

The Mind Released: Parable, Commentary, and the Therapeutic

Leonard V. Kaplan

Four sages entered Paradise: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elisha ben Abuyah, and Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Akiba said to them "When you reach the stones of pure marble do not exclaim 'Water, Water!'" Ben Azzai looked and died. Ben Zoma looked and lost his mind. Elisha ben Abuyah cut the shoots. Only Rabbi Akiba ascended in peace and descended in peace.¹

This essay will comment upon three parables from the Jewish mystical tradition first with an eye toward the therapeutic, which I define as the possibility of human self-healing, and then on the nature of law and its relationship to the individual. The first parable, *Pardes* (or Paradise), comes from the period of early rabbinic mysticism, called *Merkavah* mysticism and which Gershom Scholem dates to the two centuries before the birth of Christ. It is central to a species of speculative texts, called the palace fragments, which are concerned with approaching the Godhead.² The second considers Freud's life and thought. Precedent for considering Freud's life as a parable is found in the commentary of Lou Andreas-Salome, herself a confidant to Freud. The last, "Before the Law," is a parable on law and self in the tradition of early rabbinical speculation and story telling from Franz Kafka. The essay argues that the early Jewish mystical tradition represents a significant though not fully acknowledged influence on Freud, and, therefore, modern consciousness and that the Kafka parable provides the bridge for understanding mysticism, therapeutics, and the law together. Mysticism (in general and the Jewish mystical tradition in particular) presupposes a Godhead and defines an outer limit for human experience.³

The *Pardes* parable has a fantastic quality in its various versions.⁴ The story is of Talmudic origin with variants in both the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud collections and is central to early rabbinic mysticism.⁵ The parable is part of the *Hekhalot* series of tales that helped form the tradition. These tales were generated from Ezekial's vision of the Chariot or Throne of God and are part of *Merkavah* mysticism.⁶ The *Pardes* parable comes from a series of so-called palace fables which are themselves a subset of fragments elaborating and signifying the chariot vision in Ezekiel, the early ground of Jewish mystical reflection and of medieval Kabbala. The story is central to *Hekhalot* or palace literature. The story also figures in a mystical tradition that is complementary but also potentially subversive of mainstream rabbinic Judaism. This tradition is also imaginatively rich and, because it has been covert, much more obscure in its meanings and much more difficult to trace historically. Akiba and his companions have evoked responses in this tradition that I will consider within this work.

In addition to Talmudic sources, the *Pardes* parable appears in at least two different sets of manuscripts of the many that comprise the palace literature. Peter Schäfer has only recently translated parts of these manuscripts, which he argues are properly included within the palace genre.⁷ These fragments, which share the central theme of the individual's relationship to God, give us the best characterizations of the four sages who entered paradise. Schäfer makes the case that these various sets of fragments concern three interrelationships: "conceptions of God, angels, and man" (Schäfer 8) The *Pardes* fable appears in *Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Merkavah Rabbah*, each concerned with the exemplary man's relationship to God and God's body. Schäfer argues that the *Pardes* parable has a more important place in *Hekhalot Zutarti* and only a secondary significance in *Merkavah Rabbah*.⁸ Of all the manuscripts only *Hekhalot Zutarti* concerns itself with the question of whether a person can ever view the body of God. Rabbi Akiba is coupled with no less a figure than Moses in this palace legend. Although generally God can be heard but not seen, Akiba remarkably is allowed both to view God and to bring back with him God's

name. This text suggests the great danger in approaching God. Further it indicates that in this text God looks like man: As Schäfer notes, “Aqiva’s description is the climax of the *positive* possible statements about God: he looks like us, like man, although he is of tremendous dimensions and . . . in the end concealed from us. The fact remains that Aqiva (and only Aqiva) can transmit the knowledge that God . . . looks like a man” (59).

Though the *Pardes* story plays a lesser role in *Merkavah Rabbah*, the version presented is noteworthy. Akiba’s (here called Aqiva) descent from the trip provides assurance of God’s good will to humanity.

R. Aqiva said:
When I went and asked this question before the throne of glory,
I saw him, the Lord,
the God of Israel,
how he rejoiced with great joy,
how he stretched out his hand, his right,
and [with it] struck the throne of glory.
And he said:
Aqiva my son,
this throne of glory
on which I sit
is a precious vessel,
which my right hand, established.
Even to a non-Jew [*ger*]
who has just now converted to Judaism,
whose body is pure
of idolatry, bloodshed, and illicit sex,
will I bind myself [*ani masqiq lo*]
to his footsteps
and to much study of the Torah.
When I departed from the throne of glory
to descend [*laredet*] to man,
he said to me:
Aqiva, my son,
descend [*red*]
and bear witness of this mystery [*middah*] to the creatures.
Then R. Aqiva descended [*yarad*]
and taught the creatures this mystery [*midda*].⁹

