**The Experience of Prophecy in the Mystical Diaries of Rabbi David Kohen**

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“My soul’s delight is prophetic revelation” (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1, 5).

**Introduction**

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, against the backdrop of the ideological and social changes in the world at large and among the Jewish people in particular, a new spiritual leadership emerged among the Jewish people: one suffused with a sense of mission and aiming to bring a new message to correct the ills of human beings and their societies. Eliezer Schweid has shown that some of those thinkers adopted the model of the biblical prophet—not as a rhetorical device but as an expression of an inner consciousness.[[1]](#endnote-1) Like the biblical hero, those “modern” prophets (among them Hermann Cohen, Hayim Nahman Bialik, Martin Buber, and Leo Baeck) had a grand national and social vision for their people and for all humanity, a vision of exalted moral content combined with aspects of redemption. They sought the realization in history of an idea that they felt was speech in the name of the one God, who is creator, leader, and judge of the world. Their mission required total dedication, and arose out of a recognition of unassailable necessity. More than two thousand years after biblical prophecy came to an end, it returned to the stage in a new guise. In that context, this article seeks to direct attention to one unique figure who provided his own interpretation of the renewal of prophecy during the generation that witnessed redemption.

Rabbi David Kohen (1887–1972), known as *Ha-Nazir*, the Nazirite, and author of a book entitled *Qol ha-Nevu’ah* (The Voice of Prophecy).

His original thought combines philosophy and Kabbalah, reason and experience, knowledge and creativity. Very few studies have been written on the thought of *Ha-Nazir* in general, and on *Qol ha-Nevu’ah* in particular. Dov Schwartz was one of the few scholars who examined R. Kohen's thought, as an outstanding disciple of R. Abraham Isaac ha-Cohen Kook, very involved in the publication of his Master’s writings[[2]](#endnote-2). Recently, an interesting initiative tried to propose a comprehensive discussion, however, of the entire book and its different sections**,** which are intimately bound up with the Nazir’s spiritual and personal development.[[3]](#endnote-3) Indeed, he was also interested in questions of prophecy as a possible experience in the present, and many descriptions recounted in these personal diaries reveal the portrait of a mystic in search of an encounter with the beyond.[[4]](#endnote-4)

This study intends to continue this trend: to explore the man himself from his writings, especially through the descriptions of his mystical experiences that appear in his personal journal entitled *Megillat Setarim*,which translates as *Scroll of Secrets.*[[5]](#endnote-5)

The methodology presented here is based on careful textual reading: an analysis of a phenomenon through its post-experiential written account, the product of later reflection, and based on the presumption that there is a connection between the mystical experience and the written record of that experience, despite the difference between the two.[[6]](#endnote-6)

**Mystical Diaries and the Longing for Prophecy**

*Megillat Setarim* are five notebooks that *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* copied at a later stage from various personal writings, after being 60 years old.

These memoirs reveal numerous biographical details about the Nazir’s extensive travels in his youth and young adulthood (in Lithuania, Germany, Switzerland, and Palestine). They reveal as well the variety of personalities with whom he maintained contact in the traditional rabbinic world in which he was raised, and in the universities where he studied. Furthermore, the memoirs are creative reflections in which the author recorded his thoughts, feelings, and deliberations, along with visions, dreams, and acts of “inner listening.”[[7]](#endnote-7) The notes—or the notebooks—that served as the basis for the copying that produced *Megillat Setarim* have not been preserved, with the exception of one known as *Ha-Menahel* (“the Organizer”), which is essentially a “moral diary” in which the young David Kohen, then only 17 years old, began to record details of his daily schedule, his customs, and his thoughts. The aim was to enable the writer to review these details, as he writes on the notebook’s front page:

*Sefer Ha-Menahel* for each month will cast a favorable but sharp eye on my various actions and activities, undertaken in the previous month, and will render judgement upon them, determining whether they are good or not, and will issue a verdict about what is to be done further and from what I should desist.

This journal begins in 1904 and concludes about 12 years later, with many pages left blank and indications that others were torn out, pages that sometimes divide one period from another and one place from another. The *HaMenahel* notebook reveals the inner world of Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir, his uncertainties and his concerns, the disclosures of his heart and his prayers to heaven. This being so, the use of writing as a mirror of the soul preceded the connection between Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir and his great teacher, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Ha-kohen Kook, who also used reflective writing in order to give expression to his inner world. The fact that both these men kept personal journals should not lead us to see mutual influence or one serving as the model for the other, but rather a similarity between two very similar personalities, despite the differences that exist between them.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Althought autobiographies in general and mystical diaries in particular are rare in Jewish literature, the importance of these writings to understand the inner life of the religious experience is very enriching. Common Kabbalistic literature often behaves, like Halakhic literature: as the Halakhic prescriptions, the paths are offered without delving too much into descriptions of the most intimate spiritual moments as a specific mystic would have experienced them. Personal testimony, however, reveals the matter in great detail and encourages future apprentices on their way.

If ego-documents have been viewed in the past as being of lesser importance for historical scholarship, which preferred objective documentation over subjective description, that tendency has shifted in recent decades, especially in the wake of the scholarly approach known as “micro-history.” Today, for many scholars of Jewish mysticism, working with mystical diaries or other ego-documents has become the central locus of inquiry, on the assumption that it is precisely the mystical life, and not an abstract intellectual interest, that is the core of kabbalistic creativity.[[9]](#endnote-9)

The fact that mystical diaries reveal an aspiration for prophecy need not surprise us. On the contrary, this is characteristic of Jewish mysticism, as Rachel Elior has noted: “The normative Jewish tradition is based on the assumption that divine revelation in public ceased at a certain moment in Second Temple history… the mystical tradition is based on the opposite assumption, that divine revelation never ceased; it continues throughout history and is disclosed to people who possess unique qualities.”[[10]](#endnote-10)

However, it is important to be precise: Is every “divine revelation” in the category of “prophecy”?[[11]](#endnote-11) As Moshe Idel has noted, the kabbalists are not in the habit of using the expression “prophecy” to describe their mystical experiences. Instead, they employ more general terms and leave the term “prophecy” to the biblical world. One expression is the Sephardic kabbalist Avraham Abulafia, who relates that he receives prophetic revelation and, as a result, he began to compose books in that spirit during the last quarter of the 13th century, even though the rabbinic establishment attacked him for doing so.[[12]](#endnote-12) For Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir, Avraham Abulafia is undoubtedly a model to be emulated. From many perspectives, Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir’s attitude toward Abulafia reflects his intellectual approach and the manner in which his outlook took shape: from initial intuitions to an established outlook.[[13]](#endnote-13) How Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir first came to know the works of Abulafia is related in *Megillat Setarim*:

I was first made aware by a scholar of the esoteric (Prof. Scholem, who visited me along with Eliezer Meir Lifschitz at our home on Shabbat) of the writings of Rabbi Avraham Abulafia and his students, and taking them in hand, they became, for me, a strong and powerful awakener, and my spirit is astir, gaining in holiness and purity, rising upward, as I found my thoughts and the paths of my understanding in the non-rational prophetic logic, in the prophetic Kabbalah (of Rabbi Avraham Abulafia)… And my soul came alive, to the point of the beating of my spirit in my heart, and to the notes of the violin of the pleasant song of understanding, the sound of my lover knocking, and I was transformed into a new man. (*Megillat Setarim* D, 13).[[14]](#endnote-14)

Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir’s new familiarity with Abulafia’s writings influenced him both on the intellectual level (Abulafia’s explanation of Kabbalah as a continuation of prophecy) and on the practical level: “I was transformed into a new man.” Before his eyes stood a flesh-and-blood figure striving to attain prophecy and telling how one might get there. The thirst for prophetic experience becomes attainable:

I do see that prophetic revelation*,* needed and hoped-for at this time of revival and redemption in our own generation, from the mouth of the Holy One, the God of Israel, is not distant from us. By preparing through musically intoning the holy names [*or:*the names of the Holy One *– translator*], together with the singing of their letters. Strength [*’ometz* beginning with *aleph*], *’ometz, ’ometz,* and *Creation* [*beri’ah*, beginning with *bet*] shall you create, and the word of the Lord is revealed [a verb, *nigleh*, from a root beginning with *gimel*] (Megillat Setarim, D, 13).

The expectation, anticipation, and longing for a prophetic experience is a central focus of *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir*’sdiaries. This expectation was an integral part of his day to day life. It guided his spiritual journey and he directed his best efforts and all his energy towards becoming worthy of realizing this experience in some manner: “I prepare, anticipate, and long for ‘a transcendent revelation’” (*Megillat Setarim*, A, 60).

In line with the biblical stories in which prophecy is thrust upon the prophet, *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* feels that the quest for prophecy is an internal longing over which he has no control. He is called to it and must submit:

Again, the voice within me calls out, to go, to find solitude, and to anticipate a prophetic revelation, and the voice is strong and powerful, deep deep inside. At last the supernal soul within me is waking up, it cannot find rest, I have no rest (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 95).[[15]](#endnote-15)

The inner voice acts on the person, transforms him into a messenger and reveals his mission:

Finally, this longing of my heart is not in vain. On [the holidays of] *Shemini-Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* in particular, I became aware that the euphoria of the spirit of prophecy was drawing near and knocking on my door (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 20).

The image of the prophet bringing the word of God to the gates of the city appeared before his eyes:

I feel, my spirit stirs within me, to announce and to make me self-aware, that I will be called to wander among the people of Israel, to proclaim to them the word of God and His will, by the breath of his mouth… at the time that the spirit of his angel will reveal to me, before our holy sanctuary, may it be soon in our days, amen, so may it be His will (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 87).

He lived with complete confidence in his mission and anticipated his promised future:

I sense and feel that the day will come, that the hour will arrive and my spirit will be stirred, my heart will be lifted to the path of God and I will be anointed with the holy oil of prophecy (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1, 72).

In one sense *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* diverged from the scriptural prophetic model. The biblical prophet initially refuses to accept his mission because he feels unworthy[[16]](#endnote-16). *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* did not second guess his destiny. From his youth, he sensed his own uniqueness and grand ambitions accompanied him always.[[17]](#endnote-17) At this point in his life, these feelings are growing clearer and freeing themselves from personal ambition. While he still sees himself as unique, he does not seek to be the only one: “The quest for greatness, through melancholy, abstinence and asceticism is truly the need of the generation” (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1, 38). He writes further:

Perhaps God will have mercy and I will not be the only one, but merely the first around whom an elite will gather. They will bear the holy weight of true revelation as in the times of the prophets and our days will be renewed as of old.

Nevertheless, *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* remained a singular and lonely figure. No cadre of students seeking inspiration from his teaching, personality, and prophetic mission gathered around him. In the history of mystical composition, fraternities of this sort beginning with “Merkavah mystics” in ancient times, through the fellowship of the Zohar in the Middle Ages, and ending with the circle associated with Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzotto, left their mark on kabbalistic literature. The members of these societies were typically part of the intellectual elite, and they strove to establish an alternative reality to the social order and prevailing conventional priorities of their day. They were led by a charismatic leader with a sense of prophetic mission that added new layers of meaning to the existing tradition.[[18]](#endnote-18) Though *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* did indeed have a sense of prophetic mission, he did not follow the mold of the charismatic leader, “gifted with a mystic certainty that introduced an alternative understanding of the world, or proposed a vision or perspective that would impel him to recruit a cadre of disciples to follow his teachings and assist him in the fulfillment of his vision of overturning the present order and the creation of a new reality.”[[19]](#endnote-19) The mission of *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* was different. While he brought a new message, it was not in tension with the established religious social order. Unlike other charismatic leaders, he did not seek to change the norms and behaviors of his community but rather his main work was in spiritual creativity and uncovering what he called the “Hebrew Auditory Logic.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

However, Rabbi David Cohen was inspired from the Biblical Prophet: The quest for prophecy and a sense of destiny drove to take upon himself a nazarite vow in the spirit of the words of the prophet Amos, “and I will raise up prophets from your sons and nazarites from your young men” (Amos 2:11) [[21]](#endnote-21). The classical commentators to the Bible also saw parallels between the prophet and the nazirite, basing themselves on the following Talmudic exposition concerning the nazarite:[[22]](#endnote-22)

Since [the nazarite] took a vow of abstinence he is called “holy.” Moreover, scripture gives him the weight of a prophet, as it says: “and I will raise up prophets from your sons and nazarites from your young men” (Sifrei Zuta, Naso, 6,8, H.S. Horowitz edition, Jerusalem 5736, pg. 242).

This parallel is interesting: It associates the physical behavior of the nazarite with the elevated stature of the prophet. However, these two figures are fundamentally different: The nazarite chooses to live an ascetic life and his status is dependent upon his decision and actions. The prophet on the other hand, is called by God even against his will and has a societal mission. Nonetheless, scripture likens the two and venerates the nazarite who must take care at every moment to maintain his purity. They both are “holy to the Lord.” The rabbi who became a nazarite writes:

To give myself completely over to God, to render myself ownerless completely sanctified to God. And in truth I will be a nazarite of God (*Megillah Setarim,* C-1, 57).

