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Between Magic and Religion -
Ashkenazi Hasidic Piety

Hasidic Ashkenazi literature is known to scholars of Jewish religion as one of the most prolific sources of medieval Jewish magic or magical beliefs. This is all the more astonishing as the non esoteric writings of the *Hasidey Ashkenaz* represent a rather traditional Jewish piety as known to us from talmudic sources. Considering this duality of an almost traditional Jewish piety on the one hand and very distinct magic tenets on the other, we may ask whether the *Hasidey Ashkenaz* themselves perceived any difference between magic and religion. There are indeed a number of modern historians of religion who completely deny the validity of such a distinction, for in most historical religions magic and religion are in fact intertwined to a certain degree, thus permitting almost no differentiation between the two.

It was Erwin R. Goodenough in his monumental opus on "Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period"¹ who rigidly denied any justification of a distinction between magic and religion, as in his view this distinction was a subjective value judgment, not an objective criterion. He formulated his opinion in the following drastic manner:

"Thus the contrast between religion and magic appears to be the reflection of a personal value judgement, not an objectively observable distinction."²

" »Magic« seems to me then to be a term of judgment, not of classification. It is used subjectively, not objectively [...]".³

Should one conclude from Goodenough's statement that it would be better to refrain altogether from all attempts to assess of any differences between magic and religion ? My answer would be 'no!' Instead, I believe we have to put the question of the relation between magic and religion in a different manner. Instead of asking whether there is a difference between magic and religion, we should inquire, to what degree is the element we usually call magic integrated into the religious beliefs of the religion under discussion? That is, we should clarify whether the magical element is an integral part of the

¹ *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, NY-Toronto 1953, Vol. II.

² *op.cit.* vol. 2, p. 156.

³ *op.cit.* p. 159.

central religious thought itself or an extraneous element added to the main line of the religious thought in question.

Aiming to find an answer to this question, we should investigate each religion individually according to its own intrinsic standards and ideas and thus establish what the actual inherent relation between magic and religion in each individual religion is before offering overall statements which claim validity for religion in general. Our first question should be, therefore: are there criteria which might help us to arrive at a sound judgment on this problem regarding Jewish religion?

Is there any common denominator for all phases of Judaism which could serve as a touchstone in this matter? Can we find any basic idea in Judaism through all phases of its development defining the essence of the relationship between man and God, defining the fundamental religious issue?

In the first chapter of the Bible we do indeed find a statement describing this relationship between man and his Creator in a way which was seemingly fundamental to all phases of Judaism. A. Jellinek, when publishing Shabtai Donolos *Perush na'ase adam be-zalmenu*, declared this statement to be the most important and most fruitful of the Mosaic religion.⁴ I refer to the well known words of the Creator saying that man will be created in the image of God:

"And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1,26).

This basic Jewish tenet expresses a pattern of dual relationship between God and man. On the one hand God as the creator is superior to man, and on the other hand man is supposed to be the image of the Lord. Since Talmudic times, Jewish teachers have usually interpreted and defined this contradictory relationship in the following way: Man is not the image of God by nature or from birth. On the contrary, he has the duty to struggle all his life to become the image of God through his religious efforts.

This fundamental interpretation of the image-problem in terms of a merit-system is common to nearly all phases of Jewish religion. According to this pattern of interpretation man has to bridge the existing gap between God and man by his own efforts, thus finally becoming the image of God. Whereas this meritorial pattern of interpretation is common to nearly all Jewish thinkers, the actual realization of this goal, however, is seen quite differently by them as it is related to the various major trends of Jewish thought. The realization of this aim depends, within the various systems of Jewish thought, on two changing factors: namely, on theology on the one side and on anthropology on the other. In other words, in a philosophy conceiving man as the image of

⁴ A. Jellinek, *Ginze Hokhmat ha-Qabbala*, Leipzig 1854 (Reprint Jerusalem 1969), p. VII; and cf. S. Belkin, *In His Image*, 1960; K.E. Grözinger, *Der Mensch als Ebenbild Gottes - im Wandel der jüdischen Tradition*, in: *Nordisk Judaistik*, X,2, p. 63-74.

God, both, -theology and anthropology-, are closely related to each other. Every change in theology demands a respective change in anthropology and vice versa.

In order to arrive at a sound judgement on the initial question of this essay, that regarding the piety of the *Hasidey Ashkenaz*, I shall first compare some differing Jewish realizations of both theology and anthropology and ask by what means according to them man might achieve his goal of becoming the image of the Lord. Only then will we be able to answer the question, whether magic is an essential religious means in *Hasidut Ashkenaz* or only an additional or even alien element within this conception of Judaism.

a) Man as the image of God in early talmudic interpretation.