For Scholem this passage is susceptible to a theurgic interpretation. Although he recognizes that “in some cases *Merkavah* mysticism degenerated into mere magic” (78), he notes that fourteenth-century Kabbala reinforces this strand, obliging its community to do the study and good deeds necessary to restore creation, rent by God’s withdrawing of Himself in the act of creating. Unsurprisingly, this esoteric knowledge can be passed only to a few who are holy enough to cope with it. As we see in the ascent to the garden, the other sages pay for their boldness. Only an Akiba can deal with the knowledge of God’s name and survive.¹⁰

Louis Finklestein, in his *Akiba, Scholar, Saint, and Martyr*,¹¹ has provided a biography for Akiba, separating what we know about his life, times, legend, and actual life. Akiba lived before the fall of the Temple, was forty years old and a poor illiterate shepherd prior to his commitment to the study of Torah. He became *the* authority on legal interpretation and an intellectual and moral leader for his community. His recognition of the leader of a Jewish revolt against the Romans ended in disaster and resulted in his terrible death at their hands. Akiba was a sage, not a patriarch, a man of the (holy) law, a commentator, an interpreter, a student, a wise man. He was also a flawed man who made a major error that harmed the Jewish people and contributed to his own martyrdom at the hands of the Romans. Why then does Akiba succeed and his fellows fail and fail in such different ways? Akiba in this visit to Paradise cautions each of the sages about the dangerousness of the garden: “when you reach the stones of marble do not exclaim ‘Water, Water!’” Had Akiba visited Paradise previously? If not, had he a vision of Paradise that he trusted? Did Akiba reach a correct understanding of *Pardes* from study of Torah? If Akiba has succeeded even in part because of his own understanding, it affirms the possibility of fore-

knowledge of ultimates. Since Akiba is a scholar as well as a righteous man, rational apprehension of the Godhead and therefore of a *telos* would seem to be affirmed by Akiba's success. Yet Akiba did not have the prescience to know that his fellows would return damaged or worse. As moral leader or as guide, we sense his limitations: he could not save; he could only warn his companions, who were sages themselves. As sages, they were all versed in Torah, the divinely-inspired signs of an awesome Presence, but of the four only Akiba was an ordained rabbi. Should this itself be enough to account for the difference?

Torah is not for rabbis only. It represents others, notably the prophets, in conversation with God, though the nature of the experience of each of the prophets differs. In the tradition Moses has the most complete conscious experience in his conversation with God. Yet even he views God from behind and not face to face. The sage Akiba who sees Paradise and lives becomes a scholar and moral leader late in the day. He goes up and comes down in peace. But we do not know what his interior experience was prior to this achievement. Was he in any way preparing himself prior to his study and learning to survive paradise? When did he realize that Paradise can be a dangerous place, that at best a visitor can maintain a personal peace, only if he goes up in peace? Akiba is not born graced or at peace. He is not born a scholar. He started to study only in his fortieth year. He studied for the sake of Torah and he attained peace. He must reach this stage before and perhaps as a condition of visiting and certainly of surviving paradise. The rest are damaged.

One characteristic distinguishing Akiba from his colleagues was that he believed and practiced good works. Did all the others not? They after all were sages, which suggests that they were more than mere repositories of textual information. Further, we learn that Akiba made serious political blunders to the harm of his people and his own cruel dismemberment at the hands of the Romans. Yet the legend tells us he survives Paradise. He does not thrive in the world because of his successful trip: he simply ascends and descends in peace; there is no claim of transformation. His body and his consciousness apparently remain the same before and after the experience. He must, therefore, already have achieved the necessary state of consciousness, although that achievement did not guarantee worldly success even in the cause of God. Akiba's peace is one marked in life and in legend by communal commitment, suffering, and martyrdom. The story relates that during his mutilation at the hands of the Romans, immediately before his death, he remarks to his disciples, "All my days I have been troubled by the verse, 'With all thy soul' (Deuteronomy 6: 5), which I have interpreted as meaning 'even if He takes your soul.' But I said: when shall I have an occasion to fulfill this precept? Now I have the occasion, shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the Shema's concluding word, *echad* ("one"), until he expired as he finished pronouncing it."¹² So peace is not without suffering and can be humanly attained, even if rarely. Peace is the philosophic, the theologic, the therapeutic goal.

What information do we have of the other three. Why would Ben Azzai, a sage, die? Why would Ben Zoma lose his mind? Why would Elisha ben Abuyah "cut the shoots" (which has been interpreted to mean that he become an apostate)? The early commentary informs us that as an apostate he was a free thinker and enjoyed the fruits of bodily pleasures. But he lost paradise.¹³ Halperin cites other Talmudic sources to amplify our understanding about Akiba's fellow travelers. In one story Elisha performs the forbidden act of riding a horse on the Sabbath. His devoted student Rabbi Meir exhorts him to desist:

"You have all this wisdom, and yet you do not repent?"

