

WHEN MAGICAL TECHNIQUES AND MYSTICAL  
PRACTICES BECOME NEIGHBORS:  
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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Magic has become a central area of study evoking research in religious studies, ritual studies, anthropology, psychology, ethnology, sociology, folklore, cultural studies, let alone history and epigraphy. Today, one can hardly write a comprehensive phenomenology of the subject, taking into consideration every comparative aspect of the subject and its assessment. In other words, the more diversified our knowledge of the subject becomes, the more demanding its study turns. One solution to this problem is limiting the discussion to one aspect of the subject, with a particular emphasis on a certain topic. In the present study, I shall try to give an example of what I have in mind, assuming that the example at hand and the manner in which it is presented here have paradigmatic significance for a wide range of phenomenological and methodological issues.

The vantage point that serves us here is that of ritual studies and ritual theory. My argument runs as follows: Every magical act is either preceded or followed (sometimes both are the case) by certain rituals. However, cursory readings of magical literature, a common habit among many scholars, do not make it evident that there might be a connection between the ritual preparations and the magical act itself. In my view, though, there is an interesting connection between the aims of the magical act, the core event, and the manner in which one prepares for doing it. This connection constitutes the ritual procedure and, hence, the theory of the ritual event. I have explored the subject in my book *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden and

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<sup>1</sup> This paper constitutes the enlarged and revised version of a lecture I have given in the framework of the conference, "Continuity and Innovation in the Magical Tradition," on July 17, 2006. Since it is written in the form of a methodological essay, I considered it essential not to distract the attention of the reader from the major line of argumentation with details that usually belong to the footnotes. Thus, the number of footnotes will be as restricted as possible, only to those giving the essentials of background information.

Boston, 2003), and I shall try to show that the conclusions reached there are valid, too, in the cases of magic in general, and of the theurgic rituals done to prepare and protect the mystic as described in the Hekhalot literature in particular.

For reasons dictated by the limited space at my disposal, I shall have to examine one example out of the many available. I assume that the example chosen is strong enough to convince the reader that, in general, magical acts are shaped in the course of uniquely configured procedures that structurally function as rituals. This assumption is the quintessence of my understanding of what constitutes the ritual theory in each case. I shall try to show that, since they are crafted to work once, *ad hoc* and/or *ad hominem*, the magical acts at hand should be studied in their individual context.

## I

More specifically, this paper aims at bringing to the discussion table new agenda for the study of the relationship between essential aspects of magic and mysticism.<sup>2</sup> It proposes to create a new map for the territory, which points out ways leading to the two subjects at hand. I shall start, though, by reviewing a few scholarly approaches to the study of the relationship between Merkavah mysticism and magic. Then, I shall discuss the contribution that the discussion of ritual and ritual theory as presented in my book can offer to the discussion of the questions at hand. In modern scholarship, the relationship between Merkavah mysticism and magic touches on three methodological issues. The first one is represented by Gershom Scholem, in the chapter on "The Theurgic Elements of the Lesser Hekhalot and the Magical Papyri."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In his recently published study James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People Behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Brill, 2001), the author tries to discuss this issue, citing many parallel sources. However, his major aim is to create a triangle in which magic, mysticism, and shamanism meet. Although he is aware of the essential differences between Merkavah mysticism and Shamanism (as I argued many years ago), he still forces his point, but in my view does not satisfactorily create a shift of scholarly orientation. See his discussion on pp. 49–51. Furthermore, the many sources Davila quotes from the area of magic and the magical aspects of Merkavah mysticism are left without a proper analysis from the point of view of their ritual function.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter X in Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, two editions (New York, 1960 and 1965), p. 75. All the references here are mainly to that page.

For Scholem, the magico-theurgic element in Merkavah mysticism is best explained in light of materials known from the Greek Magical Papyri. Scholem furthermore argues: "The theurgic element was not a later addition to the texts but a basic component, one which the editors of such books as the Greater Hekhalot, 3 Enoch, and the *Masekheh Hekhalot* attempted to minimize or discard entirely." Scholem makes this statement in reaction to a previous one made by Adolf Jellinek, to the effect that the mysticism of the Hekhalot was only combined with theurgic elements at a later stage of development.

