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Kabbalistic Hieros Gamos:

Reconstituting the Androgyne, The Proximus, the Illus Tempus, and The Divine

The author¹ of the 13th century Kabbalistic work, *Igeret Ha-Kodesh (The Holy Letter)*, thus instructs his fellow Kabbalist interested in performing his marital duties according to the law:

My brother, as you are diligent like me to seek and examine the ways that will teach the fear of the Lord and guide you in the paths of radiant light towards the face (Numbers 8:2) of the pure Menorah, you will be saved from the path of darkness that causes the blind, those who never saw the resplendent light, to stumble all their days. You have asked me, my brother, to show you the way in which a man may consummate sexual union with his wife so that it will be for the sake of heaven and thereby merit sons learned of the law, worthy of the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven. (.....) I wish to open the gates of righteousness (Psalms 24) in this matter so that you may attain your rightful request through the truthful Torah of the Lord, may he be praised.²

The author then proceeds to instruct his “brother” by grouping his “remarks (...) in six chapters, like the arms of the candelabrum”³ and repeatedly emphasizing that “the union (should be) at the proper time, which is the Sabbath evening, which is the complete revolution of the cycle,”⁴ further explaining that this day should be chosen for marital relations because “the Sabbath is the foundation of the world and an example of the world of souls.”

Sabbath was a very important moment in time for the Kabbalists: as a set of rituals and techniques, it was conducive to a state of “cosmic awareness,” and the substantiated re-union of the self with the divine, achievable within the physical constricts of the geographical world. Moreover, the Kabbalists “linked (the Sabbath) with those Sacred Spaces which had traditionally served as *axis mundi*: Eden, Jerusalem, the Temple.”⁵ As the theoretical foundation of the practice was developed, all these sites came to be represented and actualized in the proper observance of the Sabbath day. By equating it with a return to the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Kabbalists shifted significance from the locale to a specific moment in the primordial time. Moreover, by accepting this transformation, this “historical event acquire(d) a new dimension; it (became) a theophany.”⁶ Just as “the Temple was an *imago mundi*, at the Center of the World, in Jerusalem, the individual body of the Sabbath observer became an ever-perfecting-milieu with cosmic abilities. Gradually, after several semiotic transfers the sublimated individual self became equated with the formula “body-house-cosmos.” The wo/man thus became a carrier of “shards” from the original Paradise, and a symbol of its continuity and mobility in time and space.

Through the “Sabbath observance (which was) salvific in nature, and serv(ed) as a foretaste of the World to

¹ Gershom Scholem called this work “by the name *Hibbur ha-Adam im Ishto*-‘a treatise on marriage and sexuality’ written by an anonymous Kabbalist (perhaps Joseph of Hamadam) at the end of the 13th century and then later attributed to Nahmanides under the title *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*” (qtd. by Seymour Cohen in *Igeret ha-kodesh ha-meyuhas la Ramban*, Library of Congress: 1976, 8).

² *Igeret ha-kodesh*, 30.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 70.

⁵ Eliot Ginsburg, “The symbolism of the Kabbalistic Sabbath: Motif Studies” in *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*, 85-86.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 111.

Come, (...) pav(ing) the way for Messianic redemption,”⁷ the adept became a *shomer Shabbat*- one who properly observed the Sabbath. Such an individual engendered the double significance of the Shabbat: “a return to *illud tempus*⁸ (Eliade) and an “adumbration of *olam haba*, or “the World to Come.”⁹ The lack of spatial and temporal specificity allowed the adept’s unhindered admittance into the constant realm of the divine. More important still, is that once the Kabbalist mastered the weekly rituals of the Sabbath, he then could ascend/understand/descend to/from the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Jubilee and receive “the holiest blessings of all.”¹⁰