"I cannot," he said.

"Why not?"

He said to him: "Once I was passing in front of the Holy of Holies mounted on my horse, on the Day of Atonement that happened to fall on a Sabbath. I heard a heavenly voice coming forth from the Holy of Holies: '*Return backsliding children* [Jeremiah 3:4]—except for Elisha ben Abuyah, who knew my power and rebelled against me.'" (Halperin 35).

In another Talmudic tale, Elisha sees the angel Metatron at a place reserved for God and speculates that there are perhaps two divinities. Metatron is flogged and Elisha is cut off (Halperin 35-6).

In *Hekhalot Zutarti*, the Biblical prooftext referring to Elisha is from Ecclesiastes 5:5, *Do not let your mouth bring your flesh into sin* (Halperin 202). Also in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, we are informed of one way in which Elisha expressed his apostasy: he stopped children from studying Torah (Halperin 204). Elisha becomes *Aher* (apostate, cut off) because he fails to distinguish Metatron, who in the *Hekhalot* is like a lesser version of God, from God himself. There is also a claim that after his apostasy he became a Gnostic heretic (Gruenwald 44). Elisha, despite his brilliant mind, confuses the real with a lesser substitute. The mistake he makes is magnified by his journey to the garden and by his understanding of Torah itself. The apostasy counts as significant particularly because of how close to truth he comes. The warning to those who are both brilliant and potentially good is that even an Elisha can be destroyed by his mistakes. *Aher* was allowed earthly enjoyment and experiment at the cost of community, at the cost of a whole perception of *Pardes* and, therefore, an enriched perception of his place in the greater Paradisial whole. Even after his apostasy, *Aher* is still a sage, still respected for his knowledge and, because of the intervention of his disciple, still permitted the possibility of redemption.

What commentary do we have concerning Ben Zoma? We have a statement from him after his return from the garden. Rabbi Joshua comes upon him walking in a trance and manages to evoke a response:

Ben Zoma said to him “I was contemplating *ma’aseh bereshit*; and only the space of an open hand divides the upper waters from the lower waters. Scripture speaks of “hovering” here [in Genesis 1:2, where *the spirit of God was hovering over the waters*] and also [in Deuteronomy 32:11]: *As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovering over its young*. As [in Deuteronomy] ‘hovering’ means simultaneously touching and not touching, so [in Genesis] ‘hovering’ means touching and not touching.”

R[abbi] Joshua said to his disciples: “Ben Zoma is outside.” A few days later Ben Zoma was dead. (Halperin 29)

The Biblical prooftext attached to Ben Zoma comes from Proverbs 25:16: *If you find honey, eat only your fill, lest you become stuffed with it and vomit it*. *Hekhalot Zutarti* reveals that “Ben Zoma looked at the splendor, at the stones of marble, and thought it was water. His body could endure not to ask them, but his mind could not endure it, and he went mad” (Halperin 234).

Who is Ben Azzai and how do the Talmudist and other commentators understand his death? In one Talmudic account, “R[abbi] Akiba sees Ben Azzai surrounded by fire as he expounds. Akiba thinks he is exploring ‘the chambers of the *Merkavah*,’ but it turns out he is joining together verses from the three divisions of Scripture, ‘and the words of the Torah were as joyful as the day they were given at Sinai . . . in fire’” (Lev.R. 16 :4, ed. 354-5). The scriptural prooftext says of Ben Azzai, *Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Psalm 116:15). From *Hekhalot Zutarti* we have Akiba stating “Ben Azzai succeeded in reaching the gate of the sixth palace. He saw the splendor of the air [!] of the stones of pure marble. He opened his mouth twice and said, ‘Water, water.’ Instantly they cut off his head and threw upon him eleven thousand axes [?]. This is to serve as a sign for all time, that one must not make an error at the gate of the sixth palace. The Lord is king, the Lord will be king for ever and ever” (Halperin 201). A variant fragment in *Hekhalot Zutarti* reads, “Ben Azzai looked at the sixth palace and saw the splendor of the air. . .of the stones of marble that were built into [?] the palace. His body could not endure it. He opened his mouth and asked them: ‘what is the nature of these waters?’ He died. Of him Scripture says, *Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints*” (Halperin 204). Here grace is certainly a possibility. Ben Azzai is recognized and kept in paradise. A later medieval elaboration of the tale makes Ben Azzai beloved by God, perhaps displacing even Akiba as the most elevated of the sojourners. Fishbane points out that for the medieval mystics, while Akiba “experienced mystical bliss,” Ben Azzai “died in rapture, and that this death pleased the Lord.”¹⁴