In Talmudic-Midrashic literature, God is depicted in a distinct anthropomorphical manner and this in spite of the Rabbis' awareness of an essential difference between God and man. The Talmudic God acts like a human being: He loves, He punishes, He rescues men with His mighty hand and even dons *tefillin*⁵. From this, we may conclude that there is a common denominator between God and man, a realm where they can be compared with each other, and which can serve man as a link and a means in his goal of becoming the image of God. This common denominator is ethics! That is to say, the Talmudic sages believed that man may become the image of God by acting morally like God. The Midrash *Tanhuma* puts this in the following way:

"The Holy One, blessed be He, is called »Just« and »True«. Therefore He has created man in His image (*zelem*), that man might be *just* and *true* like God himself!"⁶

In a similar way the Talmud⁷ describes desired human behaviour as an imitation of God's own deeds. In the same manner as God clothes the naked, man should clothe the naked, as God visits the sick, man should visit the sick and so forth. That is, man becomes the image of God by *imitatio dei*. By acting like God, man is in the likeness of his Creator. This traditional ethical version of man becoming the image of God by observing the biblical commandments is still to be found in the *Sefer Hasidim*:

" »And God said: Let us make man in our image« (Gen. 1,2). Why [did Scripture use the words] »let us make man in our image« in the plural form and did not say »I will make«? In order to imply to man that he himself should make man in the image and likeness namely, whenever man studies Torah, which was given from

⁵ *bBerakhot* 6a.

⁶ *Tanhuma Bereshit* § 7, ed. Jerusalem 1973, p. 8a.

⁷ *bSota* 14a.

Heaven, for its own sake. And about him who fears Heaven it is said: »and that this fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not« (Ex. 20,20). And further it is written about them: »I have said ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High« (Ps. 83(2),6). But if they do not observe the Torah it is written: »when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image« (Ps. 73,20) and [Scripture] says: »he is like the beasts that perish« (Ps. 49,12)."⁸

For the Talmudic sages as for the author of *Sefer Hasidim*, therefore, it is primarily the ethical behaviour which enables man to become the image of God.

b) Man as the image of God in early Hekhalot literature

In early *Hekhalot* literature, God is still portrayed in anthropomorphical terms. But here it is not ethical behaviour which makes God anthropomorph. Here it is His huge stature, His *Shi'ur Qoma*:

"R. Akiva said: He is like us, so to speak, but He is bigger than everything. And this is His glory that He has hidden from us."⁹

In the writings of *Hekhalot* literature God is depicted as a huge anthropomorphical mystical corpus sitting on His throne surrounded by the celestial hosts. God himself and all His hosts represent a pure and holy world of mystical fire and of singing entities.

In contrast to this pure and saintly divine world the terrestrial anthropomorph, that is man, lives in the impure material realm of flesh and blood, in complete contrast to the absolute purity of the divine world.

Here, if man wants to become the image of the Divine he has to purify himself, has to learn the celestial hymns, has to know all the celestial passwords or write them on his limbs¹⁰ and, finally, has to mount the celestial world. In a possibly later text related to *Hekhalot* literature, this basic idea that man has to adjust himself to the quality of the celestial world and has to undergo a total transformation of his terrestrial body is applied to Moses: His limbs have to be transformed into torches of fire, his strength must become like the strength of the celestial beings, his eyes like the wheels of the *Merkava* and his tongue like the tongues of the celestial singers. Only after this transformation, when he has become an image of the celestial beings, may he approach the divine throne and communicate with God.¹¹ Henoch's

⁸ *Sefer Hasidim*, Parma, J. Wistinetzki, Frankfurt a.M. 1924, §656, p. 191.

⁹ Schäfer, P. (ed.), *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen 1981, § 352.

¹⁰ *Synopse*, §§ 566. 569.