This declaration in the summer of 1922 indicates a meaningful stage in the self-perception of *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir*. In fact, he had begun to practice asceticism and to take on the outer trappings a nazarite several years before. He became a vegetarian and refused to eat meat already in 1913 when he left Russia to study at university in Germany. Later when he arrived at the University of Basel during the First World War, he began to grow his hair long, as can be seen in pictures from this period. However, this behavior did not have any overtones of *nezirut* and certainly no prophetic significance.[[23]](#endnote-23) The turning point came a few years later, after he immigrated to Israel in the footsteps of his great mentor, Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook. In early 1922, when standing in prayer at the Western Wall, *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* heard a voice from behind him saying, “you are a nazarite of God” (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1, 4). What exactly happened? Was this a heavenly voice or words spoken by one of those offering prayers beside him? Did this declaration speak of *nezirut* as an internal state of being or a mere outer appearance? Whatever the case may be, this incident brings together for the first time his appearance and behavior with the idea of *nezirut*. A few months later, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the connection between his self-perception, *nezirut,* and his quest for prophecy were already clear.

I am a nazarite, yes I am a nazarite, a stage on the way to becoming a prophet. Thirsty, aching, anticipating and praying for drops of dew from heaven, for a revelation of God’s wisdom, his mercy, his truth… I need purification, a spark, more purity, more strength (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 82).

**The Night of Spirit and Ascent**

The quest for prophecy – or the pursuit of *deveikut* (clinging to the divine) – requires great effort.

The thirst for Him, the all-encompassing never-ending search and quest of intense longing, in prayer, in supplication, this is the path and perhaps the destination as well, upon which the vitality of the soul grows, like the vitality of the eternal one (*Megillat Setarim*, B, 10).[[24]](#endnote-24)

But sometimes the effort does not produce results:

I long and pine with all my might for knowledge of God and the revelation of His holy spirit, which is so necessary for the generation of the dawn of redemption. I remain awake into the night and prayerfully recite the holy psalms of David but get no closer to my objective. I read over the books of the Kabbalah but it is a dry uninspired study (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 9).

This situation leaves the mystic distressed:

My soul has longed and pined for the revealed word of God, but there is no response. I have found no rest... I have gone deep into abstinence and *nezirut*. And if God will not show mercy to those who love Him by revealing his glory to them, what reason do I have for life. I am too distressed to go up or down. How can I find the way? (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 10).

This distress itself raises doubts about the whole enterprise:

I am thirsty and pine for my beloved, the Living God, my soul has dried up, I am exhausted, despair lies in wait at my door. Perhaps I will never achieve my desire. The masses desire tasty treats and spicy snacks known as books and scientific articles, and are satisfied with these. But my interests are deep matters that come from my mind and my heart. Who can understand? (*Megillat Setarim* C-2, 52).

Highs and lows pass over each other:

Yet, from time to time my spirit is revived and my soul stirs, and I see heavenly visions of salvation for the Jewish people and the rebuilding of the Temple of God and the honor of His name in the world. But after the euphoria, transcendence, and power of these visions which should be shared in order to comfort and encourage the spirit of the Jewish people, I become mute and cannot open my mouth. I recognize that all these are a sort of sacred dream but they are not to be revealed (*Megilat Setarim* C-1, 22).

Indeed, this is the nature of mystical aspiration: unending highs and lows.[[25]](#endnote-25) Moments of *deveikut* (clinging to the Divine) are rare and they vanish in the blink of an eye. The mystic aspires and searches, seeks and experiments, and his/her path is paved with highs and lows.[[26]](#endnote-26)

The path to despair is a fast one. It begins with feelings of guilt: If the mystic does not see the light, it is a sign that he/she is not worthy:

The hand of the Lord grabbed me, led me and carried me, I have devoted all my life, I have given up everything, but maybe, maybe, it is not right in the eyes of God, for I have sinned against people and God. And what have I found here? However, I have not lost my exalted supernal hope to come to the place of the unknown. But perhaps an errant spirit misled me, and perhaps I will remain inept and bereft, and my days will pass and end in smoke (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 21).

In his pioneering book *The Mystical Life* the French scholar of mysticism, Roger Bastide, devoted an entire chapter entitled “The Night of Spirit”[[27]](#endnote-27) to describing this phenomenon. There are feelings of separation from the coveted attachment to God, frustration and emptiness, and the mystic feels rejected and unworthy. This is a condition that has been noted in the testimonies of various mystics across diverse cultures. But the situation is not unending. Eventually the mystic achieves enlightenment:

All is suddenly made clear, and the significance of these long stretches of aridity is apparent. They are seen to have meaning, and the mystic realizes that they too are a grace from God… They are not merely a stage but the very ground and cause of spiritual progress… Aridity elevates the spirit to God, and in addition, augments the desire for permanent Union with Him… Aridity takes the place of mystical prayer, and Heaven is silent when formerly it revealed itself in voices and vision… Spiritual aridity was sent to remove all those particular divine favors which might assist a soul at the outset of its spiritual life, but which later became unsurmountable obstacles to its progress… God places the soul in aridity and inflicts on it trials and tortures which are necessary to man that he may be detached not only from exterior affections, but from himself and in this way may subdue the natural and innate love of self (pp. 132-135).

According to Bastide, the tribulations purify the mystic because they weaken, dull and even eliminate the subject’s sense of self. The moments of *deveikut* that follow the melancholy create a sense of membership in a spiritual elite and nourish the soul with an experience of “fullness.” The authentic union which follows the pain of spiritual darkness is purer, more abstract, and more spiritual. It grows precisely out of feelings of want and thirst and opens the door to pure prayer:

But You God, the one my soul adores, You, who I long for and search for all day, please, shine your countenance on your servant, give me a sign, and prepare my path, reveal the one who will share your word with me, show me your way so that I will know you forever, do not withdraw from me. Please God, my soul pines for you, and I haven’t the strength to fall again (*Megillat Setarim* C-1, 42).

Other passages describe the ecstatic state and the unmediated encounter with the supernal realms. *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* uses the familiar expression *aliyyat neshamah* (an assent of the soul):[[28]](#endnote-28)

During prayer, in songs and hymns, my soul ascends, and new supernal worlds break open to it, and this lower world breaks forth and ascends with new light, the light of God’s countenance, [the kabbalistic realms of] *Assiyya, Yetzira, Beriah* (*Megillat Setarim* C-1, 72).