These ultimate blessings were not the only rewards of the *shomer Shabbat*. Each week, during the holy day, another blessing befell the Kabbalist, i.e., the phenomenon of *neshamah yeterah*, or the transformation of the person by the temporary acquisition of the Sabbath soul.¹¹ This temporal conviviality between the mortal’s soul and the Sabbath soul helped him/her “internalize” the Sabbath and become conscious of the paradigm of the “body as microcosm and Sabbath surrounding one, Sabbath within the one.”¹² Based on this macrocosm-microcosm relationship between the atemporal/aspatial/divine and the temporary/limited/human, another characteristic of the Sabbath, that of the possibility of re-enacting aspects of the divine, became available to the Kabbalist. Due to this specific belief in the correspondance between the divine and the human, the Kabbalist tradition did not consider the separation from Eden/nature/primordial time a still extant state of being. Rather, through the Sabbath practice, this chasm was being bridged on a weekly basis by the devout Kabbalist when, as part of the community of Israel, he was identified with the *Shekhinah* of the cosmic *Sefirot*.

According to Kabbalist teachings, during Sabbath, *Shekhinah* is reunited with *Tif’eret*, the Holy One: “On the Sabbath day, the lovers [Tif’eret and Shekhinah] have returned to each other face to face.”¹³ The erotic imagery used to suggest the intimate reunion between the people of Israel and the divine principle was very important: it visualized the equilibration of cosmic principles in anthropomorphic terms, and as such it justified the importance accorded to marital intercourse during the Sabbath. The husband and wife reproduced in their lovemaking a similar if sublimated divine activity, and thus they were both transformed by the ritual and were transformative of the divine, i.e. had *theurgical* powers.

Framed in this Kabbalistic mythos, the detailed advice *Iggeret ha-kodesh*’s anonymous author gives to his Kabbalist brothers regarding when, how, and for what purpose to engage in marital intercourse makes more sense. For the scholars, consciously subsuming every ritual of life to the higher goal of redeeming and restoring the divine, “(the Kabbalist scholar) consummate(d) sexual union with his wife (...) for the sake of heaven.” Diligent in their theurgical pursuits, the Kabbalists devised and implemented a complex process of sanctification of life’s rituals: eating, washing, even making love. Moreover, these rituals, when performed at the most opportune time, i.e. the Sabbath, took on an added layer of sanctity, they were mythicized¹⁴ to such a degree that when being performed with

⁷ Ibidem, 65.

⁸ Cf. Mircea Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.

⁹ Ibidem, 86.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 84.

¹¹ Kabbalah Class Course pack, 145c.

¹² Ibidem, 145b.

¹³ Ibidem, 148, 7b.

¹⁴ “Not only is the case that the kabbalists presume that what God does affects Humanity just as what humanity does affects God, but the very imaging of the one reflects the imaging of the other. The ritualization of myth and

the right intention, they helped engender and empower the divine. Marital intercourse on Sabbath night, the prerogative and the obligation of the Kabbalist scholar bypassed the trappings of the mere satiation of one's sexual desires, becoming a means of participating in the Kabbalistic redemption myth.

The questions that will drive this present project are grouped around the theme of the Sabbath night marital intercourse as *hieros gamos*, as an *imitation dei*, and the possible connections between this activity taking place during a "sanctified time" and the restoration, through sexual union, of the primordial androgyne, the created being closer to the divine. Is there an equivalent, a necessary condition here: i.e. does the balancing of the feminine and masculine attributes of the divine result in a changed perception of time (qualitative dimension of time) which then makes possible the annihilation of time (and space) and the dissolution of the self unto the divine? Are the androgyne status and condition absolutely necessary for a return to the center, to the beginning? Is sanctified time always tied to divine androgyny and the flow of Edenic time?

By looking at several versions of the creation of the primordial androgyne, comparing and contrasting these myths and then elaborating on the mythicized ritual of marital intercourse, I attempt to formulate a final hypothesis based on this working premise: there is a connection between the sanctification of time in Classical Kabbalah and the increased attention/emphasis placed on the feminine aspect of divinity, on the Shekhinah and her anticipated reunion with her heavenly spouse. First however, it should be noted that, in the following pages, the androgyne is analyzed only in one of its many possible associations. For the sake of the argument here, only the association between the *primordial androgyne* and the *primordial time, illud tempus* (and possibly the redemption time) will be discussed.