Paradoxically, Scholem also subscribes to the view expressed by Karl Preisendanz, who argues that "As time progressed, the external paraphernalia of incantations, formulae, magic words, etc. in this literature [= The Greek Magical Papyri] gained continually in volume. What originally constituted a simple theurgic practice has finally grown into a highly pretentious and elaborate magical apparatus..." Scholem found it difficult to make up his mind and suggest a conclusive picture. On the one hand, he said that in their various phases of development major texts of the Merkavah literature lost or minimized their theurgic elements. On the other, he followed Jellinek and Preisendanz, arguing that the theurgic materials gradually gained in volume and importance.

I approach the subject from a different angle. In my discussion of the issue in *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden and Köln, 1980), I disconnect the Hekhalot writings from their ultimate provenance in the (rather late) Greek Magical Papyri. I offer a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the problems at hand. My principal argument, that entails an innovative side vis-à-vis Scholem, consists of the suggestion to view the magical and theurgic parts of the Hekhalot literature not in light of the Greek Magical Papyri but in light of the wide spectra of Judaic life and existential needs, in which magic used to play various roles.<sup>4</sup> My way leads from the Hebrew Scripture, through apocalypticism, to rabbinic literature. I must admit, though, that when I wrote the relevant chapter in my book (Chapter Four: "The Hekhalot Literature," pp. 98–123), the Geniza materials were largely unknown.

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<sup>4</sup> See now, Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 2005); Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge, 2008), Yuval Harari, *Early Jewish Magic: Research, Method, Sources* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 2010). All these studies were published after the major line of argumentation in this paper had been conceived and written.

Being now aware of their existence,<sup>5</sup> I am convinced that they could have supported my view and given it a larger spectrum and more existential depth than was possible at the time.

In any event, I believe that knowledge of those materials in their astonishing variety would have strengthened my "Judaic" position. One must admit, though, that the magico-theurgic elements in the Hekhalot literature show a large variety of usages, depending on author, place and time of composition. One could add at this point that the factor of inner traditions in their various forms of development can be traced with difficulty. In other words, taken together, all these factors do not always amount to clearly identifiable positions. With all the historical differences, thematic stratification and structural diversification, they all point to one direction: their solid, and indelible, presence in the Judaic world in Talmudic times.

For reasons that I am at a loss to explain and account for, several of my readers preferred to ignore the complexities I tried to highlight in my study of the subject.<sup>6</sup> Roughly expressed, these readers argued that my discussion of the subject was nothing but a repetition of the schematic, one-page assessment as presented by Scholem. The lesson I had to learn was a simple but frustrating one: It showed the paucity of attention scholars often give to the writings of their colleagues.

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<sup>5</sup> In recent years Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked have published three volumes of *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* (Tübingen, 1994, 1997, and 1999). The enormous efforts of the editors in publishing these materials deserve our praise. Those familiar with the subject report that more material awaits publication, as well as the magical materials written on clay bowls. A word, though, is due on the tasks that still need to be accomplished. The general practice of publishing these materials is embedded in their identification, decipherment, translation and short editorial comments. Work is now underway in characterizing the Jewish provenance of these materials in the various studies of Gideon Bohak and Yuval Harari. The methodological context of their studies is mostly comparative, and they have already rendered interesting results. The number of studies of Mesopotamian, Greek, Coptic, Mandaic magic is growing on a daily basis. However, the kind of work that this paper wishes to present—namely the study of magical rituals in the context of their ritual theory and in comparison to the magical materials of Merkavah mysticism—is still *terra incognita* to many scholars in the field. In this respect, its paradigmatic significance extends the limits posed by its title.

<sup>6</sup> In order to reduce the polemical tones of my paper I shall avoid listing all the studies I have in mind. For reasons that will become clear, the only exception to that restriction to which I will adhere will be Peter Schäfer's paper reprinted in the reference given in the next footnote. I believe that Schäfer's paper cannot be bypassed in this connection.

