanity He was creating, the same Aggadic motif seems to have slipped into the second usage. God would hardly be consulting all this who are to be found more righteous than wicked among Adam’s offspring; He is rather seeking out the counsel of those unique individuals scattered through history whose task it will be to sustain the world.

This is indeed the function of the *zaddiq* in that second sense of the term: he is the sustainer of the world. A great number of rabbinic dicta attest to this

function in one way or another. Of Hanina ben Dosa, a disciple of Yohanan ben Zakkai and an ideal type of rabbinic folk-piety, we are told: "The entire world is sustained for the sake of Hanina My son." Or, more generally, "The entire world is sustained by the merits of the *zaddiqim*" (*Ber.* 17b). "God saw that the *zaddiqim* were few; He rose up and planted them in each generation" (*Yoma* 38b). "As long as there are *zaddiqim* in the world, there is blessing in the world; when the *zaddiqim* die, blessings vanish" (*Sifre Deut* 38). It is in this sense also that our original passage is to be taken: the *zaddiq* is the pillar upon whom the world rests in the sense that he is the one through whose merits the world is sustained. The cosmological background of this figure of speech should, however, not be ignored. It may not be in a purely metaphoric sense that the rabbis are speaking here.

There are recorded several discussions among the rabbis as to the number of *zaddiqim* whose presence is required in a given generation to offset the world's wickedness and to allow for its continued existence. The Palestinian sources prefer the numbers thirty and forty-five (Mach: 135f.), both of which are as yet unexplained. It is the Babylonian tradition, quoted in the name of Abaye, that fixes on the number thirty-six, a figure which becomes so important in later Jewish folklore. Both Mach and Scholem have indicated the source of this number in Egyptian astrological traditions (Mach: 137ff.; Scholem, 1971:251ff.). At the same time, however, there seems to be present among the Palestinian rabbis a notion of singular spiritual leadership in a generation. Both the *tanna* R. Eleazar and the *amora* R. Yohanan proclaim that the world was created, or is sustained, for the sake of a single *zaddiq* (*Yoma* 38b). R. Simeon ben Yohai, who will be of great importance to us a bit later, seems to shock us with his immodesty when he says: "If there are thirty, twenty, ten or five *zaddiqim* in the world, my son and I are among them. If there are two, we are they, and if one, it is I" (*Gen. Rab.* 35:2).

The notion of singular leadership in a generation also exists in rabbinic sources outside the specific *zaddiq*-terminology. God takes care, we are told, not to dim the light of one generation's leader until the sun of the next has begun to shine in the world (*Qidd.* 72b) / 6/. Both in the generation of Hillel and in the days of Yavneh, it is reported, a heavenly voice was heard by the assembled sages to proclaim: "There is one among you who is fit to receive the holy spirit, except that the generation is not worthy" (*Yerushalmi Sotah* 9; 24b; Büchler: 8f.). This seems to point to a single charismatic leader of Israel, one who may be revealed as such only in a deserving generation. While the term *zaddiq ha-dor* (the *zaddiq* of the generation) does not appear in the old rabbinic sources / 7/, it seems clear that such a notion is not entirely foreign to the rabbis' thinking.

III.

As we turn our attention from the early rabbinic materials to the speculative universe of thirteenth-century Kabbalah, particularly as manifest in the Zohar, a number of new factors enter to complicate our discussion. Here *zaddiq* has become a conventional term for the ninth of the ten divine

emanations (*sefirot*): the same word thus designates an aspect of the divine Self and a particular group of humans. This ninth level of divinity is otherwise commonly referred to as *yesod* ("foundation"), as Joseph, as the phallus of *Adam Qadmon*, or, in better Kabbalistic language, as "the sign of the holy covenant." This complex of associations is hardly accidental. Joseph is the *zaddiq* by virtue of *shemirat ha-berit*, sexual purity in the face of temptation. *Zaddiq* is the foundation of the world based on the verse in Proverbs and on the rabbinic reading we have mentioned, as the reproductive organ is the foundation of the human body. It is this ninth emanation, standing in the central sefirotic column, which serves as the vehicle through which divine life flows into the feminine *malkhut* or *shekhinah*, the last of the *sefirot*, and thence into the corporeal world. One will therefore find in Kabbalistic literature abundant references to *zaddiq* as pillar, as foundation, and so forth, including all the expected phallic associations of such terms. The earthly *zaddiqim* are those who stand in particular relation to that element of divinity, arousing the upper flow by virtue of their deeds below.