*The Bible*¹⁵ details the versions of the creation of the first human being destined to inherit and steward the world of creation as follows:

So God created humankind in his image,
In the image of God he created them;
Male and female he created them .

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply (. . .)"¹⁶

Against this initial "simultaneous" creation of the "male and female" the second creation version posits a different story:

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (. . .) Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."¹⁷

Searching among the animals of the field and the birds of the sky which man, at his request had named, the Lord God finds no suitable partner and helper for him,

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

the mythicization of ritual are interweaving patterns of mystical piety in the kabbalistic sources." Wolfson, Elliot, "Coronation of the Sabbath Bride", in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 6, 302.

¹⁵ The edition used here is *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Edition with The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. Ed. Wayne A. Meeks. Harper Collins Publishers: 1989.

¹⁶ Genesis 1.27-28. *The Harper Collins Study Bible: New Revised Edition with The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*.

¹⁷ Genesis 2.7-8.

“This at last is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
This one should be called Woman,
For out of Man this one was taken.”¹⁸

Later in Genesis, “humankind” follows the divine prerogative; is “fruitful and multiplies” and reproduces itself by creating progeny that is itself in the “image of God”.

This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Humankind” when they were created. When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.¹⁹
It is important to notice the change of the female/ the woman/Eve’s ontological status when her creation story changes. In the first version, she is (possibly) half the image of God, and as close to the divine as the male/man/Adam is. In the second version, she is twice removed from God: she is created from a man’s body, albeit a sacred part, but she no longer “mirrors” the divine in equal measure with the primordial man.²⁰

These two competing stories are present in one degree or another in most religious traditions. The most important element to note in the first biblical version is that the androgyne image belongs to the divine, and the simultaneously created beings mirror it: “male and female he created them.” In the second creation story, it is Adam himself who is potentially androgynous even though he was created from “the dust of the ground.” The divine androgyne is not presented here as the primordial model, but the first created human being is himself, from the onset, encompassing his female counterpart, not only in image, but in “flesh and bone.”

In “The Symposium,” Plato seems to combine these two versions:

The original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two, as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and a union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which once had a real existence, but is now lost, and the word "Androgynous" is only preserved as a term of reproach. In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; one head with two faces looking in opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond. He could walk upright as men do now, backwards or forwards as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace (.....)

Zeus (.....) cut them in two like a sorb-apple²¹ which is halved for pickling.

After the division, the two parts of man (the Androgyne), each desiring his other half, came together and throwing their arms around one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one; they were on the point of dying from hunger and self-neglect because they did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate, man or woman, as we call

¹⁸ Genesis 2.21-23.

¹⁹ Genesis 5.1-3. It might be important to note here (for later investigation) that when Adam and Eve’s first two sons were born, no such mention was made. Of course the difference can be attributed to a different scribe/author. Nevertheless, it is intriguing that of the many daughters and sons that the primordial couple “engendered”, only this third offspring earns the right to be being likened to his father –and mother- and to the God who created them in Its image.

²⁰The amazing semantic and semiotic changes that happen during translations should be noted at this point. When the word *tsela*, which can mean both “side” and “rib” is translated as the later, the whole gender balance shifts dramatically. If Eve is being created from Adam’s rib, she comes from his “inside”, seemingly from an easily spared anatomical part, so she can be construed as having no physical or spiritual likeness to and/or ability to resonate and express God, unless, of course, she was made in God’s other half image, and Adam had already been modeled on the male half of the divine. (In my readings so far, I have not yet come across any sources proposing such an argument; this does not mean, of course, that such an argument does not exist.) If Eve is made from Adam’s “side” than a certain physical likeness to the creator is immediately implied.