The example to which I have already referred is Peter Schäfer's paper, "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism."<sup>7</sup> Schäfer suggested seeing in the entire Hekhalot literature a compendium of magical adjurations, thus discarding the seminal value of that literature for gaining information about mystical experiences in late antiquity. Schäfer argued "...it is not the heavenly journey which is at the centre of this mysticism, with adjurations on the edge, but rather the reverse. Magical adjuration is a thread woven throughout the entire Hekhalot literature. This is true to such an extent that a heavenly journey may even culminate in an adjuration."<sup>8</sup> Similar utterances in Schäfer's paper give expression to the same assessment. I shall add another quote from his paper, in order to convince the reader that I do not intend to misrepresent Schäfer's view: "The world view which informs these texts is thus one which is deeply magical. The authors of the Hekhalot literature believed in the power of magic and attempted to integrate magic into Judaism. The central elements of Jewish life—worship and the study of the Torah—are determined, in the mystics' understanding of the world, by the power of magic."<sup>9</sup> Most striking is the statement, "The authors of the Hekhalot literature believed in the power of magic and *attempted to integrate magic into Judaism*" (italics added). In other words, Schäfer wants us to believe that the magical components of the Hekhalot writings stretch beyond their primarily instrumental context, facilitating mystical ascents and divine revelations, and "attempt to integrate magic into Judaism," no more no less.

Schäfer's dismissal of "Scholem and his successors," with the footnoted comment "This applies mainly to the book by I. Gruenwald,"<sup>10</sup> gives an idea of what I have in mind when referring in the manner I have done to the work of some of my unnamed colleagues. In fact, Schäfer's position looks to me as an arbitrary attempt to state the opposite of what commonsense and an objective reading of the texts in question show.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 277–295.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 284–5.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 290.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 290.

On the other side of the scholarly discussion, Jonathan Z. Smith marks a real shift in the study of magical practices.<sup>11</sup> Smith examined at some length the scholarly output of category formations in the study of ritual and magic. For him, an initial reaction to the scholarly effort to place magic on the scale linking “religion,” on the one hand, and “science” on the other, was an adequate starting point. To me, however, this part of Smith’s essay belongs to the past. It belongs to what to me now resembles the apologetic zone of the study of magic. For more than a century, the scholarly study of magic had to find itself a locale in the triangle marked by the notions of “science,” “religion” and “rationality.” We are now free to discuss magic as magic and not as a by-product of other domains of religious and mental activity.

Thus, I find greater interest in Smith’s systematic study of the choice of locations for the successful performance of magical acts. His remarks entail significant insights relevant to the discussion of ritual practice in its historical development. Although Smith, in his analysis of ritual theory relevant to the understanding of what is done and where, uses different categories than the ones I use, I find in his comparatively brief comments much that is helpful in bringing about the needed change in the scholarly climate affecting the study of magic and related subjects.

In fact, it leads us to the very heart of the matter—namely, the essential connections that exist between the various stages of what is done, where, and for what kind of purpose. On a wider scale, it brings us close to the discussion of the symbiosis that exists between the magico-theurgic rituals of the Hekhalot writings and the parallel magical practices found in sorcery, healing, exorcism, adjurations, the writing of amulets and other kinds of magic. In contrast to many scholars whose interest in the theoretical side of magic is limited to its historical, philological and comparative aspects, I think that the rituals done to prepare the magical act cannot be explored and properly understood unless their *coherent connectedness* to the respective efficacious acts is foregrounded. The same holds true for the magico-theurgic aspects of mysticism. I think that I am not exaggerating when I say that many scholars trying to assess magic still view it as a principally

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<sup>11</sup> See Jonathan Z. Smith, “Trading Places,” in Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (eds.), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 13–27 (reprinted in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago and London, 2004), pp. 215–229).

theological problem. However, in the present context anthropological considerations will be given their interpretive chance. In short, we shall examine the extent to which the magico-theurgic practices, done in the mystical and magical domains, (a) are technically performed, and (b) show similar structural forms of integration with a variety of spell-materials.