There is a single pillar that reaches from earth to heaven and *zaddiq* is its name. It is named for the *zaddiqim*. When there are *zaddiqim* in the world, it is strengthened; when there are not, it becomes weak. It bears the entire world, as Scripture says: "*Zaddiq* is the foundation of the world" (Prov. 10:25). If it is weakened, the world cannot exist. For that reason, the world is sustained even by the presence of a single *zaddiq* within it. (*Bahir*, ed. Margalio 102)

It is probably because of this association of the human *zaddiq* with the *zaddiq* figure in God that the early Kabbalists of Provence and Gerona tended to employ the term *zaddiq* as the embodiment of their pietistic ideal, rather than *hasid*, the term more usual to other medieval sources (Tishby, 1961: 659, 667) /8/. The Kabbalists do not, however, perhaps disappointingly to readers of Norman O. Brown, draw out into words the implicit notion that the earthly *zaddiq* is to be seen as the phallus of the human community. The frequent associations of *zaddiq* with pillar, foundation, etc., which we could easily be tempted to seize upon in our search for *axis mundi*, refer almost always to God as *zaddiq*. Our primary interest here is in his human counterpart, of whom the Zohar but rarely says:

He who knows these secrets and serves with wholeness, cleaving to his Lord . . . draws blessing into the world. Such a man is called *zaddiq*, the pillar of the cosmos. (Zohar 1:43a)

We should also call attention to the belief of the Zohar and of nearly all Kabbalists in metempsychosis. When such authors speak of one *zaddiq* standing in the place of another, they may often (though not always) be claiming that the latter-day leader is none other than his predecessor reincarnate.

The central figure of the mystical dialogues which comprise the large part of the Zohar is R. Simeon ben Yohai, that same Simeon ben Yohai who had proclaimed the possibility that he be the single leader of his generation back in second-century Palestine, here recreated in the imagination of a thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalist. Now that briefly recorded claim has been expanded into a much fuller narrative, in which God Himself is forced to recognize R. Simeon's unique status.

"Abraham will surely be" (Gen. 18:18); YiHYeH (= will be) has a numerical equivalent of thirty.

One day Rabbi Simeon went out and saw that the world was completely dark, that its light was hidden. Said Rabbi Eleazar to him: Come, let us see what it is that the Lord desires. They went and found an angel in the form of a great mountain with thirty lashes of fire issuing from its mouth.

"What are you planning to do?" Rabbi Simeon asked the angel.

"I seek to destroy the world, for there are not thirty *zaddiqim* in this generation. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, said concerning Abraham: "He will surely be," meaning that Abraham was equivalent to thirty."

Said Rabbi Simeon: "I beg of you, go before the Holy One and tell Him that I, the son of Yohai, am to be found in the world."

The angel went to God and said: "Master of the World, surely that which ben Yohai has said is known to You."

God answered: "Go and destroy the world. Pay no heed to ben Yohai."

When the angel returned to earth, ben Yohai saw him and said: "If you do not leave, I decree that you will not be able to return to heaven, but will be in the place of ^עAza and ^עAza^עel [the fallen angels]. When you again come before God, say to Him: 'If there are not thirty righteous ones in the world, let it be twenty, as is written: "I shall not do it for the sake of the twenty" (Gen. 18:31). And if not twenty, then ten, for it says further: "I shall not destroy for the sake of the ten" (ibid. 32), and if there are not ten, let it be two—my son and I—as Scripture says: "The matter (*davar*) will be upheld according to two witnesses" (Deut. 19:15). Now *davar* refers to the world, as Scripture says: "By the word (*davar*) of God the heavens were made" (Ps. 33:6). If there are not two, there is one, and I am he, as it is written: "*Zaddiq* [in the singular] is the foundation of the world." ' "

In that hour a voice went forth from heaven saying: "Blessed is your lot, Rabbi Simeon, for God issues a decree above and you nullify it below! Surely of you it was written: 'He does the will of them that fear Him' (Ps. 145:19)." (Zohar *Hadash, wa-yera*. 33a)

The second-century Rabbi Simeon, according to an old Aggadic source, had also claimed that he, with the help of the prophet Ahijah of Shilo, could sustain Israel until the advent of messiah (*Gen. Rab.* 35:2) /9/. Now the author of the Zohar has its central character announce that "through this book Israel will come forth from exile" (Zohar 3:124b). The Zohar abounds with praises of R. Simeon, who is commonly referred to in that work as "the

holy lamp.” He is described as the new Moses and the new Solomon (Zohar 2:148b-149a). A pillar of cloud hovers over him, as it did over the desert tabernacle when God spoke with Moses. As all the sages of the world once turned to Solomon to reveal his wise secrets, now they turn to R. Simeon. While there are other sages and *zaddiqim* present in the pages of the Zohar, it is completely clear to the author that none of them approaches the singular role of this figure. He is, both in name and function, the single leader of his generation.