²¹ The fruit of the European tree *Sorbus Domestica*.

them--being the sections of entire men or women--and clung to that. They were being destroyed when Zeus, in pity of them, invented a new plan. He turned the parts of generation round to the front, for this had not always been their position, and they sowed the seed no longer as hitherto like grasshoppers, in the ground, but in one another; and after the transposition the male generated in the female in order that by mutual embraces of man and woman they might breed and the race might continue.²² Although the two halves come together “face to face” so that they can share “mutual embraces” and continue the race, “sow(ing) the seed in a more affectionate, loving manner, the union of the two parts of the androgyne is done primarily “so that the race might continue.” The distinction between the creator and the created is still abysmal, their cosmic destinies apart.

Not so in the Jewish mystical tradition. Inspired by a variety of cosmogonies, and undergoing a restructuring of the correspondences between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the above and the below, the rabbinic tradition and then later, the classical Kabbalah, gradually added more mythical layers to the story of creation and to the agency of the created. In the rabbinic haggadic creation myth, God asks the angels for advice as to whether to create man, and both the angels and the earth to which they had flown in order to gather dust to create man, are adamantly against it. Nevertheless, God creates Adam from dust he himself collects, and after the latter experiences a short, unhappy union with Lilith, his first wife, God decides to gift him with a better mate:

I will not make her from the head of the man, lest she carry her head high in arrogant pride; not from the eye, lest she be wanton-eyed; not from the ear, lest she be wanton eared; not from the neck, lest she be insolent, not from the mouth, lest she be a tattler; not from the heart, lest she be inclined to envy; not from the hand, lest she be a meddler; not from the foot, lest she be a gadabout. I will form her from a chaste portion of the body.²³

Created in this manner, Eve does not have an “identical origin” with her husband, and unlike Lilith, she cannot claim equal rights with him. She is hence made from “a chaste portion of (his) body” with many precautions being taken to prevent her from developing any spiritual flaws. As such, she is at all times connected, and subordinate to him, and because she has been created from man, twice removed from God.

The 13th century book, *Sefer-ha-Zohar (The Book of Splendor)* distinctly emphasizes not only the importance of a simultaneous “male and female” creation, but also the mystical idea that God cannot be correctly perceived unless s/he is a balance of both male and female:

Male and female He created them.
From here we learn:
Any image that does not embrace male and female
Is not a high and true image.(...)
The Blessed Holy One does not place His abode
In any place where male and female are not found together.(...)
A human being is only called Adam
When male and female are as one.²⁴

The main character of *The Zohar*, Rabbi Simeon, explains this passage to his companions in mythic, theurgical terms. Adam comprised the male and the female not only in his name, but in his body, too: Eve was fastened to his side. Upon awakening from the legendary slumber, the male Adam and his new wife saw each other face to face:

(before this) man was yet imperfect, for only when Eve was made perfect, was he then made perfect, too. Further proof is that the word *va-yisgor* [and he closed], there occurs (...) the letter *samekh*, which

²² Benjamin Jowet, trans. *Great Books of the Western World*, Chptr. 7, 243.

²³ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, chptr. 1, qtd, in *The Other Bible*: William Barnstone, Ed. HarperCollins Publishers. San Francisco, 31.

²⁴ *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, 55-56.

signifies “support,” as much as to say that male and female now supported each other. Likewise do the lower world and the upper world sustain each other. Not until the lower world was made perfect, was the other world also made perfect.²⁵ It is in this Zoharic context that lovemaking, especially the marital intercourse during the Sabbath, achieves a theurgical import and the midnight *hieros gamos* are performed with the specific intent to perfect the lower world and to engender a similar perfectibility of the upper world. The simultaneous creation of both male and female, and the ensuing separation of the androgyne are foundational for the emerging Kabbalistic mythos. “Since Adam and Eve could not face each other, the human being was incomplete.”²⁶ Only when the two of them come together face to face is the human being complete, and enabled to perfect both the lower world and the world above. Moreover, the Kabbalist scholar permitted himself marital encounters only during the Sabbath, within the “space” of sanctified time: the Friday night *hieros gamos* were thus taking place for the sake of heaven.