## II

Taking into consideration the two points mentioned above, highlights one major issue. It concerns the overall aims of the magico-theurgic rituals in both areas of activity—magic and mysticism. Most of the magical materials known to us consist of two parts. The first and major one constitutes the center of the magical act—the spell—and the new reality it wishes to create. The second consists of the ritual structure, including the utensils, objects and other means that are used in order to make the spells work and the desired reality accomplishable. From a literary point of view, adjurations are the noticeable form used in both of the cases mentioned here—magic and mysticism. However, one difference must be kept in mind. Anyone studying the magical materials from the Cairo Geniza, the magic bowls, and other materials of similar nature will notice that most of the texts concern earthly matters. They seek to intervene with social relations and have decisive influence on the operation of material—animate and inanimate—objects. However, the Hekhalot writings show other concerns and objectives. They deal with heavenly ascensions, the vision of the “beauty” of God, participation in the angelic liturgy, and the disclosure of special secrets. These secrets mostly relate to cosmological matters in the past and to historical events in the future. The revelation of these secrets requires the appearance of angelic beings on earth. The typical matters that constitute the magical acts are the enhancement of love or hate, helping people to overcome difficulties and all kinds of disorders, cursing others and causing them physical damage and even death. They are all located in realms that are not included in what Schäfer calls “the aims and purpose of early Jewish mysticism.” In other words, Schäfer’s paper misses a number of crucial points in nuancing the discussion of the materials he places in the limelight.

Indeed, “magic” and “theurgy” are rather flexible terms. They are “soft” and easy to move from one location to the other. However,

scholarly caution should guide us in what we can and should do. When the applications of categories are either mixed up or allowed to fall into the traps of arbitrary parallels, one may conclude that the warning signals have not been watched carefully. When one studies the Hekhalot writings, in order to compare the theurgic-magical materials contained in them with those found in magic proper, careful attention must be given to major points of difference. Otherwise, one is likely to reach the point at which no demonstration can show that the assigned homework has been carried out properly. There are no sacrificial rites in the Hekhalot writings, but there are such rites in the magical texts. Hence, no blood serves in the preparatory practices of the Hekhalot writings. Libations of either wine or water are also missing from the Hekhalot rituals. The names of angelic beings and the abundant use of *nomina barbara*, words the decipherment of which is quite enigmatic, create a noticeable similarity between the Hekhalot writings and the magical materials. However, the lyrical character of the Hekhalot hymns and the coercive adjurations in magic show that the two kinds of literature are worlds apart. The hymns of *Sefer Ha-Razim* create a singular phenomenon. They show a striking affinity to the hymns of the Merkavah literature. However, the magical parts of *Sefer Ha-Razim* are quite different from the theurgic materials in the Hekhalot writings.

Since I do not have all the space I need to give a complete scheme of all the tracks of the map that lead to every aspect of the topic at hand, I shall limit myself to essentials that are needed for an initial fact finding tour. As indicated above, the study I am offering in the following pages contains a discussion of a number of features that have not yet been given the kind of attention they deserve—in particular, the ritual technique that facilitates achieving specific magical or mystical ends. I shall direct the reader's attention to the need for finding a venue for the discussion of the links that exist between what is done, how and where, in order to make the magical act work. At the same time, we shall keep an open eye on the mystical techniques in their theurgic affiliations. This does not mean that I direct either ameliorative or pejorative criteria in assessing the techniques used in Merkavah mysticism vis-à-vis those applied in magic and sorcery. However, the theurgic practices of the Hekhalot writings have different aims from the ones which magic claims to achieve.