Blessed is that generation in which R. Simeon ben Yohai lives. Blessed is its lot both above and below. Of it Scripture says: “Blessed are you, O land whose king is free” (Eccles. 10:17). What is the meaning of ‘free’? He lifts up his head to offer revelations and is not afraid. And what is the meaning of ‘your king’? This refers to R. Simeon, master of Torah, master of wisdom.

When R. Abba and the companions saw R. Simeon, they would run after him saying: “They walk behind the Lord; He roars like a lion” (Hos. 11:10). (Zohar 3:79b; cf. also 2:15a)

The association of *zaddiq* of the generation with “king of the land” should already raise our antennae to the possibility of *axis mundi* symbolism here. Certainly there is something of sacral kingship in the air. When R. Simeon is referred to as *qayyema de-^calma*, pillar of the cosmos (Zohar Ḥadash 24a; Tishby, 1957:31), we are yet closer to a notion of holy man as sacred center. But we need not rely upon any passages of dubious intent. The Zohar finally tells us quite explicitly that R. Simeon is to be viewed in light of Israel’s ancient traditions of sacred space:

R. Simeon went out to the countryside, and there he ran into R. Abba, R. Hiyya, and R. Yose. When he saw them he said: “This place is in need of the joy of Torah.” They spent three days there, and when he was about to depart each of them expounded upon a verse of Scripture.

R. Abba began: “‘The Lord said to Abram after Lot had departed from him. . . raise up your eyes and see. . . all the land which you see I will give to you and your seed forever.’ (Gen. 13:14-15) Was Abraham to inherit all that which he saw and no more? How far can a man see? Three, four, perhaps five miles—and He said ‘All the land which you see’? But once Abraham had looked in the four directions, he had seen the entire land. Further, God lifted him up over the Land of Israel and showed him how it was the connecting-point of the four directions, and thus he saw it all. *In the same way, he who sees Rabbi Simeon sees the entire world; he is the joy of those above and below.*”

R. Hiyya began: “‘The land upon which you are lying I will give to you and to your offspring.’ (Gen. 28:13) Was it only that place which God promised him, no more than four or five ells? Rather at that time God folded the entire Land of Israel into those four ells, and thus that place

included the entire land. If that place included the whole land, how much more clear it is *that Rabbi Simeon, lamp of the world, is equal to the entire world!*" (Zohar 1.155b-156a, based on sources in *Gen. Rab.* 44:12 and *Hul.* 91b)

Seeing R. Simeon is parallel to Abraham's vision of the Holy Land; R. Simeon contains the entire world as Jacob's rock at Bethel contained the entire Land of Israel. The *zaddiq* stands at the center of the cosmos, the place where the four directions meet. He is thus the earthly extension of that element within the Deity which is called *zaddiq*, a this-worldly continuation of the Kabbalistic *amuda de-emza'ita*, the central pillar of the universe. He is in a highly spatial sense the earthly counterpart to the pillar of the sefirotic world.

We should take special note of the Zohar's claim that R. Simeon's generation is unique in having such a leader. While some of the later Kabbalistic sources will claim that such a soul is necessarily present in every generation (Zohar 3:273a, R.M.; *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* 29b; *Sha'ar ha-Pesuqim, wa-ethanan*, perhaps based on *Gen. Rab.* 56:7), others seem to agree that the appearance of such a soul is a rare event in human history, and that very few such *zaddiqey ha-dor* exist, each serving to sustain the world for a number of generations that come in his wake. Nathan of Nemirov, the leading disciple of Nahman of Bratslav, claimed in the early nineteenth century that this soul had appeared but five times in Israel's history: it was present in Moses, R. Simeon, Isaac Luria, the great sixteenth-century Kabbalist, Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, the first central figure of Hasidism, and in his own master. It will next appear in the person of the messiah (*Hayyey MoHaRaN II, gedulat hassagato* 39).

But we are running a bit ahead of ourselves. We have made passing reference earlier to the Zohar's R. Simeon as a figure of Moses *redivivus* (*Emeq ha-Melekh* 4b, 33b) / 10/. In order to understand the spatial centrality assigned to R. Simeon, we shall first have to turn our attention to the Kabbalistic Moses.