¹¹ Cf. K.E. Grözinger, *Musik und Gesang in der Theologie der frühen jüdischen Literatur*, Tübingen 1982, pp. 308-314 and 315-318; id. Singen und ekstatische Sprache in der frühen jüdischen Mystik, *JSJ* 11(1980), p. 66-77. Similarly Moses is cleansed before mounting heaven that

transformation into the highest angel is similarly depicted in the so-called third Book of Enoch.¹²

However, not only Moses and Henoch had to undergo some kind of adaptation to the heavenly realms. Every ordinary *Yored Merkava* has to prove himself capable of singing the celestial songs¹³, using the divine names in theurgy and magic¹⁴, thus applying the means by which man gains divine power¹⁵. The transfer of divine power to man is most evident in the magical practice of writing divine names on all kinds of edible and potable substances. Man thereby incorporates them and wins divine power¹⁶ with all its wonderful results, transforming him into a new being.¹⁷ Regarding the transformation of Henoch-Metatron P. Schäfer arrives at the same conclusion: "But this Metatron is not an angel like the other angels at all. It is Henoch, the human being, who has been transformed into an angel. *Henoch-Metatron* is a prototype *yored merkava*. His example shows how close man can come to God, so close that he almost resembles him, that Aher-Elisha ben Abuya could mistake him for God, that only a missing letter distinguishes his name from God's name."¹⁸

Besides this antropomorphical conception of God as a *Shi'ur Qoma* there is a layer of an onomatological conception of God in Hekhalot literature as I have shown elsewhere.¹⁹ According to this conception, God himself is His name, God and His name are identical. In the name of God lies divine power. By transferring this name or parts of it or permutations of it into the hands of angels and men, they can participate in the divine power. When man uses

he may be equal to the angels, *bYoma* 4a.b; *Pesikta Rabbati* Par. 20, cf. K.E. Grözinger, *Ich bin der Herr dein Gott*, Bern-Frankfurt a.M. 1976, pp. 143-44; and cf. P. Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen 1984, pp.171-81.

¹² 3 *Enoch*, H. Odeberg, NY 1973, ch. 15, p. 20 (hebr.sect.); P. Schäfer, *Synopse*, Tübingen 1981, § 19.

¹³ Schäfer, *Synopse*, § 591; Grözinger, *Musik*, pp. 310-315; Schäfer, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*, Tübingen 1991, S.85.

¹⁴ Schäfer, *op.cit.* p. 39-40; 85-90.

¹⁵ Schäfer, *op.cit.* p.67 f.

¹⁶ Schäfer, *op.cit.*, p. 88-91. 104-105.

¹⁷ Schäfer, *op. cit.*, p.108-110.

¹⁸ *op.cit.* p. 144 f.: "Aber dieser Metatron ist gerade kein Engel wie alle anderen Engel, sondern der in einen Engel verwandelte Mensch Henoch. Henoch-Metatron als der Prototyp des *yored merkava* zeigt, daß der Mensch Gott sehr nahe kommen kann, so nahe, daß er ihm beinahe ähnlich ist, daß Aher-Elisha' ben Avuya ihn versehentlich für Gott halten konnte, daß nur ein fehlender Buchstabe seinen Namen von dem Namen Gottes unterscheidet."

¹⁹ The names of God and the Celestial Powers: Their Function and Meaning in the Hekhalot Literature, in: *Proceedings of the First International Conference of the History of Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan, Jerusalem 1987, pp. 53-69; German in: *FJB* 13(1985).

these divine names and incorporates them by eating or drinking them he, like Metatron, becomes similar to God and thus is the *imago dei*. Man then resembles Metatron, though he is, to a lesser degree, a »Minor YHWH«. This onomatological stratum of Hekhalot literature is, as we shall see later, the forerunner of Eleazar of Worms' doctrine of language. But Eleazar of Worms created a system and a full blown doctrine, of what is not yet explicit in Hekhalot literature, but mere practice.

Even if Hekhalot texts do not dwell expressly on the "*imago* terminology" and its basic biblical proof, and in spite of the fact that their theology and anthropology differ from Talmudic literature, both concepts of Hekhalot literature, -the anthropomorphical as well as the onomatological one-, again present the same structure of man becoming the image of God, namely, by *imitatio dei*. There is a common denominator between God and man, and man has the religious duty to come close to God, to become his image by imitating the divine world.

c) Man as the image of God in medieval thought

In medieval Judaism, this basic structure of the relation between man and God was retained, but only by a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of theology and anthropology. This total reinterpretation of the image-doctrine was necessary because of an absolute crisis the doctrine began to suffer in the 9/10th century. This crisis was brought about by the philosophical rationalism of Rav Sa'adya Gaon. Like the later Jewish Platonists and Aristotelians, Rav Sa'adya removed every, even the slightest trace of anthropomorphism from his theology. Sa'adya formulated a totally abstract theology, leaving nothing in common between man and God. Sa'adya thus very vehemently negated the notion that man could be the image or likeness of God in even the slightest respect, as there can be no image and likeness with God whatsoever. The central Jewish dogma that man was created in the image of God was herewith abolished.²⁰