In short, my discussion focuses on the rituals that prepare the magician and the mystic for their respectively transformed habitus, in the framework of which the mind empowers the efficacy needed for what they, respectively, wish to accomplish. At this point, I would like to say that the vast literature currently published on magic and mysticism shows limited interest in these aspects of the subject. The scholarly work still focuses on parallel materials that can be assessed in comparative settings. Historical and philological considerations play a major role in this enterprise. The essence of the ritual core and its respective theory is a rather slowly growing area of scholarly interest. The pages that follow wish to infuse the subject with more energy and intellectual interest.

In other words, the venue I seek is the one that will be conducive to examining magical and mystical rituals and their respective relevant ritual theory. An in-depth exploration of the materials at hand is urgently needed. Thus, if anything *new* can be said on the cases studied, it will have to take into consideration entirely different factors from the ones which sustained previous studies of the subject matter.

The new vantage point, as explored here, aims at providing a new scanning range. It consists mainly of anthropological or behavioral aspects of rituals. These aspects are vital for establishing the hard core of the context in which ritual theory creates the links between the preparations and the act that follows. Viewed in its anthropological setting, the subject of rituals and ritual theory can function as the *tertium comparationis* in the study of Merkavah mysticism and magic. My study of rituals convinced me that in order to understand rituals *qua* rituals, every ritual act should be viewed as embodying its unique ritual stance.<sup>12</sup> In other words, every ritual is embedded in its own ritual theory. Ritual theory is closely related to the structural manner in which the ritual at hand creates the efficacy of its act.

In this sense, ritual theory is not a factor that rests on forensic pre-suppositions, most conspicuously symbolism and theology. Rather, theology, and even more emphatically symbolism, should be eliminated from the performative assessment of the study of rituals. Contrary to what used to be the common practice in the anthropological study of rituals, I consider it essential to minimize the role that symbolism used

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<sup>12</sup> See Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (Leiden and Boston, 2003).

to play in their scholarly explanation. Mentioning symbolism, I refer specifically to the work of Victor Turner who, in my view, highlighted symbolism in order to minimize the role of theology. However, studies on ritual and theology still fill the shelves with their grandiose titles and sub-titles. In my view, modern anthropological studies have succeeded in radically changing this situation, and symbolism begins to lose its interpretive impetus.

I think that modern anthropology has also extracted magic and theurgy from the realms of fraud and deception. Twenty years ago, one could still find a statement like this one introducing a major compilation of magical texts:

...people are not interested in whether or not magicians' promises come true. People want to believe, so they simply ignore their suspicions that magic may well be deception and fraud. The enormous role deception plays in human life and society is well known to us. In many crucial areas and in many critical situations of life, deception is the only method that really works....Of course, it is all deception....Those whose lives depend on deception and delusion and those who provide them have formed a truly indissoluble symbiosis.<sup>13</sup>

Similar words can be found in what people write on myth and mysticism. I find it a futile position to take if one finds consolation in waging an intellectual war against such views. Let me say it as succinctly as possible: We have matured to live with the notion that one person's deception is the realistic position of the other. The history of almost every branch of scientific knowledge is full of such cases. In my view, approaching a phenomenological issue with a disputation over the validation of its truth is a waste of time. I would therefore prefer, with the delicate veil that overhangs them, the concluding words of Clifford Geertz about the sense of what a present fact is:

...the post-positivist critique of empirical realism, the move away from simple correspondence theories of truth and knowledge which makes of the very term "fact" a delicate matter. There is not much assurance or sense of closure, not even much of a sense of knowing what it is one precisely is after, in so indefinite a quest, amid such various people, over such a diversity of times.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago & London, 1986), p. xlviii. The citation comes from the Editor's "Introduction."

<sup>14</sup> Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1995), pp. 167–168.

The magical and mystical texts we read are a thick slice of the past. What do we know of that past and of the people who lived it? Using a qualifier in Geertz's text, I would say that the question is a "delicate" one. Trying to reach a conclusive answer, one can say, once again with Geertz, that it is "so indefinite a quest." Since magic and mysticism are still practiced in modern life, the stigma of "past"-ness can be removed from them, with all that such a removal entails for their empirical assessment.