It is now well known through Scholem's monumental interpretations of Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbatianism that the Kabbalists saw the soul of Adam as containing within it all those souls that were to be born in all future generations (Scholem, 1973:36ff., 302ff.). In this way Kabbalah comes much closer to containing a notion of original sin than most writers on Judaism have been willing to ascribe to the Jewish tradition. A less well-known but perhaps equally significant part of the Kabbalistic myth is the notion that the soul of Moses contained within it the souls of all Israel. Each Jewish soul, according to Luria, is related to one of the six hundred thousand mystical letters of the Torah. Each Israelite has a particular soul-root which is also manifest in a letter of Scripture. The soul of Moses, however, contains *all* of these; it is called the *neshamah kelalit*, the general or all-inclusive soul. It is because Moses' soul contains both the entire Torah and the entire people that he becomes the instrument of revelation. The structural parallel to classical Christianity is obvious here; revelation is being depicted in nearly

incarnational terms. Moses receives the Torah as an outward sign that his own soul is the full embodiment of Torah / 11 /. According to another formulation, Moses is related to Israel as the soul is related to the body; the leader is his people's soul (*Sefer ha-Gilgulim* 63a) / 12 /.

We now understand the centrality of Moses and the Mosaic revelation in the salvific scheme of Kabbalah. The old rabbinic sources had already seen Sinai as the event which redeemed Israel from the curse of Eden (*Shabbat* 146a). If all souls were tainted by the sin of Adam, the Kabbalists now claim, all the souls of Israel are redeemed by their presence in the soul of Moses as he ascends the mountain. Alas, the sin of the Golden Calf interrupts this moment, and Sinai does not become the final redemption. But Israel's access to this great purification continues to be through Moses. Primarily, of course, the way to achieve this access is through Moses' Torah; in this sense Kabbalah remains faithfully rabbinic. (Else it would be precisely that Christian faith garbed in the symbols of Jewish esoterica which some Renaissance humanists indeed hoped it to be!) Nevertheless, the figure of Moses himself remains important here, and the fact that R. Simeon is believed to be Moses' soul reincarnate, an old/new leader who can bring all the souls of Israel to God and compose a book which now *will* effect the final redemption, is what makes him so essential to the mythic structure of the Kabbalah. No wonder that he stands at the center of the world / 13 /!

IV.

We now turn to the further development of this motif in eastern European Hasidism, where it was to receive its fullest and most radical treatment. Here a new type of charismatic leader had taken central stage in the Jewish community; claims are made both for his spiritual powers and for his temporal authority which seem to go far beyond anything previously articulated in Jewish sources. Of the rich legacy of holy men and religious leaders from Israel's past, various paradigmatic figures are brought forth to justify the emphasis placed on the centrality of the *rebbe* and his boundless powers. Elements of both sacral kingship and cultic priesthood are drawn out of biblical sources in defense of the Hasidic master. Several dynasties within the movement claimed descent from the House of David; particularly in the traditions of the Ruzhin/Sadegora dynasty was the motif of kingship treated with great seriousness, including an assumed right to regal life-style (Nisensohn). It is told that R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt, in leading that portion of the Yom Kippur liturgy in which the words of the ancient high priest are recounted, changed the text from the third to the first person ("Thus did I say . . ."), for he recalled that he had filled that office in a prior incarnation (^c *Eser Orot* 114). Many a collection of Hasidic homiles, in dealing with the Torah portions of Leviticus, will make a complete transference from priest to *rebbe* in verse after verse, almost as a matter of course.

It is the model of *zaddiq*, however, that is most prevalent in the Hasidic discussions of leadership; by the second generation of the movement this term

was well on its way to becoming the universally recognized appellation for a Hasidic master. As popularly conceived, it is through this *zaddiq* that the devotee must turn to God; the *zaddiq*, being at once bound to both heaven and earth / 14/, becomes a channel through which others may ascend to God and by means of which blessing comes down into the world (*Degel Maḥaneh Ephraim, be-ha'alotekha* 199b; *Maggid Devaraw le-Ya'akov* 64b). As is the way of Hasidic literature, the discussion here draws on the whole of the earlier tradition, but focuses the materials in such a way as to emphasize the values of the new movement. This is most strikingly seen in the following passage from the writings of the Ba'al Shem Tov's successor, the Maggid of Miedzyrzec:

We begin with the Zohar's interpretation of "One generation passes and another comes" (Eccles. 1:4). There is no generation which does not have a *zaddiq* like Moses (Zohar 1:25a; Gen. R. 56:7). This means that Moses included the entire six hundred thousand of the generation. Thus the rabbis said: a woman in Egypt gave birth to six hundred thousand from one womb [/ 15/]. This is why "One generation passes and another comes" is said in the singular and not the plural: it refers to the *zaddiq* of the generation. Thus the rabbis say: "Before the sun of Moses set," (Qiddushin 72b), etc., as Scripture tells us that "*Zaddiq* is the foundation of the world." Now it is known that *yesod* [the ninth *sefirah*, = *zaddiq*] has the power to ascend and draw the divine abundance forth from above, because it includes all [/ 16/]. The same is true of the earthly *zaddiq*: he is the channel who allows the abundance to flow down for his entire generation. Thus the rabbis said: "The whole world is sustained for the sake of Hanina My son." This means that Hanina brought the divine flow forth for all of them, like a pathway through which all can pass; R. Hanina himself became the channel for that flow [a supraliteral reading of *Ber.* 17b]. In the same was he [the *zaddiq*] the ladder of which it is said: "They go up and down on it" (Gen. 28:12). Just as he has the power to cause the downward flow of divine bounty, so can his entire generation rise upward through him. (*Or Torah, noah*)