These descriptions recall the *Hekhalot* Litterature, which include portrayals of mystical ascensions, glimpses of the realm of the angels and finally descent and reentry. But, there seems to be a difference, between the highly structured mystical ascents of the Merkavah mystics and the Nazir’s more seemingly subjective efforts and explorations[[29]](#endnote-29).

The ascent of the soul allows people to transcend the narrow boundaries of personal experience, to encounter the abstract spiritual reality that is woven between the revealed and the hidden, to take in the power of this experience and to meditate anew upon the lower realm in a fresh way, by the light of God’s countenance.

The ascent of the soul does not happen during or following study, but rather during prayer, the moment of turning to God. An additional passage mentions another “ascent of the soul” during the morning prayers. Here the textual context is clear. The ascent of the soul comes while reciting the blessing that describes the song of the angels in their upper worlds (the *Yotzer Ha-Meorot* blessing which praises God for the creation of light and the celestial beings):

Today I was in the Garden of Eden, during the morning prayers after the night’s session of study, to the refrain of Torah and the poems and hymns of praise of David, God’s anointed one, with unbounded pleasure and delight, with song and a lilt in my inner soul. When I got to the [Blessing of] *Yotzer Or* [the Creator of light], the light inside of me intensified, in my soul, a truly resplendent and dazzling light, that brought joy and delight. Then I heard the sound of the song of the pure and holy lights, the servants of God. The angels were raising themselves up and were singing, singing lights. And the ache, and the relentless crying, from happiness and the highest joy, and from pain that soon I would have to descend to the lower world, to this dark world (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1, 75).

The mystical experience blurs the boundaries of time and place, mixes written text with the aural experience, and connects the upper and lower realms. It connects the abstract to the concrete in a way that ties theoretical teaching to nature. For example, it transforms figures that belonged to the past into ones belonging to the present. Following the study of the *Idra* chapters of the Zohar on the holiday of Lag Ba-Omer, the anniversary of the death of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* felt that his soul met Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:

On Lag Ba-Omer, [the day associated with the Kabbalistic attributes of] Splendor in Splendor, I felt a bit of the secret meaning of the day, [my] spirit in [his] spirit, [my] splendor in the splendor of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, in the celebration of the day, the holy personality of the splendor of the face of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai graces us, and you graced your splendor upon him, his supernal soul draws close to one who is worthy to be close and take shelter in his splendor… I feel the vitality of the spirit of the source of life, blessed is He, everything is not fully clear, in thought, I cling to Him, blessed be He in the vitality of the realm of the mind, after engaging in the logic of the books of true wisdom (*Megillat Setarim,* B, 25).

Sometimes the experience comes suddenly without any deliberate preparation:

Today I went to the grave of Shimon Ha-Tzaddik, a tremendous spirit rested on me there, seized me and shook me, it was the spirit of Shimon Ha-Tzaddik, who was wont to say, the world stands on three things (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 30).

Despite all the preparations, revelation comes unexpectedly. The suddenness emphasizes the intensity of the experience and provides confirmation of authenticity. Indeed, it is a heavenly call and not a product of convincing oneself through subconscious auto-suggestion. The mystical experience is essentially the meeting point between the transcendent and the immanent.

**Intuition, Foresight, and the Inner Voice**

The experience of prophecy of *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* is mentioned in his diary *Megillat Setarim* in many contexts and various facets.

While still in Switzerland between the years of 1913-1921, *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* spoke of a number of times where a very strong intuition later proved to be a sort of foresight of the future: Once concerning the picture on the notary’s seal of his friend Arthur Cohen (*Megillat Setarim*, A, 74), and another time during the priestly blessing (*Megillat Setarim*, B, 11). These feelings intensified in the Land of Israel:

I felt this morning on the holy Sabbath, during the priestly blessings… that today, the mandate will surely end, I was almost without any doubt about it, my certainty was so strong, with a truly amazing light, this is one sixtieth of prophecy, in the visions of God, the revealing of the future (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 66).

Sometimes the foresight is not about the future, but rather the uncovering of a secret:

I have just returned from the Western Wall, from the place of His holy sanctuary, the remnant of our past glory and testament to our future redemption. After the afternoon prayer, and unending weeping, while next to the wall of our sanctuary, I asked shall I fast? And the answer, no; Should I go out [*to the desert, for meditative solitude – Y.B.*]? And the answer, no; Should I study the books of Kabbalah? And the answer, yes, yes, you will find what you are looking for (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1 84).[[30]](#endnote-30)

A different type of description relates to the discovery of hidden meanings in Torah study:

I studied the inner wisdom, and at the last part of the night, I recited portions of the Mishnah, with a voice of joy, to a melody of unlimited pleasure and delight, and delightful secret insights into the laws of the Mishnah, its language and the intricacies of its statements, and Talmudic discussions in all their clarity were revealed to me with the delight and pleasure of wisdom (*Megillat Setarim*, A, 59).[[31]](#endnote-31)

What is the nature of these secrets? Is it a process of study and immanent cognitive understanding or perhaps a transcendent revelation? Is it an inner voice or an outer voice? The end of this passage is oblique. In *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir*’swords:

Everything was heard in the melody of the Mishnah, like the appearance of the *Maggid* (an angelic embodiment of the Mishnah) to our master the author *of Beit Yosef,* the sound of the melody of the Mishnah spoke through my mouth (*Megillat Setarim*, A, 59).[[32]](#endnote-32)

*Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* rewrites the experience in kabalistic terminology:

The revelation broke through with wisdom and understanding, like a bolt of light, and everything was illuminated, and everything was understood, in a completely extraordinary way. One moment you are in the company of God. Then the moment passes and you are lowly and small like before… Even the prophets are only intermittently in the Kingdom of God and only for a short time, as Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla’s wrote in his work *Shaarey Tzedek*. But one must remember the revelation, and extrapolate from it to everything that is so hidden and closed to us (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 68).

It is important to note that apart from a few accounts of visualization of images by *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir*, “revelation” is predominantly depicted as an “inner voice” in his writings[[33]](#endnote-33) It seems that *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* also eschewed visualization techniques and preferred practices of concentration on speech (such as combinations of divine names) and internal listening (“the word is heard by the inner ear, and the voice is the voice of God” [*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 38]). In contrast to Christian mysticism, which gives broad license for guided imagery focusing on visible details (“mental prayer”, Bastide, pp. 70-78), *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* is focused on the auditory dimension and the general impression it leaves on the person:

I feel, that I am very close to the opening of the gate to the house of God, He stands behind the wall, and I am outside on the threshold of the door knocking, and the beautiful long awaited voice of my beloved is becoming audible from me (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1, 63).