The parable presents four sages who, in all but one case, come away from an experience of Paradise destroyed in mind or body or both. Or so it first seems. Surely like the madness of Ben Zoma, the death of Ben Azzai is an ominous warning for those who approach God even with apparently adequate preparation. However optimistically we interpret the death of Ben Azzai, madness and loss of faith are certainly states to avoid. The bodies—not merely the spirit—of the

sages ascend to paradise. The body is not a shell, thrown off for spiritual emancipation.¹⁵ By the eleventh century Hai Gaon was committed to a visionary grasp on the Godhead and insisted that only the spirits of the respective sages ascend and return to awaiting bodies.¹⁶ Gaon believed that “one in possession of the necessary qualifications has methods through which he can gaze at the *Merkavah* and look into the celestial chambers. . . . From his innermost being and its chambers he will then perceive the Seven Chambers.”¹⁷ Gaon recognized the danger of approaching this study, but he also felt the obligation to pursue the vision of the *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, the end point in the quest to envision God enthroned. In the twelfth century Maimonides, the greatest of medieval Jewish theologians, still pursued this goal. Maimonides argued that the principal dogma for Judaism is that God is incorporeal. Yet despite Maimonides’ commitment to extend disciplined rationality as far as humanly possible, his influential *Guide of the Perplexed* had as its goal gaining, through study of Torah and the *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, at least intimations of the Godhead. If we insist on the incorporeality of the Godhead, must we relocate the space of Akiba’s experience of Paradise to his mind? What does it mean to talk about Akiba’s ascent and return, Ben Azzai’s looking and dying, Ben Zoma’s looking and losing his mind, and Elisha ben Abuyah’s cutting the shoots? If we believe that Akiba and the others never left physical space no matter what their respective experiential conditions, what can this fragment convey for our quest for understanding the limits of the therapeutic?

The early commentators make certain assumptions about the meaning of the fragment. They assume first that the story has meaning. They further assume that certain fundamental knowledge is open to human reach and achievement. They assume an uncertain but real relationship of human volition, the implication of a proper disciplinary path, and psychological as well as metaphysical consequences attached to personal struggle, direction and practice. The fate of the sages is not marked as arbitrary, fated or random. Each sage’s presumed motivation has played its part in interpretive accounts of their respective ends. Yet we are still left to question the meaning of *Pardes*. It is a referent to something or somewhere other, other than the internal workings of the body and the self, other than the family or the community. The term promises a transcendence; it marks a possibility, an opening where Freud marked a rationalizing structure or propensity of the mind toward self-deception and, apparently except for the rigorously stoic or the graced, self-despair.

II

The beginning of personhood is not, contrary to what we often hear, that Johnny-come-lately term humanism. The beginning of personhood lies in Jewish civilization. Without the Jewish *religious* idea—and this I say without apology to the moribund Marxists—no concept of personhood is possible: it could not have come into the world.

Cynthia Ozick¹⁸

Freud is very much in the Jewish mystical tradition.¹⁹ Yerushalmi in fact makes an interesting case that Freud created a Jewish psychology that extended self-understanding into a universal model of ontology.²⁰ Freud, the atheistic Jew who honored his Judaism at the same time that he denied its theology, imagined himself as a Hannibal trying to wrest the imperium from the gentiles and as a Copernicus of the mind. He drew on his culture, Jewish and Viennese *fin de siècle*, to write critical texts in the hopes of combining Socratic self-understanding and Jewish responsibility. Paradise is, of course, a utopian or God concept; it is by definition anti-psychoanalytic. For Freud, utopian conjecture can only represent infantile wish and adolescent rebellion. Furthermore, he insisted that a failure to understand and recognize possible mystical experience as nostalgic²¹ or regressive may delegitimize the very possibility of wholeness, cure, flourishing, or reality itself.

Does the term “paradise” have anything to do with contemporary psychoanalytic practice? Unlike Akiba and the early commentators, the possibility of considering paradise as some tangible physical space seems disallowed us. Yet the parable presents four sages who come away from an experience of Paradise in all but one case destroyed. However optimistically we interpret their fates, madness and loss of faith (in human possibility) are certainly states to avoid. Freud, who is our contemporary Aher (the name attached to Elisha after his sojourn in *Pardes*), has

pushed the boundaries of human motivation beyond civility, beyond conscious thought to the dark and dirty aspect of mental organization that allows self-deception and narcissistic distemper. Freud's view is intrapsychic. The world outside the self becomes distorted as it is internalized because of the necessary conflict between instinctual tendencies and cultural prohibitions. Even though eros attaches to external objects, they are rarely perceived in themselves but rather are forced into the need-structure of the subject who is making the attachment. Nor is Freud necessarily wrong in his clinical assessments, but his internal vision may be as impaired as Aher's.