Every generation has a *zaddiq* like Moses or like R. Hanina ben Dosa; he is the channel of flow in both directions between the upper and lower worlds. Here the *axis mundi* symbolism as regards the *zaddiq* is quite fully developed; he is the all-inclusive central pillar linking heaven and earth. Jacob's ladder, perhaps the oldest and best-known *axis mundi* symbol of Jewish literature, has undergone a far-reaching transformation. The *zaddiq* is no longer the dreaming observer of the angels who go up and down the ladder's rungs, as was the biblical Jacob. Nor is he a participant in the constant movement along the ladder, a reading which is found in various other Hasidic comments on this passage. Here the *zaddiq* himself *is* the ladder; it is through him that others may ascend to God.

It is not clear whether the Maggid believed in a *single zaddiq* who was the pillar of a given generation, or whether he accepted the notion that there might

be more than one such figure in the world at a given time. While this passage seems to point to a singular figure, and such a claim was later made concerning the Maggid himself (° *Eser Orot* 24) / 17/, many other passages in his writings and those of his disciples seem to point in the other direction. Even in such a work as the *No°am Elimelekh*, where the emphasis placed upon the *zaddiq*'s powers and the importance of his role in the devotional life of the devotee seems utterly boundless, the idea of a single *zaddiq ha-dor* is not prominent. In the writings of Shne°ur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the ḤaBaD/Lubavitch school, the phrase "the spreading forth of Moses in each generation" is quoted (e.g., *Torah Or* 68c), but here as earlier it seems to refer more to the presence of Moses in every Jew, or at least in every *zaddiq*, than it does to a single figure. The same is true in the writings of Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, yet another disciple of the Maggid and a major theoretician of early Hasidism (*Me°or °Eynayim*, *bereshit* 11a). The reality of Hasidic life, which saw many contemporary figures revered as *zaddiqim*, tended to encourage the notion that each *hasid* would have to seek out his own master, the one whose soul-root was closest to his own, that *zaddiq* then becoming for him the center of his own subjective cosmos. It should be noted that even in circles where the legitimacy of many *zaddiqim* was recognized, the followers of a particular master would show no hesitation in ascribing symbols of the sacred center to their own leader. Again, the world can have more than one center. Thus R. Uri of Strelisk, a disciple of Jacob Isaac of Lublin around the turn of the nineteenth century, is supposed to have said:

He who comes here is to imagine that Lublin is the Land of Israel, that the master's court is Jerusalem, his room is the Holy of Holies, and that the *shekhinah* speaks through his mouth. (*Nifle°ot ha-Rabbi* 202) / 18/

After his master's death, R. Uri himself was regarded as a *zaddiq*, and presumably would have expected his disciples to relate to his court in the same way. Nor would he have wanted the disciples of any other master to treat that *zaddiq* with any less of such "respect."

With regard to the Ba°al Shem Tov himself, however, the situation was somewhat different. There is some reason to believe that the BeSHT, unlike the circle of preachers from whose midst he and the Hasidic movement emerged in the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century, did believe in a single *zaddiq ha-dor*, and perhaps that he saw himself in this way (Weiss: 85f.). Since we have virtually no access to the BeSHT's life or teachings except as filtered through the writings of adulating disciples and descendants, the truth of his own belief on such a matter is difficult to determine. It is quite clear, however, that long after the Ba°al Shem's death the claim that he had been *zaddiq ha-dor*, in the fullest sense of that term, was widespread among the *hasidim*. Here was the one figure whose memory was most universally revered in Hasidic circles; devotion to the BeSHT and his teaching was taken as a defining characteristic of adherence to the movement. It should not surprise us then, that the editor of *Shivḥey ha-BeSHT*, the legendary

biography of the master first published in 1815, makes the claim that the Ba^cal Shem Tov's soul was that of Moses and Rabbi Simeon reincarnate (*Shivḥey ha-BeSHT* 8)!