"All such expressions as refer to God in terms of substance and accident, or, for that matter, in terms of attributes of substance and accident do not really apply to Him in any degree, be it large or small. For it is established that the Creator (be He blessed and exalted) is the Creator of everything. Hence there is left nothing, be it substance or accident, or any of their attributes, which could be applied to Him, it being recognized and clearly established that He, the Creator, has made everything. Obviously, it is impossible and

²⁰ cf. *Emunot we-De'ot*, II,8.9; ed. Yosef Qafih, Jerusalem 1970, p.96-98; trsl. Ibn Tibbon, Josefuw 1878, p.48a. 48b; ed. D. Slucki, Leipzig (Reprint Jerusalem) pp. 48-9; German translation J. Fürst, Leipzig 1845, p. 160.164.; cf. Grözinger, *Der Mensch als Ebenbild Gottes*, above n.4

absurd to speak of Him in terms of the thing which He created."

"the verse »And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him« (Gen. 1,27). I explain it in the sense of bestowing dignity and honour upon man; i.e. in the same way as all lands belong unto Him, and yet He honoured one land in particularly calling it »My Land«, [...] This phrase must, therefore, be taken in the sense of special distinction, not as anthropomorphic."²¹

Yet, the philosophical and mystical thinkers following Sa'adya did not comply with this abrogation of the biblical *imago*-doctrine. While they all basically accepted the new formulation of the theology, they tried to fill up the gap thus created on the divine side by substituting mediating instances which could form the divine side of the *imago*-partnership. And at the same time they reformulated anthropology in such a way that it fitted into the new divine substitute in the *imago*-relationship.

I shall outline just one medieval example of this new approach towards the *imago*-doctrine before progressing to the *Hasidey Ashkenaz* themselves, that is, to the solution Eleazar of Worms offered. The most impressive and at the same time typically philosophical solution to the *imago*-problem in the Middle Ages was the one given by the Aristotelian Maimonides.

At the very beginning of *More Nevukhim*, Maimonides discusses the *imago*-doctrine. Following Sa'adya, he stresses that God is not definable in corporeal categories, but as opposed to Sa'adya he nonetheless wants to retain the *imago*-doctrine and therefore reformulates anthropology so that it will comply with the new theology. Since God himself and the mediating instances between Him and His world are not bodies, Maimonides reformulates anthropology in a corresponding manner. It is no longer the human body that is the essence of the human being and which could enable him to be the image of the Divine. According to Maimonides, there is now an incorporeal "category" which makes up the essence of man and enables him to be the image of the Divine. This new essential of humanity is, in Maimonides' view, the human *intellect*:

"As man's distinction consists in a property which no other creature on earth possesses, viz., intellectual perception, in the exercise of which he does not employ his senses, nor move his hand or his foot, this perception has been compared -though apparently, not in truth - to the Divine perception, which requires no corporeal organ. On this account, i.e., on account of the Divine intellect with

²¹ Translation of A. Altmann, *Three Jewish Philosophers*, ed. by H. Lewy, A. Altmann and I. Heinemann, NY 1969, pp. 84-86.

which man has been endowed, he is said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty, but far from it be the notion that the Supreme Being is corporeal, having material form."²²

It is intellect that makes man a human being and makes him different from animals. Thus, only if man has a developed intellect is he *Zelem Elohim*, the image of God. In the words of Maimonides:

"Some have been of the opinion that by the Hebrew *zelem*, the shape and figure of a thing is to be understood, and this explanation led men to believe in the corporeality [of the Divine Being]: for they thought that the words »Let us make man in our *zelem*« (Gen 1,26) implied that God had the form of a human being, i.e., that He had a figure and shape, and that, consequently, He was corporeal. [...]

The term *zelem* [...] signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is a particular being. In man the »form« is that constituent which gives him human perception: and on account of this intellectual perception the term *zelem* is employed in the sentences »In the *zelem* of God he created him« " (Gen. 1,27)²³.