Freud systematized the romantic unconscious by making it a structure, defining our mental apparatus as the only route to any transformative self-determination. For him, Paradise is not a place but a state where Id is and Ego shall be. Any viable personality transformation would have to combat internal resistance and defense. This is hardly comparable to the sage's Paradise, but given the experience of three of the sages, it may be preferable. For the sages, however, even the danger of madness and apostasy, given even a pessimistic reading of the death of Ben Azzai, life and study, works and attitudes, had an end state—the experience of God. Within the Freudian view of the psychic apparatus, defensive structures will revert to even unpleasant self-representation to ward off the experience of that kind of free-floating anxiety that threatens the boundary of self itself. Freud rejected any metaphysical transcendence as “an illusion” whose continuance marks infantile levels of communal consciousness. God, for Freud, was a defensive projection of the father, the fictive social representation of law.

Where Freud accounted for anxiety first as danger to the body and then as danger to the self, the *Pardes* parable displays anxiety at the viability of Creation itself and locates it at the warning triggered by the marble the sages see as they enter the heavenly palace. Akiba told his brethren not to “exclaim Water, Water” when they saw the marble. One set of commentaries accounts for this curious warning by relating the water to Ezekial's chariot vision and to the Israelites escaping Pharaoh. In the vision, the chariot is reflected in the water (in one version it is actually in the water). The chariot touching the water, whether through reflection or immersion, suggests danger and intimates an evil inversion. Water, in these interpretations, invokes danger because of its dynamic insubstantiality; God's chariot in these views is contaminated by the water, which, in some commentaries even threatens the Godhead itself. This fear of contamination derives from anxiety among commentators about the instability of the entire creation. For these commentators, it is not the fate of the individual that is at stake, but a collective fear of cosmic loss that threatens the continuance not of the Jews but of the Judaic vision of the universe (see Halperin 194-249).

Freud's new science of psychoanalysis limits itself to its chosen sphere of internal anxieties, excluding all others, and, by doing so, marks a turning point in the history of representations of the human mind, now strictly tied to the body and to the family that defines it, more specifically with the set of internalizations shaped by mother, father and siblings, with aunts, uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers that constitute the self. Understanding the mind did not mean transforming suffering or sublimating erotic or aggressive tendencies in individual clinical patients. The very question of healing, cure, or diagnosis and prognosis involves assumptions about the limits of self and self-transformation. Yet Freud's theory, however flawed, may still provide some help to those seeking to understand others. Like Aher he also denied *Pardes*—perhaps a denial more costly to generations convinced by the removal of God from human vision. According to Lou Andreas-Salome, Freud lived his theory in his life and made his life his theory.²² He remained deeply committed to an empirical rationality, fearing that his speculative bent would betray his hard-won insight.

Freud and psychoanalysis have taken us to a set of limits concerning the extent to which a particular use of reason can effect self-alteration when brought to bear by a professional working with another. Because it denies free will, Freud's new science is a not a fruitful mapping of the self for someone who determines on self-change; because it insists that part of the self is unconscious, it does not permit the individual to embark upon a conscious attempt to effect self-transformation. In fact, psychoanalysis predicts the unlikelihood of change from within and the ubiquitous nature of self-deception and ambivalence. By the end of his life Freud no longer had faith in the possibility of effecting significant healing from within his model though he remained

committed to his model as the best representation of intrapsychical reality and its relationship to the other.

III

Jacques Derrida comments on this loss of God and the law of God in his reflections on Kafka's parable, "Before the Law."²³ In fact, the Kafka story is a parable in the *Hekhalot* tradition.²⁴ Most will recall the tale of the countryman who comes to the city to gain access to the law. He is confronted by a giant Doorkeeper who refuses him entry. He peers in but can only imagine the depths of the law court. He is told that even if he should get past the Doorkeeper, larger keepers will deny him further access. He bribes the Doorkeeper, he cajoles, he spends his life in supplication. As he is dying, the Doorkeeper answers that the reason he has seen no one else seeking entry is because this aperticular door is meant only for him.

Michel de Certeau identifies the fable quality of the tale and its pedigree in the Jewish mystical tradition (2-3). Certeau mentions that the "radiance" that the countryman sees emanating from the law court is the *Shekhalot inah*, the indwelling or the feminine aspect of God in the medieval Kabbala. Derrida does a more extensive analysis of the parable. He applies various hermeneutics, including the psychoanalytic, without denigrating them and without accounting for the nature of the mystery of the story—a mystery that Kafka maintains and which Freud's analytic fails to exhaust. The countryman has an awe of law and a metaphysical need for God as the source of the law. Derrida's commentary highlights that need and the loss for human existence in the face of a system that demands the excision of that need—the present alternatives are languishing in the meaninglessness of the universe or a masturbatory self obsession equating the internal fire with an immanent Godhead. Kafka's parable presents a palace story at a time when people are disconnected from the vision—from the very possibility of wholeness—and as such shows the inadequacy of Freud's vision. Freud's genius, like that of Elisha, was a commitment to his personal reason; in itself, this is not redemptive, but perhaps, like Aher, he was not completely lost. But in a post-modern moment when renegotiations of reality constitute the intellectual agenda, Freud's commitment to the rational is no longer a psychological option. Reason itself has once again been called into doubt. To post-modernist eyes, the desire for grounding is suspect and finding a base that can serve as a ground is impossible.²⁵