In his book, *Qol ha-Nevu’ah* (The Voice of Prophecy), he deals with the distinction between “seeing” and “hearing.” In his view, these two senses are connected to two different worldviews:

These are two different worldviews, or to be more precise, there is a worldview, a way of looking at the world, and a world-hearing, a way of listening to the world. The former is unique to Greek logic that is pagan and intellectual, and underlies Western science, for which intellect, theory, observation of the world and its actions stand at the fore.

Not so Hebrew logic, which is auditory, and does not view the world or see the divine in the world, but rather hears the world’s laws and listens to the command of the unseen and the invisible One whose word is heard, such as in prophecy (*Qol ha-Nevu’ah*, p. 38).

In other words, Hebraic thought—especially in contrast to Greek thought—is essentially auditory and nonvisual in its orientation.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Hebrew logic is “auditory” because it seeks to distance itself from a sensual concept that is close to paganism. Sticking to the motif of seeing enables the portrayal of a pure monotheistic concept in which the divinity is not seen: He has no body and no corporeal form. According to this, in contrast to the pagan mystical concept (*theophánia*) and even the Christian mystical concept (*visio beatifica*), the “original” Jewish mystical experience cannot be one connected to seeing but only to hearing. How, then, is one to understand the many anthropomorphisms in biblical descriptions, rabbinic midrashim, and mystical texts?

Elliot R. Wolfson has written: “[T]he problem of visionary experience in Jewish mysticism cannot be treated in isolation from the question of God's form or image.”[[35]](#endnote-35) Wolfson perceives two different motifs of Jewish mystical experience: one that operates through the auditory sense and another that is based on what is seen and on imagination. In his view, one should not underestimate the valence of visionary experience in Jewish sources:

The will to visualize God in images without succumbing to apophatism, on the one hand, or rejecting iconoclasm, on the other, is the ultimate challenge of the prophetic, apocalyptic, and rabbinic corpora, for a thorough study of any of these would require a separate volume.”[[36]](#endnote-36)

Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir, on the other hand, argues for ascribing limited importance to visionary experience in Jewish mystical experience. He writes at length about this in another chapter in *Qal ha-Nevu’ah* (pp. 45–69), devoted among other things to the expression of “the Lord’s light” and “the Lord’s glory [*kavod*]” and to angelology. He comes to the conclusion that visionary experiences are only a “passageway” to a deeper experience, the experience of hearing:

Eternal light [*’or ‘olam*] seen in the imagination of the prophetic seer is a transitional state, an imagined similarity, to the supernal world that is not seen and not observed, that is heard from within him (ibid., p. 69).

What is the nature of this inner voice? One the one hand, the term “voice” points to an external entity, but on the other hand the term “inner” indicates an internal process. The kabbalistic tradition includes both possibilities. From the routine exchanges of the appearance of the *Maggid* to Rabbi Joseph Karo (“the voice of my beloved strikes my mouth,” “a violin plays of its own accord”) Werblowsky learns that the experience was apparently involuntary automatism in the muscles of the throat and lips, a vocalization that actually passed through his mouth and not an inner voice. In contrast, the *Maggid* of Rabbi Moshe Chayyim Luzzatto was not heard by anyone by him[[37]](#endnote-37). From a careful reading of various passages, it seems that *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* speaks explicitly of an inner voice heard only by him that was not the result of an internal reflex or any external consciousness. For example, we read:

On the holy Sabbath at the time of the afternoon prayer I went to the Western Wall and prayed there, I heard something in my ear, inside, in a clear and distinct voice (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1, 17).

And more explicitly:

The speech, in my mind’s inner ear, in my soul, at the Western Wall of our holy sanctuary, this is one sixtieth of prophecy, and I am driven by it, turn to it, completely with tremendous attention. I am standing facing the wall of the sanctuary, and ask a short question, and hear inside of me, the sound of an answer. I consider it a small-scale prophecy, coming after preparation and great concentration (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 103).

There are cases where the voice is insufficiently clear and *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir* struggles to understand the meaning. This is another indication of the disconnect between the cognitive consciousness and the inner voice, and a testimony to the process of transcribing the experience after the fact, which involves understanding and interpreting after the revelation:

The voice I heard at the Western Wall of our holy sanctuary, on the seventh day of Passover, after the afternoon prayer, came to me, “go lead this people,” and I did not know, whether the emphasis was on the latter part, that is to participate actively in the leadership of the people as in teaching classes, etc. and to live in the revealed Torah. But now I am inclined to see the emphasis on the first part of the statement, “go,” that is to say to actually go, to wander, to go into exile into the fields, to some holy place, in a cave (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 43).

It is important to note one other point. Even if the message is not completely understood by the one who hears the inner voice, its general meaning is clear and above all, the language of its transmission is identified: Hebrew, the holy tongue. This contrasts with the common phenomenon of “mystical language” which is not understood by the mystic himself or herself, nor to those around him or her. The inner voice is revealed at first in special supernatural moments of divine intimacy, in certain situations of consciousness that are foreign to regular cognitive thinking but it continues afterwards to appear through rational study and intellectual activity.

Auditory logic, is something new to me, [it derives] from the logic of the heart, wisdom and understanding, which was revealed to me through my inner ear, that I never asked of anyone, and I did not find it through [studying it from] a teacher, I see that it is the true and only path for me to reach transcendent knowledge (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 24).

The inner voice is neither a passive voice[[38]](#endnote-38) nor a collection of dim thoughts. It is an active voice that arouses feelings and insights, initiates and creates the great intellectual project of *Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir*: the Hebrew Auditory Logic.

**Conclusion**

This article has sought to understand the search for prophecy by Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir on the basis of his writings. A simultaneous reading of his personal diaries and of his ideational writings shows that for “the Rabbi” who became “the Nazir,” the Torah and experience support and sustain each other: The “scholarly researcher” of the sources of Kabbalah is actually “the Kabbalist” who reads in the ancient book before him a description of the experience that he himself undergoes. This conclusion opens the way to understanding Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir’s mystical conception, which is the inner core of his conception of prophecy.