When man in his intellectual development has achieved the highest perfection, this being the state of prophecy, he is entitled to be called 'image'. But as there is no possibility of direct contact between man and God, it is the mediating Aristotelian *Active Intellect* who will represent the divine side in this *imago*-partnership as Maimonides states:

"I have shown you that the intellect which emanates from God unto us is the link that joins us to God. You have it in your power to strengthen that bond, if you choose to do so, or weaken it [...]"²⁴

That is to say, man has to imitate this celestial entity in his own intellection, which mediates between him and the Godhead. The *imitatio dei* is, so to speak, the imitation of the celestial divine intellect, which is the Aristotelian *Active Intellect*. Maimonides' mystically inclined follower, Abraham Abulafia, even perceived the human and the divine intellect as being unified and identical:

" »image« in this context is a name which designates the natural form, which is [the form of] the species, and it is the soul, which is the human rational intellection, which is similar to the divine [rational intellection] with which it is united and from which its existence [stems] and from It is its being, providence and perpetuity. This is why it is written that [man] was created in God's »image«,

²² *More Nevukhim*, I,1; transl. M. Friedländer, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, London 1925, p.14.

²³ *More Nevukhim*, I,1; transl. Friedländer, p. 13.

²⁴ *More*, III, 51; transl. Friedländer, p. 386; and. cf. II, 12 and 37.

which is the name of the soul which survives after the death, the perpetuity of its survival depends upon its likeness to its Creator, concerning the intellection, the existence and the eternity and the dominion, until this image's name will be like the name of its Master, and it [image] is the special name of the *Intellectus Agens*, an image like His image, as it is written on it »and God created man in his Image, in the image of God He created him« . The duplication of these words hints to the Creator and to the creature, which is called with the name of the Creator; this fact hints that they [the Creator and the creature] are one entity, inseparable."²⁵

In Maimonides' philosophy, the doctrines of *imago dei* and of *imitatio dei* were thus transformed in such a way that it is now the human intellect which has to imitate the divine intellect in order to become *Zelem Elohim*.

d) Man as the image of God in Eleazar of Worms' writings

Eleazar of Worms also proposed a reformulation of anthropology, comparable to the one undertaken by Maimonides, but a specific difference exists between the two. Whereas in the philosophy of Maimonides intellect is the constituent of humanity, in Eleazar's system it is language. In Eleazar's view, it is language which is the essential distinction between animals and man, not intellect, as according to Maimonides. Thus, it is language that gives man the ability to become *Zelem Elohim*.

Discussing the fact that the two grammatical forms of the Hebrew word for mouth, i.e. *peh* and *pi*, are formed by means of the two letters »*yud*« and »*he*«, which themselves make up God's own name »*yah*«, Eleazar puts the following question:

"Who has given man his mouth? It was the mouth of the Lord, *pi adonay*, who has given a mouth to the human being as it is written: »out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding« (Prov. 2,6), »the answer of the tongue is from the Lord« (Prov. 16,1) »[must I not take heed to speak] that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?« (Num. 23,12), »and the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth« (Num. 23,5), and it is written »I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God« (Num. 22,18)(24,13).

From here it follows: Regarding this that he has put a word into the mouth of Balaam, he calls this »the mouth of the Lord«. Conclude from this: man got his mouth from the mouth of the Lord and this is *YH* and the name [i.e. God] is thus totally mouth *pyhw* [*pihu*]. He is mouth.

²⁵ Or *ha-Sekhel*, quoted from M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany 1988, p. 7.

And why did [Scripture] point to the mouth? As man is like the animals in all respects - only regarding his mouth he is like the celestial beings. Therefore [Scripture] says: »Let us make man in our image«, by means of the Holy Language which is with the celestial beings.²⁶

Eleazar comes back to this point again when he states²⁷ that the five vowels of the Hebrew language were delivered only to the one creature which had been created as a *Zelem*.²⁸

We may conclude from this: In Eleazar's view it is the ability of man to speak that makes him a human being. But it is not simply the ability to use a language; more precisely, we should say it is the ability to use the Hebrew language which turns man into the image of God, and it is this language which enables man to attain the likeness of God. Elsewhere, Eleazar cites two verses from Psalm 8 to demonstrate to which high degree man may achieve the state of *Zelem Elohim*. In the Biblical text the angels ask the Lord:

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him? [...]" (v.4).

"For thou hast made him a little lower than God (*Elohim*)" (v.5).

By this, according to Eleazar, Scripture wants to teach us the following lesson:

"There is no creature that has not a spirit. But the most elevated and most capable spirit was bestowed only on man, this is the middle part [of the three parts of the soul which is the tongue²⁹], to speak in clear cut words, as it is written in [Scripture]: »For thou hast made him a little lower than God«, for he is image and likeness, *Zelem* and *Demut* [...]"³⁰

Like Maimonides, Eleazar is not speaking here in metaphors. The use of the Hebrew language, especially when studying the Torah, brings man closer to the celestial world. When man sits and utters the words of the Torah, the fire-like words from heaven will fall down upon him and will enflame the words coming forth from his mouth.³¹ The prototypical situation of such a mystical event was of course the revelation on Mt. Sinai. At that time, God's own language, his own words, came down and were heard in the world

²⁶ MS Munich 81, p. 139a.