Law itself has been reduced either to instrument or politics. The awe that it invoked is displaced and negated into disrespect and even contempt. The Temple of the Law has become the setting for a soap opera: at best an occasion of titillation, at worst a source for anger and despair. With the dismissal of the law, each person becomes an independent sovereign in an era when sovereignty is suspect and power is by definition impotent in the face of a politics that denies all validity except to its self-examination of its own processes. Kafka's *Pardes* fable recalls that ancient dread and reminds us that once society believed in the possibility of intimations of a "real" not merely personal. Despite the insistence of the Doorkeeper, the door to the law is not limited only to one person even if the attempt to pass through it is dangerous.

At the beginning of this paper, I defined the therapeutic as the possibility of human self-healing. However, my study of these *Pardes* fables suggests that any effective therapeutic must also admit of the possibility of openness toward a Godhead and a law that command awe as well as surprise and joy. Human suffering may be unmitigated, but it does not have to be meaningless and the self does not have to remain divided. Akiba was strong in body and mind. His body could accept both the mystery of *Pardes* and the pain inflicted by the Romans. His mind had the discipline for Torah and its covert secrets. He could combine study and play a role in the community. His existence was not split: he suffered but he suffered without conflict. Freud also performed in the world and studied as well. He constructed a psychology that universalized the mind whose obligation was to discipline biologically-given tendencies. He set up institutes to teach his new psychology in order to further it.

The cost of Freud's new psychology was a denial that anything outside of the material body could be anything but projection, defense, and infantility; the gain was to undercut any sense of racial immutability. For Freud, psychoanalysis redeems his body from the European rejection of the diseased Jewish body.²⁶ The Jew's body became everyone's body. Psychoanalysis would

heal neurotic, excess suffering, but only by exalting the personal: suffering is personal, meaning is personal, the self is personal and forever divided. Kafka's countryman has lost the Torah; he has lost community. He has lost study; he has lost the capacity to act for God, community, or self. Yet though forlorn, he retains the metaphysical craving for a law that is at once approachable, divine, and necessary. For Akiba the door to justice does not divide mind and body, God and law, study and action. The *Pardes* fables suggest that without the awe, the *mysterium tremendum* that prompts recognition for the need of the vision, Creation is unstable and without meaning. As it expands from the *Hekhalot* to medieval *Kabbala*, the Jewish mystical tradition's commentators clarify the extent to which man can restore wholeness to creation through action. Postmodern conceptions of law and psychology, presenting them as mere technologies open to social or individual and social self-fashioning, are rather denials of the combination of reality and imagination exemplified by Akiba. As the poet Paul Celan, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, asserts, 'There are / still songs to be sung on the other side / of humanity.'²⁷

Notes

- ¹ I quote from the epigraph to Howard Schwartz, *The Four Who Entered Paradise* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995). Schwartz has taken the *Pardes* parable and reshaped it in light of his reading of the commentary. Marc Bregman's introduction to Schwartz (xxxiii, fn. 50) provides a succinct statement of the state of commentary on the parable, even including four fictional versions from this century by M. J. Berdichevsky, Milton Steinberg, Arthur Waskow, and Cynthia Ozick. Pierre Hadot refers to the formulation by Bernard Groethuythusen of the sage's place in the world as paradigmatic: "The sage's consciousness of the world is something peculiar to him alone. Only the sage never ceases to have the whole constantly present to his mind. He never forgets the world, but thinks and acts with a view to the cosmos. . . . The sage is a part of the world; he is cosmic. He does not let himself be distracted from the world or detached from the cosmic totality. . . . The figure of the sage forms, as it were, an indissoluble unity with man's representation of the world." See *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), 251. Michael Fishbane has recently stressed the question of the meaning of death in the parable. He also points out that in the two Talmudic tellings Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma have experienced death or madness. See *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 34-5.
- ² I have found *pardes* translated both as "paradise" and as "garden." R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* (New York: Adama Books, 1986), 294 say that in late biblical (cf. Song of Songs 4:3; Ecclesiastes 2:15; Nehemiah 2:8) and talmudic Hebrew "*pardes*" is translated as "garden" or "orchard." The word is derived from the Greek *paradeisos*.
- ³ Werblowsky and Wigoder 180 define the tradition of Jewish Mysticism in the early rabbinic and Gaonic Periods, which centered on the mystical ascent through the heavenly spheres and palaces (*hekhalot*) to the vision of the Divine Chariot (the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* or Throne of God) and produced a body of literature known as the *Hekhalot* books. "The mystical Midrashim describe the ecstatic experiences of the visionaries and abound in powerful hymns of praise to the Divine Majesty."
- ⁴ See Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960). Except in titles of works, I have everywhere regularized the varied spellings of *Merkavah* and *Hekhalot*.
- ⁵ *The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* 373 defines the Talmud as a comprehensive term for the Mishna and Gemara regarded as a single unit. It is applied specifically to two compilations, the Palestinian (sometimes incorrectly called the Jerusalem) Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmud is a unique literary work, the result and record of study and discussions over a period of some eight centuries by scholars of the entire nation working continually in the Academies of Palestine and Babylonia. Its spiritual roots are the Bible and the traditions of *Halakha* (law) and *Midrash* (commentary) that crystallized during the Second Temple Period. Though considering itself grounded in the Bible, the Talmud itself clearly distinguishes between the "Written Law" and the Oral Law, which was transmitted by word of mouth from the time of Moses (Avot. 1:1). It is claimed, however, that both derive from God's instruction of Moses at Mt. Sinai and are complementary expressions of the same Divine law: the precepts of the *Torah* required elucidation and elaboration at innumerable points, and a living, unwritten