The Ba^cal Shem Tov had two grandsons who became important figures in the history of Hasidism. The elder of these two brothers, Moses Hayyim Ephraim of Sudilkov, was the author of *Degel Maḥaneh Ephraim*, a collection of homilies which is an important source for his grandfather's teachings. R. Ephraim, as he is called, does mention the belief that his grandfather possessed the soul of R. Simeon ben Yohai (*Degel, be-shalah* 101a) /19/. When it comes to the question of singular versus collective leadership in his own time, however, the author clearly opts for the latter; he speaks rather frequently of the *zaddiqim*, in the plural, of a given generation (*Degel, zaw* 156b, *emor* 181b). Like other writers on the subject, he seems to accept the reality of his times. His younger brother Barukh, however, was of a rather different mind. Barukh of Medzhibozh became embroiled in public controversies with nearly all the *zaddiqim* of his day. While both power politics and differences in religious attitudes contributed to these conflicts, underlying both lay the fact that Barukh considered himself to be the sole legitimate heir to his grandfather's mantle of leadership and, as the reigning *zaddiq* in the BeSHT's town of Medzhibozh, viewed all other claimants as usurpers.

It was only the nephew of both Ephraim and Barukh, however, who took up the notion of singular leadership and gave it a truly central place in his reading of Judaism. We refer to Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1810), the problematic and tormented great-grandson of the BeSHT and one of the great religious geniuses of Israel's history /20/. Influenced alike by the rich rabbinic/Kabbalistic legacy in this realm and by his own family's personal claims with regard to it, *zaddiq ha-dor* became a major motif in Nahman's writings; it is in large part through his often unacknowledged influence that the term came to be present in other latter-day Hasidic parlance as well.

Nahman sought to bring about a new revival within Hasidism. He felt that the *hasidim* had, in his words, "grown cold" since the time of the Ba^cal Shem Tov (*Ḥayvey MoHaRaN, sihot ha-shayakhim la-sippurim* 19), and that a new spark needed to be kindled. The great enemy of true Hasidism, as far as he was concerned, was popular *zaddiqism*, in part as personified by his own Uncle Barukh. Nahman sought to elevate and purify the *zaddiq* figure far beyond anything that was known elsewhere in Hasidism. The chief vehicle of this new revival from within was to be the notion of *zaddiq ha-dor*, with Nahman himself as its standard bearer. If there is only one true *zaddiq* at the center of his generation, the misdeeds of lesser figures are of no importance, except insofar as they verify that *zaddiq's* claim to singular leadership. Though recognized in this role only by a small band of disciples, Nahman maintained that recognition was not at first essential to his role. "There is one," he writes, "who has no apparent authority at all, but nevertheless in a deeply hidden way he rules over his entire generation, even over the *zaddiqim*" (*Liqq.* 56:1).

It was widely whispered in early Bratslav circles that Nahman was a reincarnation of R. Simeon; it has been shown that the figure of R. Simeon as portrayed prominently even in some of Nahman's own teachings is nothing but a thinly veiled reference to the author himself (*Liqq.* 29; *Sippurim*

Nifla'im 166; Piekarz: 13ff.). He refers to the *zaddiq* of the generation as the Holy of Holies and also as the *even shetiyah*, the mythical rock at the center of the world from which Creation originated and upon which the Temple was built (*Liqq.* 61:7). He is the true source of insight, needed for all proper interpretation of Torah in his time:

Know that there is a soul in the world through which the meaning and interpretation of Torah is revealed. This is a suffering soul, eating bread and salt and drinking measured bits of water, for such is the way of Torah. All interpreters of Torah receive from this soul. (*Liqq.* 20:1)

How characteristically Jewish a way to speak of *axis mundi*! The spatial imagery is there, to be sure; as students of Eliade we could ask for nothing better than the sacred rock at the center of the world. But here *zaddiq* as *axis mundi* is also the channel of interpretive power through which Israel has access to the Torah. The primal energy which radiates from the center now manifests itself as literary creativity through the ongoing promulgation of the oral Torah. This soul *is* in effect the oral Torah for its time, the bearer of the ongoing Mosaic revelation.

When Nahman moved his court to the Ukrainian town of Bratslav in 1802, he quoted in his initiatory sermon a passage from the Zohar in which God shows Abraham the way to the Land of Israel. That sermon is shot through with images of the Holy Land, a point which could hardly be lost on its hearers (*Liqq.* 44). Bratslav is here being proclaimed a new center, the residence of the single true *zaddiq*. Now we understand why it was that the disciples ran through the streets shouting cries of exultation as though to the dwellers in Zion. The single *zaddiq*, the portable ark or Holy of Holies, has found a new resting-place. The shouting *hasidim* must have seen in themselves a reflex of the dancing David, exulting as the ark of the Lord was brought into their city and a new cosmic center was proclaimed.