Hieros gamos as a practice is not restricted to the Jewish mystical tradition alone, nor is the androgyne myth its particularity alone. Several striking similarities exist in fact between classical Kabbalah and classical Tantra: “God as manifestation, in the Qabbalah as in Tantra, is the mating androgyne, the two poles untied in absolute bliss. The Hindu parallels are striking: even that Eve is known to the Tripura Samhita as Adam’s left side.”²⁷ In addition, similarly to the Kabbalist scholar, the Vedic mystic, too, transcends the mere corporality of just physical union with his wife and appreciates the *gamos* as a play in the world below of a scene playing above between the creator- gods:

The husband’s exclamation in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, “I am Heaven thou art Earth,” follows the transfiguration of the wife into the Vedic sacrificial altar (VI, 4, 3). But in Tantrism woman ends by incarnating Prakriti (=nature) and the cosmic goddess, Shakti, while the male is identified with Shiva, the pure, the motionless, serene spirit. Sexual union (*maithuna*) is above all an integration of these two principles, cosmic nature energy, and spirit. As a tantric text expresses it: “The true sexual union is the union of the supreme Shakti with the spirit (*atman*); other unions represent only carnal relations with women” (*Kularnava Tantra*, V, 111-112). There is no longer any question of a physiological act, there is a mystical rite: the partners are no longer human beings, they are detached and free, like the gods.²⁸

In the Kabbalistic *hieros gamos*, the two lovers maintain their “human” condition, despite their theurgical powers; in Tantra, the lovers “are detached and free, like gods.” A second difference between these two great traditions is that the Kabbalah places special emphasis on the androgyne both as possible above, in the divine, and reconstructed below, in the marital relationship of the scholar and his wife on the Sabbath night. Repeatedly mentioned is the agency of the couple in engendering the encounter of the divine male with his Shekhinah, and in creating potentialities for a process of multilayered redemption. This particular ideology, as expressed in the quintessential Kabbalistic work *The Zohar*, and its practical aspect, detailed in *Igeret Ha-Kodesh* raises a very interesting question about the particular shift in time perception during the Sabbath and the possible connections between this and the androgyne restoration activity of that evening.

To rephrase some of the questions posed earlier: in Kabbalah, is the adoption of the feminine attribute of the divine and the ensuing *hieros gamos*/ sacred marriage mythos of the Sabbath a *sine qua non* condition for the

²⁵ Gershom Scholem, ed. (a previous edition of the) *Zohar*. New York: Schocken, 1963. 31.

²⁶ *The Zohar* (Pritzker Edition) Danny Matt trans. 1:219.

²⁷ Zolla, Elemire. *The Androgyne- Reconciliation of Male and Female*, 21.

²⁸ Eliade, Mircea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Princeton University Press: Princeton. 171.

change in time perception and the estimated transcendence of time and space? How important is the androgyne? Is s/he important because of its primordial incipience? Is the mystical, spiritual and physical return of the adept to a state similar to that of the androgyne/the primordial being -who was closer to “the beginning” and lived briefly in a state of sinlessness- the best, the most complete way to approach the divine, the ultimate source? Possibly, for in the above surveyed traditions, the androgyne in both forms, as image of the divine and a male-female created being, was chronologically, ontologically and epistemologically closer to the divine than to the gendered human being. This extreme proximity, the first moment after the separation, the incipience of the created from the creator, is sought after and longed for by various mystics in order to experience the divine.

When such encounters or theophanies are about to happen, the Zohar announces them through “code phrases,” expressions that catch the attention of the companions in the main story and function as signposts for the reader. As Israel’s relationship to God is constantly described in erotic terms, the phrases used to incite the interest of the mystics and help them along divine restoration are erotically charged. The awakening of the world below to a higher level of cosmic consciousness, “to its essence and destiny,”²⁹ was multilayered and gradual, taking the form of love expressed towards the studying of the Torah, of God and, by extension, all the *mizvot* which, through repetition, are sublimated and transcended becoming acts in the larger drama of cosmic redemption. Therefore, even lovemaking, as a ritual to engender such grand restoration was performed and experienced as a modality to induce