As mentioned above, Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir regarded the Kabbalist prophet Avraham Abulafia as a guide and a constitutive figure. As a result, Moshe Idel expresses surprise at how limited are Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir’s references to Abulafia’s writings: in *Qol ha-Nevu’ah* Abulafia is not mentioned at length and it appears that he is absent from Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir’s other written works. It seems, then, that the initial excitement, during Gershom Scholem’s visit, did not continue. Why not? Did he develop disagreements with Abulafia? What might have been the reasons? Furthermore, “Ha-Nazir knew well and even printed in his book some of the Kabbalists’ sharp critiques of Abulafia. Shunning him remained part of the Kabbalistic tradition.”[[39]](#endnote-39) How then should we understand Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir’s ambivalent attitude toward Avraham Abulafia? Moshe Idel provides this answer: “We can assume that the Nazir perceived the obvious difference between the concept of prophecy held by Yehuda Halevi, Nachmanides, Moshe Kimḥi, and Rabbi Avraham Azoulai, who saw the role of the Land of Israel as decisive for the return of prophecy, and the very different spiritual world of Abulafia” (ibid.). This answer, however, seems insufficiently clear: if Abulafia’s prophecy was indeed prophecy in Ha-Nazir’s eyes, that indicates that in his opinion prophecy was not dependent on being in the Land of Israel! And if, conversely, prophecy is possible only in the Land of Israel, then Abulafia cannot be considered as prophesying by Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir!

It seems that a number of replies might be suggested in response to that demurral: Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir identifies with Abulafia’s experiences and regards them as expressions of prophecy. He himself as well had experienced similar situations while outside the Land of Israel, situations in which he saw a guiding hand (“revelation”) in intuition.[[40]](#endnote-40) Nonetheless, his vision is different from Abulafia’s. The latter speaks of prophecy as an ideal for the individual, while Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir regards it as an ideal for the many, as Dov Schwartz says.[[41]](#endnote-41) For Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir, the renewal of prophecy for the many is one of the central characteristics of messianic awakening, an awakening of a public and even political character. In this, Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir followed the messianic path of his teacher, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Kohen Kook, who identified his own time as “the beginning of redemption” and regarded the Jewish people’s national awakening as one of its indicators.[[42]](#endnote-42)

Not surprisingly, that statement is mentioned in *Megillat Setarim* in one of the first passages written after Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir arrived in the Land of Israel in 1921:

This is the true revival, the political redemption is the prophets’ redemption and the return of the Lord’s spirit to His people, and His people to Him. The beginning of the redemption that we have had the privilege of approaching and even viewing is certainly in need of the revealing of prophecy” (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 7–8).

1. **This translation has been supported by the Research Authority at Herzog Academic College, Israel. An anonymous reader made some helpful suggestions that improved this work and I would like to thank him for his insights.**

   Eliezer Schweid, *Prophets for their People and Humanity – Prophecy and Prophets in 20th Century Jewish Thought*, Jerusalem, 1999. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism between Logic and Messianism* (Tel-Aviv, 1999) [Hebrew], especially pp. 198-233. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Yehuda Bitty, *The Philosopher-Kabbalist* (Tel-Aviv, 2017) [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Dov Schwartz,“Demuto VeKavei Ishiyuto shel Mistikan [Portrait of a Mystic]”, *Tarbiz* Vol. 61 (1991), pp. 127-158. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Only a few excerpts from *Megillat Setarim* have been published with some omissions, firstly as *The Nazir’s Wisdom* (Jerusalem, 2005) [Hebrew] and secondly as *The Nazir’s Diairy* (Jerusalem, 2011) [Hebrew]. In this article, quotes from *Megillat Setarim* are taken from the original notebooks, which are held by the Nezer DavidArchives in Jerusalem. I thank the staff of the archive who allowed me access to the notebooks in their entirety. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For the contextual approach to the mystical experience and mystical language, see: Steven Katz, “Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning”, in *Mysticism and Language*, edited by Steven T. Katz (New York and Oxford, 1972), p. 3-41; William P. Alston, “Literal and Nonliteral in Reports of Mystical Experience”, in Mysticism and Language, pp. 80-102; Steven Katz, “Language, Epistemology and Mysticism”, in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York, 1978), pp. 26-74. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Semadar Cherlow dealt with these diaries and their mystical significance in her article “Yomanin Ishiyim Shel Mistikanim Yehudim BaMe'ah Ha'Esrim [Personal Diaries of Twentieth - Century Jewish Mystics]”, *Daat* Vol. 63 (2008), pp. 103-130. Interestingly and revealing, to note that *Megillat Setarim* is also the title of several books, among them a mystical diary from Rabbi Isaac Aizic Yehuda Yehiel Safrin of Komarno (see *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies: Book of Visions and Book of Secrets* [translated and introduced by Morris M. Faierstein], New-York, 1999), and a secret document in which the Messianic vision of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav is written (see Zvi Mark, *Scroll of Secrets: The Hidden Messianic Vision of R. Nahman of Bratslav*, Ramat-Gan, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See Yehuda Mirski, *Rav Kook – Mystic in a Time of Revolution*, New Haven & London, 2014, pp. 133-139, 220-223. As Semadar Cherlow noted, the Rav Kook's diaries do not include descriptions of dreams or mystical experiences but only descriptions of states of mind and spiritual aspirations (See Smadar Cherlow, *op. cit.*, pp. 104). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See J. H. Chajes, “Accounting for the Self”, *JQR*, Vol. 95, 2005, pp. 2-15; Haviva Pedaya, “HaHavaya HaMistit VeHa'Olam HaDati BaChassidut [Mystic Experience and Religious World in Hasidism]”, *Daat*, Vol. 55 (2005), pp. 93-94. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Rachel Elior, *Jewish Mysticism: The Infinite Expression of Freedom* (Portland, OR, 2007), pp. 24-25. Since Gershom Scholem's pioneering remarks on the subject (Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [New York, 1961], pp. 7-14), much has been written about the connection between the biblical experience of prophecy and late Jewish mysticism. More recently, see Daniel Reiser, *Imagery Techniques in Modern Jewish Mysticism* (Boston, 2018), pp. 67-82 (Two Models of Prophecy), especially pp. 78-79: (Biblical Prophecy thought the Prism of Prophetic Kabbalah). For a general approach to mysticism, see Steven T. Katz, “The Conservative Character of Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Religious Tradition* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 4-6; and see also his introduction in Steven Katz, ed., *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources* (New York, 2013), pp. 5–22. Recently, Boaz Huss has challenged a considered obvious identification between Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, both in the field of research, among New Age movements, and even in some mainstream Kabbalistic circles. See its article “HaMistifikatsia Shel HaKabbalah VeHaMitos Shel HaMistica HaYehudit [The Mystification of the Kabbalah and the Myth of Jewish Mysticism]”, *Pe`amim*, 2007, Vol. 110, pp. 9-30 and its recent publication *The Question About the Existence of Jewish Mysticism*, Jerusalem, 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. # See also Yoel Bin-Nun’s statement in this context: For him, the biblical prophet “receives” prophecy not by his own will and sometimes even against his will. In contrast to that, in a mystical vision, the viewer is active and interested in the revelation.