### III

Paradoxically speaking, rituals relate in a behavioral manner to the dynamics of the constant, including its regular patterns of change, which characterize any kind of normal reality. The changes from day to night, the transition from one season to the other, the collapse of the holy into the profane, the deterioration of health to illness, waking up in the morning and going to bed in the evening—all play their respective role as endemic changes in the ongoing processes that mark the existential dynamic of constant reality. Every ritual relates to the aspects of the expected and the unexpected changes in either a normally stable or disturbed reality. In many respects, rituals contribute to the solidification of the expected and the prevention of the unexpected. However, if reality is exposed to unexpected and unpredictable changes, rituals are there, suggesting themselves as effective means of reversing the process and restoring the normal order. In other words, when abrupt changes have interfered or even taken over, rituals are there to help in their own special way, to restore the disturbed and damaged reality to its pristine conditions.

Furthermore, rituals have their inner logic—that is to say, rituals are structured in such a way that their efficacy comes into effect only in performatively following the strict order that purports to be functional in shaping them into a working Gestalt. Only the strict performance of the various segments of which every ritual is composed guarantees success. Order and correct timing are essential in this respect. In speaking of rituals, scholars often refer to the factor of transformation. In light of what is likely to happen to an existing order, even minor changes make a difference. Consequently, the element of transformation epitomizes the aims of the ritual process. This is true when the rituals are done in order to preserve an existing order or restore its orderly existence.

Magic entails highly-powered means of transformation. In the magical acts, unusual changes of processes connected with routine life occupy a special role. The same is true of rituals done in the framework of mysticism. In both cases, alternate states of consciousness occupy the center of the experiential scene. The human mind seeks modes of empowering its ability to control the physical, corporeal, and spiritual domains. These modes do not belong to the common forms of religious activity and experience. Their activation requires special rituals. Metaphorically expressed, magic and mysticism break the gravitational power that normally prevents matter from losing its bonds with the laws that govern the physical world. Conceptually speaking, the usual alliance, which religious forms of behavior try to maintain with the supernatural, remains on the level of belief. Religion aims to activate spiritual realms in which belief entails exercising special powers to achieve unique results. Miracles, and other components which need no specification, are part of this realm of belief. However, miracles are the domain of the charismatic performer. Unlike miracles, which pertain to be divine interventions showing the unique qualities of divinely inspired persons, magical acts belong in the sphere of the professional performers who maintain coercive contacts with angelic and demonic beings.

Briefly, then, magical and theurgic rituals create or aim at creating extraordinary transformative events. To be able to bring about these events the people engaging in the respective rituals strive to reach unique states of mind. Two spheres of transformation characterize the cases discussed here: one works on the doer and the other brings about the change intended by the magical or theurgic act. Both the magician and the mystic have to undergo changes that enable them to do things that other people cannot do. While mysticism works in one, positively constructive, direction, magic can also bring about fatal breaches in regular life events. Death, physical incapacitation, illness and infusion of hate are only a few examples of what magic can do, when it is geared to do its negative, "black" job.

In this connection, one may mention the various acts of breaking vessels in the course of magical practices. The breaking of vessels is not just a symbolic act. It is an act in its own right. It works on the pro-active, or pre-active, level. In fact, the magical procedure consists of two kinds of actions, linked together by what I would here refer to as their embedded "ritual theory." The connections between each pro-active act and the core of the magical act are not always visible.

We shall examine at least one case that shows how this connection makes sense. However, it is in the nature of the magical act, and for that matter of the mystical act, too, that two kinds of acts are carried out on parallel levels. One of them is the pro-active, or pre-active, practice and the other one is the magic, or the mystically oriented, act itself. In fact, the pro-active acts—that is, the rituals involved—are vital parts of the mechanism that make magic work. They set into motion the desired process. In a sense, they are the pre-programmed activity closely related to the magical and the mystical event. To repeat: the manner in which they do what they do in order to accomplish their designated ends is part of the professional knowledge of the magician and the mystic. Evidently, they both share the belief that it is part of the secret inventory of their art.