interpretation must have existed from earliest times. The *Pardes* story appears in different versions; in the Palestinian version ben Zoma dies. In the Babylonian “ben Azzai gazed and was stricken.” See Michael Fishbane 34.

- ⁶ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 43-79, suggests that the fables represent the work of an initiate group of Jewish mystics who demand ascetic exercise for preparation for an approach to God. David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekial's Vision* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988), 366-466, opposes Scholem's position and attempts to refute the majority scholarly opinion that the *Hekhalot* are primarily maps for ecstatic heavenly ascent. He argues that these parables represent an attempt by the writers of these fables to achieve status in the Jewish community, to overtake their elders in a mythos that penetrates and humanizes heaven itself. Scholem also draws attention to the relationship of the *Pardes* story and St. Paul's account of his transportation to heaven (14-9). Scholem views both episodes as a representation of the achievement of a mystical, ecstatic state. Scholem holds that the early mystical tradition did connect and influence later full-blown Kabbalist practice and writing. Scholem argues, further, that *Hekhalot* literature penetrated to the inside of *Merkavah* experience. David Halperin has recently challenged Scholem's “ecstatic” account of the meaning of the *Pardes* story. For Halperin, the “awe-ful anxiety” expressed in the fables is a projection of infantile fears against adult power and sexuality. Halperin 25-31 argues that the *Merkavah* stories disturbed the congregants and caused such anxiety for the compilers of the *Mishna* that they wanted to protect others from these writings. Halperin points out that the time of the codification of the *Mishna* (the first half of the third century) was the height of attempts to suppress the *Merkavah*. He offers several explanations for the rabbinic insistence on containing and suppressing this literature. The relationship of this literature to the Song of Songs (where the material might be seen as sexually arousing and not allegorical) might encourage dangerous speculation about God's body. The book of Ezekial contains material that “more than once contradicts the ritual laws of the Torah” and contains “a brutal denunciation of the holy city” (27). Perhaps the greatest Rabbinic fear is that although suppression of this material heightened rabbinic authority as the holders of secret knowledge it also made it important because it was taboo. Halperin considers Scholem's theories about the existence of a “secret doctrine about the divinity” so elusive that it was unknown to “even some of the Palestinian Amoriam” doubtful and believes that such a doctrine “probably never existed” (30). Halperin reduces the mystical experience at the heart of this early mysticism to an attempt to satisfy a purely human need and denies the validity of any mystical experience. Halperin argues that the chariot stories, with their fantastic trappings, were merely the means by which early Jewish preachers sought to delight their congregations. Whether or not one is sympathetic to the Scholem or the Halperin perspective, one cannot deny that the *Pardes* fables were the subject of the commentaries of rabbis for hundreds of years following the destruction of the second Temple.
- ⁷ Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 7 argues for a revision of the canon of fragments within the *Hekhalot* tradition. He includes the so-called *Hekhalot Rabbati* (“the Greater Palaces”), *Hekhalot Zutarti* (“the Lesser Palaces”), *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (“the Working of the Chariot”), *Merkavah Rabbah* (“the Great Chariot”), and the so-called “Third book of Enoch” (i.e., the Hebrew as opposed to the Ethiopian and Slavic books of Enoch); the fragments Schäfer finds problematic are *Re'uyyot Yehezqel* (“the Visions of Ezekial”) and *Masekhet Hekhalot* (“the Tractate of the *Hekhalot*”). He differs with Scholem and other scholars in ordering and inclusion of some of the fragments. He is also less certain than Scholem on the dating of the fragments.
- ⁸ Schäfer 55-75 and 97-121 provides the basis for my summary of these two fragments.
- ⁹ Schäfer 118-9, who adds: “Speculation about the ‘original’ location of the *Pardes* story within the . . . *Hekhalot* literature is of little use, as this passage, being a clearly defined (though by no means always identical) redactional unit, obviously was so important to the redactors of the *Hekhalot* manuscripts that it could be integrated into various contexts” (118).
- ¹⁰ Scholem in his book on the relationship to *Merkavah* mysticism and gnosticism makes it clear that this early Jewish mysticism may have shared certain attributes with gnosticism, but insists 43-56 that the angels who guard each palace at each of the seven heavens (similar to the Gnostic elaborations) are not evil and denies that there is an equivalent evil force to God in this early mystical structure.