It will come as no surprise to the reader of Eliade to discover that the *zaddiq* in Bratslav is also described as a great tree, of which the disciples are leaves and branches (*Liqq.* 66:1, 176) /21/. In one brief passage among the several that employ this metaphor, however, Nahman breaks new ground in the notion of *axis mundi*. He lends to the tree imagery a doubly ironic twist, a twist that thoroughly summarizes this uniquely complex figure's view of himself in this regard. Nathan, the faithful disciple, recalls that his master once said:

You see in me a great and wondrous tree with beautiful branches and roots. But at bottom I lie truly in the earth. (*Hayyey MoHaRaN* II, *gedulat hassagato* 5)

In the Hebrew in which it is recorded, the statement has little impact. What does it mean here to "lie in the earth"? Translate the phrase back into the

Yiddish in which it was originally spoken, however (published Hasidic texts are most often Hebrew summary translations of oral Yiddish), and its meaning is obvious. "You see in me a great and wonderous tree . . . *ober fun unten lig ikh take in dr^oerd*—at bottom I am rotting in Hell!" The statement is a confession of all Nahman's well-documented torments and inner doubts about himself and his worthiness for the role which he had chosen.

Nahman, however, is more complex than this. Translate the same Hebrew phrase not into Yiddish but into the other language of Jewish mystical piety, Aramaic, and you come up with a precise paraphrase of Dan 4:11-12: *ilana . . . be-ram shorshohi be-are^a shevuqu*. But why should this seemingly obscure verse have a place in Nahman's self-description? The fact is that these words in Daniel follow immediately upon a verse that has major importance in Bratslav. Dan 4:10 contains the phrase *ir we-qadish min shemaya nehut*, "a holy angel come down from heaven." This phrase is well known in Bratslav and in Nahman's own writings as an acronym for *SHiMe^oN* (Simeon), Nahman's mystic alter ego (Nathan's introduction to *Liqq.*, cf. Piekarz: 14f.). Nahman was a master of literary form and was one who had wide experience in disguising and yet revealing himself through many masks. Here, in the double pun, he is at once presenting himself as the great tree, the holy angel on earth, the new Rabbi Simeon, and a miserable sinner who is rotting in Hell. The *zaddiq* has indeed become the *axis mundi*, here in a unique blending of sacral persona and real person; he is the great tree who in an entirely new way unites the three-tiered cosmos in his own person.

NOTES

/1/ First recorded by Ruth Rubin among her *Yiddish Folksongs*, Prestige International 13019. Her informant for the song was a former resident of Tyszowce (Tishevits), Poland, a town where there were Kotzker *hasidim*. Such Yiddish songs, intended in a semihumorous vein, are not unknown among the *hasidim*: witness the highly ambiguous *Brider, Brider*, recorded by the Bobover group on CCL 636. It is nevertheless not completely clear that this song was not a *maskil's* parody of the journey to Kotzk.

/2/ The phrase "to travel (*furen*) to a *zaddiq*" means "to be the disciple of a master." In Hasidic circles the question "*tsu vemen furt ir*" (lit.: "to whom do you travel") would mean: "To which *zaddiq* do you owe your loyalty?"

/3/ The description here is interestingly attributed to R. Hayyim of Nowy Sacz (Sandz), an opponent of the Sadegora dynasty.

/4/ Gershom Scholem, in his two treatments of the term *zaddiq* and its history (Scholem, 1962, 1969) seems to largely ignore the second rabbinic usage of the term. In seeking to make the point that throughout pre-BeSHTian Hasidic literature *hasid* is always a more extreme category of description than the relatively normative *zaddiq*, he has selected the rabbinic *zaddiq*-usages only from the former of the two categories here outlined. He is then able to find in Hasidism “a complete turnabout of terminology” (Scholem, 1962:114). Might one not better speak of a second rabbinic usage of the term *zaddiq*, described in some detail by Mach, a usage which is picked up by the early Kabbalah and much emphasized in the Zohar, thence passing on into Hasidism, where the terminology of the Zohar as well as that of the early rabbis becomes essential in the formulation of the new ideal type? Isaiah Tishby has already disagreed with Scholem on his treatment of the term *zaddiq* (cf. 1961:663ff.).

/5/ On Joseph’s conquest of his passions, cf. *Ruth Rab.* 6:4 and *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* 39. This aspect of *zaddiq* is discussed by Mach (26ff.). The association between Joseph as *the* prototypical *zaddiq* and this event is only made explicit, however, in Zohar 1:59b and 1:153b-154a. Cf. also the passage from Moses De Leon’s responsa quoted by Tishby (1961:664). On Moses as *zaddiq*, cf. *Sotah* 12a, *Exod. Rab.* 1:20, 24.

/6/ But see also *Tanḥuma lekh lekhhah* 5 which seems to disagree.