²⁷ MS Munich 81, p.250b.

²⁸ a. cf. p. 261.

²⁹ cf. p. 10a.

³⁰ *Raziel*, Amsterdam 1702, p. 10b.

³¹ For this motif cf. K.E. Grözinger, Die Gegenwart des Sinai. Erzählungen und kabbalistische Lehrstücke zur Vergegenwärtigung der Sinaioffenbarung, in: *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 16(1988), p. 134-183.

through the mouth of Moses. Eleazar expresses the opinion that the words of man studying the Torah are nothing less than the words of God Himself, as in the hour when Moses delivered the Torah at Mount Sinai from the Mouth of the Lord unto Israel:

" »For the commandment is a candle and the Torah is light« (Prov. 6,23). Behold, the words of Torah are like a wick which is extinguished by somebody. And regarding the wick it is as follows: It touches the flame which is above it and the flame will descend on the wick via the smoke.

And so the words of Torah are compared to *Afalsemon*-oil and the fire jumps unto the oil. Similarly the fire of Torah which is in heaven jumps on the words which come forth from the mouth of Jonathan Ben Uzziel and on the Torah which comes forth from the mouth of R.Eliezer and R.Yehoshua and of Ben Azzay. [That is the intention of what is written:] And »Moses spake« (Ex. 19,19). From this one may conclude that He gave unto Moses might and strength and He helped him with His voice and melody, so that Moses heard it and in the same way he announced it to Israel."³²

According to Eleazar, the celestial angels thereupon exclaimed:

"He speaks like ourselves and is still alive."³³ And this is [the true sense of the biblical words]: »Let us make man in our image, after our likeness«."

I repeat, it is language, the Hebrew language, which enables man to be the image of God. Man is *Zelem Elohim* inasmuch as he is able to speak the same language through which God revealed the Torah on Mt. Sinai and by means of which He created the world. Speaking in the divine language means, therefore, using the creative divine language.

I shall come back to this point shortly. Before that, we should, however, look at the divine counterpart of the imago-doctrine in Eleazar's writings.

The doctrine saying that man is the image of God was, as we have seen, not conceived in reference to the essence of God himself. Man cannot be the image of God's essence, he can only be the image of the revealed side of the Godhead. According to Talmudic literature, man can be the image of God as far as he is an ethically acting person, as is God when He deals with His

³² MS Munich 81, p. 218b.

³³ cf. Dtn 5,23 and *Sode Razayya*, I. Kamelhar, Bilgoraj 1936, p. 46.

creation. In Maimonides' view, it is human intellect imitating the celestial *Active Intellect* which is the mediator between God and man. For Eleazar, it is the voice of the Lord which mediates between the Godhead and His creation. This voice, descending from above, is gradually differentiated into categories of creative words, into language and into words heard by the prophets.³⁴ In Maimonides' system it is intellect that has this function.

We may thus fairly conclude that the voice of the Lord in Eleazar's system has a similar function to the intellect in the system of Maimonides. That is to say, here we have to regard the voice of God as the adequate divine counterpart to man as the image of "God". It seems, therefore, that according to Eleazar, besides the *Kavod*³⁵, the language of God is one of the highest connecting links between God and man; therefore it is language which makes man an *imago dei*.

Having arrived at these conclusions, we may proceed to our final point, that is, the place of magic in Eleazar's system. I have already pointed to the fact that in all the Jewish views mentioned, i.e. Talmud, Hekhalot-Mysticism and Maimonides, man becomes the image of God by means of *imitatio dei*. Let us once more refer to Maimonides' intellectual concept. For him, *imitatio dei* means the development of human intellect, by which means man will become the image of God.

In support of this idea, Maimonides adduces the example of the sons of Adam whom he begot before his son Seth. In the first book of *More Nevukhim* Maimonides explains this as follows:

"Those sons [of Adam] who were born before [Seth] had not the human form in the true sense of the word, that is the image of man and his likeness about which it is written »in the image of God and in His likeness«. But with reference to Seth whom he had instructed and enlightened and who thus arrived at human perfection, it could rightly be said, »Adam begat [a son] in his likeness, in his image« (Gen 5,3). It is acknowledged that everyone who does not possess this 'form' is not human, but a mere animal in human shape [...]."³⁶

In Maimonides' view, man without a developed intellect is not a human

³⁴ cf. *Sode Razayya*, Kamelhar, p. 42-43.