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- ¹¹ (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990).
- ¹² Hayim Bialik and Yehoshua Ravnitzky, ed. *The Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Schocken, 1992), 238.
- ¹³ See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
- ¹⁴ Fishbane 36 points out that in the Torah commentary by Rabbi Menahem Reconti (late thirteenth-early fourteenth century), Ben Azzai becomes a medieval mystic employing mystical techniques to effect mystical visualization.
- ¹⁵ The bodily nature of the trip to *Pardes* is all the more remarkable in that early rabbinic Judaism was more philosophical than later developments that represented God more anthropomorphically. See Jacob Neusner, *The Foundations of the Foundation of the Theology of Judaism: Volume One, God* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993). For recent analysis of early rabbinic commitments to the ascendancy of the bodily existence see Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Readings in Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- ¹⁶ Joseph Dan, "Mysticism in History, Religion and Literature," *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, 10, argues that *Merkavah* mysticism, including the *Bahir*, a first-century mystical text provided a basis for and perhaps even a continued connection to medieval Kabbala: "Our knowledge of the role of mysticism in Judaism during the more than five centuries of the gaonic period is very scanty, and it is impossible to assess the impact that mysticism had—or did not have—on Judaism during that long, formative period. Jewish culture in Europe, as it developed between the tenth and twelfth centuries, reflects very strong rationalistic elements, whereas mysticism seems to appear only as a marginal phenomenon. Its main impact seems to have been felt much later, and this was interpreted as an expression of dissatisfaction with some of the rational, philosophical answers to basic religious problems. Some aspects of the turn to mysticism by small, esoteric circles of rabbis in the main centers of Jewish culture in Europe (Germany, Spain, Southern France) can be understood as a reaction against rationalism and Maimonidean ideas. But were these mystical attitudes completely new, or are they signs of the reemergence of mystical texts and symbols which were present before somewhere in the totality of Jewish religious experience throughout the ages? Was mysticism a reaction against twelfth century rationalism, or was rationalism a new, medieval alternative offered against mystical attitudes which prevailed in groups and circles whose original works are lost to us? The mystics themselves insist that their symbols and texts were ancient."
- ¹⁷ Michael Lieb, *The Visionary Mode: Biblical Prophecy, Hermeneutics, and Cultural Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), traces the relationship of this mystical literature and the dynamisms of its receptions through western literature including its internalization into Christian theological perspectives.
- ¹⁸ "Hannah and Elkanah: Torah as the Matrix for Feminism," *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, ed. Christina Büchman and Celina Spiegel (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 88.
- ¹⁹ David Bakan pointed out the influence of the Jewish mystical tradition on Freud's thought. *Sigmund Freud And Jewish Mystical Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958). See also Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) and Dennis B. Klein, *Jewish Origin of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Harold Bloom, "Freud: Frontier Concepts, Jewishness, and Introspection," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993), 113 sees an analogy between Freud and Jeremiah.
- ²⁰ Yerushalmi 100, 136-7 n. 26 states that Anna Freud agreed that her father was consciously creating a Jewish psychology with psychoanalysis.
- ²¹ For the notion that mystical experience may express a nostalgia for the seeming past presence of God see Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9-13.
- ²² *Looking Back: Memoirs. The Intimate Story of Her Friendships with Nietzsche, Rilke, and Freud* (New York: Marlowe and Co., 1995), 102.

- ²³ *Parables and Paradoxes*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1961), 61. For Kafka's use of Jewish parable, see Robert Alter, *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 70-92.
- ²⁴ *Acts in Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 181-220.
- ²⁵ De Certeau 299 ends his post-modern exploration of the medieval mystical fable with just this sentiment: "Of that self-surpassing spirit, seduced by an impregnable origin or end called God, it seems that what for the most part still remains, in contemporary culture, is the movement of perpetual departure; as if, unable to ground itself in a belief in God any longer, the experience only kept the form and not the content of traditional *mystics*. . . . Unmoored from the 'origin' . . . the traveler no longer has foundation nor goal. Given over to nameless desire, he is the drunken boat. Henceforth this desire can no longer speak to someone. It seems to have become *infans*, voiceless, more solitary and lost than before, or less protected and more radical, ever seeking a body or poetic locus. It goes on walking, then, tracing itself out in silence, in writing."
- ²⁶ Sander L. Gilman, *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993).
- ²⁷ *Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1980), 183.