    (Yoel Ben-Nun, Double Source of Human Inspiration and Authority in the Philosophy of Rav A.I.H. Kook, Tel-Aviv, 2014, pp. 99-101). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany, 1988. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Continuing what I wrote in my book (*Ha-philosoph Ha-mekubbal*, pp. 233–238), I take issue here with Moshe Idel’s conclusions regarding Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir’s attitude toward Avraham Abulafia as they are expressed in his article, [“Abraham Abulafia, Gershom Shalom VeR' David Cohen (HaNazir) Al HaNevuah [Abraham Abulafia, Gershom Shalom and R. David Cohen (the Nazir) on Prophecy]” in, *The Path of the Spirit: The Eliezer Schweid Jubilee Volume* (ed: Yehoyada Amir), Jerusalem, 2005, Vol. 2, pp. 819-834.](https://www.academia.edu/38033905/Arnold_Eisen_Prophecy_as_Vocation_New_Light_on_the_Thought_and_Practice_of_Abraham_Joshua_Heschel_in_Yehoyada_Amir_ed_The_Path_of_the_Spirit_The_Eliezer_Schweid_Jubilee_Volume_vol_2_Jerusalem_Studies_in_Jewish_Thought_vol_19_Jerusalem_Magnes_2005_835_850_Hebrew_) [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. This meeting is also mentioned in the memoirs of Gershom Shalom, with slight modifications (*From Berlin to Jerusalem*, Tel-Aviv, 1982, pp.203-204). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Elsewhere he writes, “Though I am not worthy, the voice of the Lord calls from within me and gives me no rest” (*Megillat Setarim,* C-1). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. # But he is following Maimonides, whose works he knew intimately, and who very much wrote about prophecy as something that one could seek (see Eliezer Schweid, “Maimonides’s Theory of Prophecy” in [*The Classic Jewish Philosophers*](https://brill.com/view/title/14376), Leiden, 2007, pp. 210-218). In its book *Prophetic Inspirations After the Prophets: Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities* (New-York, 1996), Abraham J. Heschel deals with the question of Maimonides' self-perception as a prophet. Heschel's interest in prophecy exceeds the scholar's interest in the object of his research. See [Arnold Eisen, “Nevuah KeVocatsia: Perspectivot Hadashot Al Mah'shavto U-Pe'iluto Shel Harav Abraham Joshua Heschel [Prophecy as Vocation: New Light on the Thought and Practice of Abraham Joshua Heschel]” in, *The Path of the Spirit: The Eliezer Schweid Jubilee Volume* (op.cit.), pp. 835-850.](https://www.academia.edu/38033905/Arnold_Eisen_Prophecy_as_Vocation_New_Light_on_the_Thought_and_Practice_of_Abraham_Joshua_Heschel_in_Yehoyada_Amir_ed_The_Path_of_the_Spirit_The_Eliezer_Schweid_Jubilee_Volume_vol_2_Jerusalem_Studies_in_Jewish_Thought_vol_19_Jerusalem_Magnes_2005_835_850_Hebrew_)

    [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Several places in his writings suggest this. For example, in a letter written to his uncle Rabbi Avraham HaCohen in 1909 (when he was only 22!) he writes, “my future has always seemed to me to be a great one. As a scion of an elite and esteemed family, my veins run with vital red blood that demands an outstanding life of great deeds. When I was a child wrapped in the tallit of my grandfather, the great righteous master may his memory be for a blessing, when he stood on the podium to bless the people, already then, the thought that I need to stand before the people and to instruct them and to teach them took root (Nezer David Archives, Notes, 6). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. See, for example, Rachel Elior, *Hasidic Thought: Mystical Origins and Kabbalistic Foundations* (Tel-Aviv, 2000), pp. 45-55. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Rachel Elior, “Jacob Frank's Divrei ha'Adon,” in *The Dream and its Interpretation*, edited by Rachel Elior (Jerusalem, 2001), p. 471. See also L. Festinger et al, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis, 1956), p. 175; Douglas Barnes, “Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 17 (1978), pp. 1-15. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. This is the main claim of Dov Schwartz in the first part of his book *Religious Zionism Between Logic and Messianism*, especially pp. 53-62. While Hebrew auditory logic seeks to arouse the longing for the prophetic spirit and even higher spiritual levels, its pace is slow and incremental and does not entail an abrupt transformation nor the undoing of the present situation. See also: Yehuda Bitty, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-149, 218-219, 238-239, 263-264. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The Hebrew word *nezirut* is a noun that indicates the institution of the nazarite vow. As monarchy is to a king, so too *nezirut* is to a nazarite. Since there is no good English equivalent, the term *nezirut* will be used here in its transliterated form. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. See, for example, the commentaries of Nachmanides and Bahya ben Asher to Numbers 6:1-21 and, in an even more explicit form, in the words of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin in his *Emek Davar* to Numbers 6:8, “One should know that there are two purposes to the nazarite vow. The first is to sanctify oneself in order to obtain the holy spirit as the prophet formulated it ‘and I will raise up prophets from your sons and nazarites from your young men’ – here we see that it (prophecy and *nezirut*) is one matter, concerning this scripture wrote, ‘to vow to God’ – which means that he is to dedicated to the transcendent.” See also Maimonides at the end of the Laws of Nazarite Vows, “One who vows a nazarite vow to God in sanctity, this is praiseworthy and concerning this scripture said, ‘the vow of his God is upon his head, he is holy to the Lord’ and scripture gives him the weight of a prophet as it says, ‘and I will raise up prophets from your sons and nazarites from your young men’” (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book of Wonder, Laws of Nazarite Vows, Chapter 10:15). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. His vegetarianism began for financial reasons (See *Megillat Setarim*, 1, 35) and only later developed into a world view that was presented in his essay, *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace from a Torah Perspective* (Jerusalem, 1920). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. See also *Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 54: “I am devoured by the fire of thirst, the great conflagration for the word of God, that it reveals itself out loud into a wizened and understanding ear. I am hungry all day long and this hunger which weakens my physical strength is insignificant compared to my hunger to know the truth of God’s word. The two are inseparable. The longing to discover the word of God is so great, and burns so powerfully that it completely exhausts me.” [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Dov Schwartz writes: “The *Nazir*’s descriptions are astonishing in their extremism and they reflect a patent characteristic of the mystic: the highs reach as far as the heavens, and the lows down to the bottom of the pit. The positive self-image is openly underscored and the self-deprecation is absolute.” Schwartz, *Religious Zionism Between Logic and Messianism*, p. 155. This motif of ups and downs of *devequt* is a central motif in Hassidic thought (See Lea Ornet, *Ratso va-shov, running and returning : ethical and mystical perspectives in the teaching of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi : a comparative study*, Tel-Aviv, 2014 [Hebrew]).