³⁵ cf. J. Dan, *Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut Ashkenaz*, Jerusalem 1968; and E. Wolfson in this volume. It seems, therefore, that Eleazar continued the dual tradition of the Hekhalot literature, depicting the Godhead in an anthropomorphical way on the one hand and in a linguistic-onomatological one on the other. Both are, however, transferred here from God himself to a mediating instance.

³⁶ I,7; transl. Friedländer, p. 20.

being and therefore not in the »image and the likeness« of God. This is formulated even more clearly in the above quoted text by Abraham Abulafia, where he stresses that it is only »human rational intellection« which turns man into the image of God.

The human aim, according to Maimonides, should therefore be as follows:

"When you have arrived by way of intellectual research at a knowledge of God and His works, then commence to devote yourself to Him, try to approach Him and strengthen the intellect, which is the link that joins you to him."³⁷

Returning to Eleazar of Worms, we should expect that in his doctrine *imitatio dei* and becoming the image of God would mean using the creative divine language, performing miracles and creating creatures. I believe that we must indeed affirm this expectation. In his *Commentary on Sefer Yezira* Eleazar demands that man should not confine himself to merely studying the *Sefer Yezira*, but he should use it to create:

"On these the world is founded - be it for construction or for destruction. And for their sake this book was revealed to our father Abraham, that he may get knowledge of the work of the Lord and that he may bring forth every creation out of its root so that he may erect every work on its principle.

That is why the Lord has instructed him in the secret of everything, that he may bring forth out of them every creation and may bequeath it to his sons; 22 aspects (*panim*) in the mysterious work."³⁸

By saying this, Eleazar did not merely want to express his belief that man should bring forth only minor miraculous acts with the help of the holy letters. The creative activity of man should even be extended to the most precious creation God himself had produced, that is, to human beings.

In the Hebrew versions of the medieval *Ma'ase Buch* we are told that R. *Shemuel he-Hasid*, the founding father of the Hasidic movement, had created a human being. This creation was a nearly perfect man. It had only one defect - it could not speak.

"R. Shemuel Hasid c[r]eated a human being and wrote the word *EMeT* (truth) on his forehead.

³⁷ *More* III, ch. 51.

³⁸ MS Munich 81, p. 278a.

But this man which he had created could not speak, as speech is [the domain] of the Eternal Living (*Hey-'Olamim*).

And all the time when R. Shemuel Hasid made his exile-wanderings this man which he had created was with him and he wandered with him and served him like a servant who is serving his master."³⁹

The statement in this tale, that only God himself may bestow speech on a creature, is in perfect accordance with Eleazar's commentary on the prayers of the Synagogue. There, in his commentary on the "*Ha-Aderet we-ha-Emunah*"-litany, he maintains:⁴⁰

"He placed together [in the hymn commented upon there] »speech« and »knowledge«, for man has the knowledge to create a new creature according to the prescriptions of *Sefer Yezira*. But he cannot endow him with speech by means of the *Shem ha-meforash*, as only the Holy one blessed be He is able to do."

A descendant of *Yehuda he-Hasid* and author of the *Commentary on Sefer ha-Qoma* published by Gershom Scholem in his Hebrew book *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, stresses this opinion even more pointedly.

"The Holy one, may He be blessed, wanted to open all 50 gates of wisdom to Solomon. But the angels gathered and protested: »What is man, that Thou art mindful of him and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?« (Ps. 8,5).

Therefore the Holy One, may He be blessed, went and delivered to him [only] 49 gates but the 50th gate He did not reveal unto him, thus fulfilling the biblical saying: »Thou hast made him a little lower than God« (Ps. 8,6).

Therefore, behold, when a man is using *Sefer Yezira* to create a creature he has the might to create everything except one thing."⁴¹

We may safely conclude that this one thing is speech.

Finally, we may ask if Eleazar of Worms believed that man is merely allowed to create such a human being or whether he believed this to be a

³⁹ MS Frankfurt a.M. hebr. oct. 35, p. 95a; MS Brüll = Jerusalem oct. 3182; and. cf. S. Zfatman, *Ma'ase Bukh. Kawwim le-Demuto shel Genre be-Sifrut*, in: *Ha-Sifrut* 27(1978), p. 140.

⁴⁰ MS München 346, p. 98; and *Siddur R. Naftali Hirz Treves*, Thingen 1560, sheet 28, fol. 2b, quoted from G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, Tel Aviv 1948, p. 231; id., *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Princeton 1987, p.122, n.125 (German edn. *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbalah*, Berlin 1962, p. 109, n. 116).