“itaruta de’letata” (awakening below) which in turn awakens the different sefirot in the world of the divinity, their subsequent union causing the descent of the divine flow and blessing to the Kabbalists in particular to the lower world in general. In the language of Zohar, this awakening is termed “itaruta de’leila” (awakening above).³⁰

Eden and Edenic state, most endearingly associated with the initial moments of divine grace, had a special status in Zoharic telos. The Kabbalists conceived them as moments when humankind had an expanded consciousness, a greater ability to see the greater scheme of cosmic design. The key phrases that appear periodically in The Zohar are used to “awaken” and “arouse” the mystic’s mind and take his intentions to a higher level. Seemingly, as the sefirot is androgynous, the marital intercourse during the Sabbath and the reconstruction of an androgynous state of being, also recreates such a primordial moment and time and is inscribed as one of the rituals to bring about *tikkum olam*. A return to an androgyne like state, both in form (the Kabbalist and his wife on the Sabbath night) and in content (the male mystic taking on female attributes, his wife taking on some male ones; their bodies’ micro- sefirot balanced and arousing a similar balancing of a macro-sefirot with both female and male characteristics) seems to be the only way to bring about a balance of the opposites, and transcend dialectic tensions by restoring the divine, then cleaving to it in a return to the primordial moment that marked the creation of humankind.

From the postmodern 21st century vantage point, such a quest seems pioneering, and the insights into human psychology surprisingly accurate. How else can a return to the center, to the origin of creation, in those traditions who so believe, can be better, more fully expressed than in the most completely gendered relationship, that between a man and a woman? After all, such a “return” promises much more than a return to the ontological source; it promises an understanding of the whole, an ability one had when close to the divine, before tasting from the tree

²⁹ Melila Hellner-Eshed, “If You Wake and Rouse Love: The Language of Awakening and Arousal in the Zohar,” in *A River Issues from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar*, 1, (translation in progress).

³⁰ Ibidem.

of knowledge. The possible connections between the high price paid to acquire knowledge and the ensuing branching dichotomies of thought, present themselves quite appropriately here; before these humanly conceived boundaries, dialectic pairs, systems and ideological tensions, knowledge of and proximity to the divine implicitly meant partaking with It of absolute knowledge. Childbearing and golem creations apart, the limits of human knowledge came without the power to replicate the divine in its creating endeavors. Having tasted from the forbidden knowledge (the nature of which differs greatly in various traditions), the creation “creates” a first dichotomy between him and herself and them and the divine. In actuality, one can only assess, observe, attempt to imitate in actions that which is without his/herself, separate, distinct and most of the time aloof.

A redressing of this primordial dichotomy is then of utmost importance. The seeker, the Kabbalist scholar in this example, will return to *illud tempus* by reuniting dialectical pairs, and undoing dichotomies. Essential for the articulation of such an ideology is the Kabbalistic notion of the Shekhinah as the feminine element of the Godhead. The mythos it espouses then clearly, and quite logically, establishes the path to restoring the whole created world together with its creator to a state of “undividedness,” of perfect union of the male and female, of the opposites:

Ce qui caractérise la conception cabalistique, c’est l’insistance sur l’obtenir une relation harmonieuse entre principes opposés, dans l’existence séparée est indispensable au bien être de l’univers entier.³¹

This perfect union of the opposites while maintaining their discrete separateness might seem contradictory. In fact, the Zoharic mythos, and the Kabbalistic tradition build around it, is anything but. And at this point a reconsideration of a term used throughout this project is necessary. In Kabbalah, the term androgyne has a double meaning: it refers both to the feminine and male characteristics inherent in both the male and the female, be s/he human or divine, and to the coming together of the composite human beings or divine entities into one (temporary) unit.