    Despite having grown up in Lithuania and having been educated in a traditional Misnagdic environment, Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir felt particularly close to the sources of Lithuanian Hasidism—the Hasidism of Chabad—and especially to the book *Kuntress HaHitpa'alut* by Rabbi Dov Ber Schneerson, a copy of which he had received as a gift from his father when he was a student of philosophy in Switzerland. For him, there is a continuous line from Hasidut to Kabbalah (see Bitty, p. 202). About *Kuntress HaHitpa'alut* and its particularity, see the monography of Rachel Elior in *Kiryat Sefer*, Vol. 54 (2), 1979, pp. 384-391 [Hebrew]. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The early researchers of mysticism had good reason to compare the descriptions of these experiences with the mood swings that characterize the manic-depression. See for example, R. C. Zaehnar’s discussion in the chapter entitled “Madness,” in *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 84-105. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Roger Bastide, *The Mystical Life* (London, 1934), pp. 126-135. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. See Katz, *Comparative Mysticism*, pp. 144-147; and M. Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Budapest, 2005), pp. 23-56, 143-146. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. See Elliot R. Wolfson, “Visionary Ascent and Enthronement in the Hekhalot Literature” in *Throught a Speculum That Shines – Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton,1994, pp. 74-124. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Similarly: “Immediately after Purim, I was pulled, as if a hand drew me out, to the Western Wall, the sanctuary, every morning. I heard there the answer concerning the matter of the yeshivah. Should I rent an apartment? And the answer, no. Will we succeed in our endeavor? And the answer, you will succeed” (*Megillat Setarim*, C-1, 102). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Another example: “On the three nights of Rosh HaShanah and the holy Sabbath, I was on duty in the study hall, and I was engaged in studying tractate Rosh HaShanah, and I saw a revelation of the secrets of the Torah. At the end of the night, near dawn, I understood the deep mysteries of the Mishnah and Talmud of Rosh HaShanah, I started to record them in my notebook, but the moment was lost, it is a shame” (*Megillat Setarim*, B, 4). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Rabbi Joseph Karo recounted: “I started to recite portions of Mishnah and I read five chapters and while still reading the voice of my beloved knocked in my mouth playing a tune on its own and started to say that God is with you everywhere you go… in the merit of the six orders of Mishnah which you know by heart and in the merit of the afflictions and self-abnegation which you have done in the past and continue with now, they have agreed in the heavenly Yeshivah that I will return to speak with you as I did at first” (Rabbi Joseph Karo, *Maggid Meisharim* (Jerusalem, 1959), pp. 4-5. The *Maggid* refers to himself saying “I am the Mishnah” several times. As is known, the word “Mishnah” is an anagram of the Hebrew word *neshamah* which means soul. See also J. H. Chajes, “Review of R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, R. Yosef Karo: Ba'al Halakha u'Mequbal”, in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, Vol. V (2000) pp. 224-228. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. According to Hollenback, the theme of light, is an essential part of the mystical experience J. B. Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment* (University Park, PA, 2000), pp. 56–74. For a critique of Hollenback’s claim regarding the importance of light, see J. Garb, *Manifestations of Power* (Jerusalem, 2005) [Hebrew], p. 291. See also Daniel Reiser, *Imagery Techniques in Modern Jewish Mysticism* (Boston, 2018), pp. 90-95, 194-197, 211-218. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. See also Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, London, 1960 ; Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses – the Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, Albany, 1982 ; José Faur, *Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition,* Bloomington, 1986. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. “"Israel: The One Who Sees God" – Visualization of God in Biblical, Apocalyptic, and Rabbinic Sources”, in: *Throught a Speculum That Shines*, op.cit., pp. 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. *Id.*, p. 4. The most recent studies by Jeffrey H. Chajes have also focused on the connection between the motif of seeing and Jewish mysticism, but from another angle: seeing not as the object of mystical experience but rather as a practice leading to mystical experience.

    See, e.g., J. H. Chajes [Yossi Hayut], “The Epistemology of Kabbalistic Diagrams”, *Pe’amim*, Vol. 150-152 (2017), pp. 235-288 [Hebrew]. See also, *The Tree of Holiness: A Nineteenth-Century Visualization of Kabbalah* (Edited and with an Introduction by J. H. Chajes, with E. Baumgarten and M. Kallus), Cherub Press, forthcoming. See also Haviva Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism* [Hebrew], Los Angeles: 2002. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Even though he was persecuted and excommunicated in his lifetime, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (*Ramḥal*) achieved great posthumous fame. His student Yekutiel Gordon disseminated his teacher’s writings in Poland and Lithuania, where they were printed by the end of the 18th century. In a surprising manner, traces of Luzzatto are evident in all three major trends of Eastern European Jewish thought: Hasidism, Misnagdism, and the Musar movement. In her book about Luzzatto, Joelle Hansel pointed out the centrality of Luzzatto’s Kabbalah in Lithuanian Kabbalah and particularly in the writings of the Gaon of Vilna and his student Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin and in those of others who dealt with explaining Kabbalah and clarifying its ideas in clear language: Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver (1789–1853), Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv (1841–1926), and Rabbi A. I. Kook. See:

    Joelle Hansel, *Moise Haim Luzzatto – Kabale et philosophie*, Paris, 2014, pp. 345-369. Ha-Rav Ha-Nazir first discovered the study of Kabbalah through one of Rabbi Elyashiv’s students and later from Rabbi Kook (see Bitty , pp. 137–138). In his book *Qol ha-Nevu’ah* he quotes Luzzatto dozens of times. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. M. Idel, “Abraham Abulafia, Gershom Shalom VeR' David Cohen (HaNazir) Al HaNevuah [Abraham Abulafia, Gershom Shalom and R. David Cohen (the Nazir) on Prophecy]”, *op. cit.*, pp. 830. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Some of these events are recounted in *Megillat Setarim* (for example: A, 74; B, 12). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism between Logic and Messianism*, (Tel-Aviv, 1999) [Hebrew], pp. 306. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. *Id.*, pp. 83-107. See also: Semadar Cherlow, *Tzaddiq is the Foundation of the World: Rav Kook's Esoteric Mission and Mystical Experience*, Ramat-Gan, 2003, pp. 351-393. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)