⁴¹ G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 132; a. cf. the statement of R. Josef Ashkenazi a Safed Kabbalist from the 16th century: "Man can make a Golem which possesses a living soul by the power of his speech, but the higher soul (neshama) cannot be conferred by man because it is from the divine speech", M. Idel, *Golem*, p.71. A. Abulafia has made the same link between the imago-doctrine and *imitatio dei*, but in his view man does not create bodies but souls, cf. Idel, *Golem*, p. 102.

desirable step on the way to human perfection? That is to say: Was it his opinion that the creation of a homunculus is the final step towards religious perfection for the pious Hasid, which everybody should aim for, this step being an essential act of religion?

At the end of his commentary on *Sefer Yezira* Eleazar discusses the creation of a human being by man, as if it were compulsory for everybody to undertake this act of creation. There he demands:

"whoever studies *Sefer Yezira* has to purify himself [and] don white clothes. It is forbidden to study [*Sefer Yezira*] alone, but only [in groups of] two or three, as it is written: »and the souls they made in Haran« (Gen 12,5). And it is written: »Two are better than one [alone]« (Eccles 4,9), and it is written: »It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a fitting helper for him« (Gen 2,18). Therefore [Scripture] begins with a *bet* [that is two] *bereshit bara*, »He created«.

It is incumbent upon him to take virgin soil from a place in the mountains where no one has digged. And he shall knead the dust with living water, and he shall make a Golem and shall begin to permutate the alphabets of 221 [gates] each limb separately, each limb with the corresponding letter mentioned in *Sefer Yezira*.

And the alphabets will be permutated at the beginning, and afterwards he shall permutate with the vowels 'o 'a 'i 'e '(o) '(e)⁴². And always the letter of the [divine] name with them, and all the alphabet. Therafter the permutation of 'y and then 'w then 'h in its entirety. After them he shall appoint b and similarly g. Each limb with the letter with which it was created. He shall do this when he is pure."⁴³

It seems that Eleazar did, indeed, believe that, on his way to human perfection, man has to undertake this final step and create a human being in order to become the *Zelem Elohim* himself by this most elevated act of *imitatio dei*. In this act of creation, he is in the likeness of his Creator. Nevertheless, he is still a little lower than the Creator himself. Because he is not able to bestow unto this creation the ability which enables man himself to be in the image of God: He may not bestow upon it the ability of speech. Man can become the image of God in creating a Golem, but he is lesser than God insofar as he cannot create a man who is *Zelem Elohim* himself, for this man, the Golem, cannot speak.

Arriving at these findings, I shall try, in conclusion, to give an answer to this paper's opening question regarding the relation between religion and magic. In the case of Eleazar of Worms, it seems compulsory to conclude that

⁴² That is, with the vowels *Holem*, *Patah*, *Hirek*, *Zere*, *Hatef-Qamez*, Shwa-mobile.

⁴³ MS Munich 81, p.278; cf. M. Idel, *Golem*, Albany 1990, p.56.

in his version of Jewish religion, magic is neither an extraneous nor an additional element, only slightly connected to religion. On the contrary. In his thought, magic is an intrinsic element of religion itself, or even, for Eleazar, magic is the climax of Jewish religion. For in using the creative Hebrew language, man is imitating his Creator. In this way, he becomes the true image of God, this being, as we have seen, the foremost duty of man according to all the interpretations of Judaism which we have reviewed - except Sa'adya.

In defining the position of Eleazar of Worms, therefore, we cannot say that his religion possesses extensive magic elements. Rather, we must say that according to Eleazar, magic is religion and the highest form of religion is magic. The reason for this development of thought is the apotheosis of language as a divine and creative power and the corresponding anthropological definition that the ability to use this divine language is the essence of humanity itself.

Finally, these findings may demand a certain reconsideration regarding the relationship between the esoteric and the non-esoteric writings of the *Haside Ashkenaz*. It seems that the ascetic way of life called for in their ethical writings, as in *Sefer Hasidim*, is nothing more than a preparatory step to the absolute purity man needs when he proceeds to create his Golem. To illustrate this connection we might cite the opening section of the above mentioned *Perush Sefer ha-Qoma*:

"One verse says: »The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him« (Ps. 25,14), and another verse says »but His secret is with the righteous« (Prov 3,32). And it is written »but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets« (Am 3,7). How is this to be understood? To teach you that in the same manner as there is no righteousness without fear, there is no prophecy without both of them."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 212.