/7/ I have not been able to pinpoint the first usage of *zaddiq ha-dor* as a technical term. It is not to be found in early rabbinic sources, and was probably born of the medieval exegesis of Gen 6:9. Parallel terms (*gedol ha-dor*, *hasid sheba-dor*) are early but do not necessarily indicate a belief in singular leadership.

/8/ Interestingly, Kabbalists did not develop a notion of earthly *hasid* parallel to *hesed* in the sefirotic world. Such a claim is made for Abraham alone in *Bahir* 191(132), but is not developed. Of course the whole mythicosexual quality of the energizing of the upper world would have been thrown off balance by such a notion. For an example of the term *zaddiq* specifically referring to a person who has powers above, cf. Recanati, *qedoshim*, 26d (based on the usage in *Mo^ced Qatan* 16b), where the term is almost translatable as “sorcerer.”

/9/ This is the most likely source of the notion that Ahijah was the teacher of the Ba^cal Shem Tov.

/10/ In *Sha^car ha-Gilgulim* 2:8a-10a Luria is seen as such a figure. *Tiqquney Zohar* 69 (ed. Margalioṯ 111b) claims that Moses will return at the end of days to reveal the meaning of the Zohar! This already seems to assume the identity of Moses and Rabbi Simeon.

/11/ The Zohar (2:11b and Zohar Ḥadash *yitro* 35a) compares the *tevah* in which the infant Moses floated on the Nile to the *tevah* in which Torah scrolls are kept in the synagogue. (Cf. also *Qaneh* 12a-b; *Sha^car ha-Pesuqim* 56a, 98a; *Megalleh^c Amuqot ofan* 113.) This claim is later repeated in *Degel Maḥaneh Ephraim*, wa-yiqra 148.

/12/ This is the proper *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*; the work to which we have referred earlier is a version of *Sha^car ha-Gilgulim*, misnamed *Sefer* by the Przemysl publisher. Though these formulations are original in Kabbalistic thinking, they hark back to that strand of old rabbinic tradition which saw Moses in nearly divine terms, a tendency largely eliminated in medieval Judaism outside of Kabbalah. On the rabbinic material,

cf. Meeks. While the parallels to Christianity and even more directly to Samaritanism are noteworthy, the development here is not necessarily influenced by non-Jewish sources.

/ 13/ Certain Kabbalists believe that Moses is present in every generation. The idea is first expressed in the later portions of the Zohar literature. Cf. Zohar 3:216b and 273a (both *Ra^caya Mehemna*) and *Tiqquney Zohar* 69 (112a, 114a); Tishby (1961:688). When spelled out, however, these sources seem to refer more to the presence of Moses in every Jewish soul than to the existence of an individual Moses-figure in each generation.

/ 14/ Hasidic authors tirelessly quote with regard to the *zaddiq* a passage in Zohar 1:31a, *de-ahid bi-shemaya we-are^ca* (“who holds fast to heaven and earth”). The reference in that source, however, is to *zaddiq* as an aspect of God, not to the earthly *zaddiq*. On the human *zaddiq*, cf. Zohar 1:43a and 2:15a.

/ 15/ The Zohar is quoting *Cant. Rab.* 1:15:3. The Midrashic context makes it clear that R. Judah ha-Nasi is merely making a startling assertion to awaken a sleepy audience; he goes on to explain that Moses is *as important as* the entire generation. The Kabbalists read his assertion literally to support their assertion that the soul of Moses contained all the others.

/ 16/ *Yesod*, often referred to by the name *kol* (“all”), includes the flow of all eight upper *sefirot*.

/ 17/ The statement is in the name of Israel of Ruzhin, the Maggid’s great-grandson. Of course in such a statement the Ruzhiner was making a similar claim for himself as the Maggid’s heir.

/ 18/ Quoted in Heschel (291). Cf. also *Or ha-Nifla^ot* 22b for a lengthy comparison of the death of a *zaddiq* with the destruction of the Temple. Some of this of course is the eulogist’s hyperbole, but the choice is interesting. It is also told with regard to the BeSHT that one of his disciples, R. Wolf Kutzis, sought to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When he went to a ritual bath to prepare for his journey, he was told in a vision that the ark and the tablets of the law were to be found, respectively, right there in Medzhibozh and in the Ba^cal Shem’s heart. Recorded at Lubavitch in the 1940s. I have not found this tale in any printed collection, though Wolf Kutzis’ intended journey is the object of another legend in *Oheley Zaddiq* 8a.

/ 19/ He quotes this in the name of R. Lipa of Khmelnik, and seemingly with a certain hesitation.

/ 20/ Cf. my forthcoming biography of R. Nahman, to be published by the University of Alabama Press in 1978.

/ 21/ The tree image for master and disciple is already found in Vital’s *Sha^car ha-Gilgulim* 1b.

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