The centrality of thought in the *Iggeret* explains why arousing one’s wife is so important for the male mystic. Since each partner is connected symbolically with the male and the female sefirot, the thought or intention of each is equally powerful. (...) Sexuality is to be divested of its purely physical aspect and endowed with transcendent spirituality.³²

Going back to the idea of the mystical language used in *The Zohar* to engender the mystic’s right thought or intention and the prevalence of such mystical summons throughout the book, the following thing should be noted. The reclaiming of an androgynous state, a balanced state of the self as composed of both feminine and masculine attributes is as important to the Kabbalists as initiating a similar balancing process in the world on high. The profound consideration they gave to even the smallest thoughts and gestures, and the importance they placed on the expanding human consciousness so as to transcend the mere functional and procreative goals of human existence, definitely recalibrates my earlier hypothesis.

The mythical idea of the sexually complementary (feminine- masculine) divinity and the application of this ideology in the hieros gamos practices of the Kabbalistic community equals the transcendence of both time and space and the encounter with the Divine. In this context then, the androgyne, both human and divine, stands as a metaphor for the union of the opposites, for their continuous and conscientious balancing on both the human and the

³¹ Moshe Idel, “Metaphores and pratiques sexuelles dans la cabale” in Charles Mopsik’s *Lettre sur la saintete: Le secret de la relation entre l’homme et la femme dans la cabale*. Collection « Les Dix Paroles » Verdier. 1986.

³² David Biale. *Eros and the Jews- From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America*. Basic Books: Harper Collins Publishers: New York. 1992. 107, 111.

divine level. Rites and rituals, space and time, are all conscribed into the weave of a complex theurgical mythos of which “the reapers of the field” are constantly aware of, and intent on restoring a balanced cosmic dimension.

No soul, and consequently no human being exists in the full sense of the word, without being male and female at the same time. Gender is a cleaver, which creates a devastating split between two halves destined to be united. Sexually, as a drive for amorous union, is an attempt to overcome the damage caused by this primordial disassociation. Thus the individual does not bear a gender (masculine or feminine), i.e. a separation that marks him/her and assigns him/her to the destiny of a man or a woman; rather the separation – the gender- is his or her momentary and accidental condition, which must be overcome.³³

Only when and where a man and a woman, both exhibiting feminine and masculine attributes come together, does “The Blessed Holy One place His abode” nearby. Only when the human agents exhibit and act with an extended awareness of the complexity and fluidity of life in its non-gendered form does the return to Eden and an Edenic-like state take place.

But what exactly does such a return entail?

Contemporary Kabbalists liken the non-mystical perception of the world to seeing only the smallest branches of the tree (of knowledge) tearing through the multilayered fabric of reality and believing that reality is thus divided into categories, when all along, behind the blinding curtains, the essence of knowledge and understanding stand as one. From the myriad ways their preceding teachers designed to lift these curtains, the mythicized rituals were highly effective. Among them, the Friday night hieros gamos of the Kabbalist and his wife were highly effective in transcending the sense most commonly associated with the mundane, the material world, that of touch. Sublimated, incorporated in the theurgical mythos, the sense of touch and the marital intercourse helped engendered an elevated consciousness and an increased awareness of the co-existence of the opposites in both the human world and in the divine.

The ultimate erotic gratification is not derived from the desire for the other because the other has become fully integrated into oneself. (.....) Each and every Sabbath eve provides a temporal context for the reenactment of this mythic drama, the overcoming of differentiation. (...) In the moment of the union, the bride is transformed into the crown of her husband, the symbol that most fully expresses the overcoming of the gender dichotomy characteristic of the ultimate redemption.³⁴

Thus paradoxically, even when through hieros gamos, the Kabbalists reconstituted the primordial androgyne, (both in its male and female human forms) and balanced the human and the divine androgyne sefirot, the ultimate understanding granted to them after transcending these “differentiations”, and “dichotomies” was of an even more profound nature: at the beginning, in *illud tempus* and at the end, in *olam haba*, All was/will be One.

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³³ Charles Mopsik, *Sex of the soul: The Vicissitudes of Sexual Difference in Kabbalah*, Cherub Press: Los Angeles 2005, 31-32.

³⁴ Wolfson, Elliot, R. “Coronation of the Sabbath Bride”, in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 6, 343.

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