Thus, we find that many magical acts entail the slaughtering of animals. One may think that these are offerings given to the supernatural agents—angels and demons—who are called upon to assist the practitioner to do the magical act. However, I believe that from a more professional viewpoint the sacrificial act has a more profound aspect. As we shall see in the example cited below, the blood of the sacrifice is considered as a power-enhancing ingredient in the magical ritual, while the parts of the sacrificial animal (not necessarily one that is offered in the temple service) may serve other purposes, as the case may demand. Slaughtering an animal is certainly a pre-active act that initiates a dramatic event, which intends to have dramatic consequences, either positive or negative. The place and the time of these particular acts are deliberate choices, closely related to the desired effects.

Thus, when magic, and for that matter mystical theurgy, become objects of scholarly discussion, the specific terms of reference that should come into play are those of ritual and ritual theory. Although the words “ritual” and “rite” are frequently used in the study of magic and theurgy, they seldom refer to the manner in which any specific magical or theurgic ritual is constructed, and to the implications that this structure has upon the performed act. Hence, I believe that the subject of “ritual theory” and its implications have to be foregrounded in the study of magical ritual, and consequently allowed to have its bearing upon the study of mystical practices of the same nature.

## IV

I shall now refer to one complex instance from *Sefer Ha-Razim*, the Hebrew Book of Mysteries. It is magic, *par excellence*. The choice falls on *Sefer Ha-Razim* because it constitutes an interesting amalgamation of Merkavah-like hymns with magical practices. We shall keep the Hekhalot literature and Kabbalah in mind, too. Paradigmatically speaking, the example at hand will give the reader a chance to realize for himself the similarities and the differences that are involved in comparing both kinds of literature. It should be noted, though, that there are good reasons to think that the charm that we shall discuss has two parts. The second one will be discussed in due course.

I. If you wish to speak with the moon or with the stars about any matter, take a white cock and fine flour, then slaughter the cock (so that its blood is caught) in living water. Knead the flour with the water and blood and make three cakes and place them in the sun, and write on them with the blood the name(s) of (the angels of) the fifth encampment and the name of its overseer (in Hebrew, *shoter*) and put the three of them on a table of myrtle wood.

Stand facing the moon or facing the stars, and say, 'I adjure you to bring the constellation of N and his star near to the star and constellation of N, so that his love will be tied with the heart of N son of N.'

Say also this, 'Place fire from your fire in the heart of this N or that N so she will abandon the house of her father and mother, because of love for this N son of N.'

Then take two of the cakes and place them with the cock in a new spindle-shaped flask; then seal its mouth with wax and hide the flask in a place not exposed to the sun.

Let us turn to a close analysis of the various components that constitute the essence of this charm.

It combines a number of extraordinary matters. The presupposition that guides my analysis is that they are all interconnected. That is to say, the preliminary rituals, and at times those that follow, are closely related to the spell itself. The technique and the essence of the act are two sides of the same coin. I would not have opened the discussion had I thought that the kind of interconnectedness that I have in mind belongs to a rare species of charms. I believe that if the right effort is invested in the study of the materials at hand, and more research imagination is applied, this kind of interconnectedness may be discovered in more charms than is usually the case. I must admit, though,

that many magical acts look like accidental piles of disconnected elements. Thus, I find myself joining the point made by the English poet, Samuel Butler Coleridge, who urges us to succumb to

...the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination.

The reader is furthermore asked

...to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination *that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment*, which constitute poetic faith.<sup>15</sup>

Although the poetic discourse moves in different spheres from those of the scholarly one, I believe that Coleridge's words have an evocative power that transcends their immediate context. No fruitful scholarly discourse that moves towards novelty can survive the separation from the "colors of imagination" and consequently the treasured moments of "willing suspension of disbelief." In my view, the study of magic and mysticism moves in these alleys. The first impression one gets from reading the passage quoted above is that of a total collapse of empirical sanity. This impression increases, when reading the second part of the same charm (see below in section V; the passage is marked "II").

The first part of the charm contains a prescription specifying what one has to do if one wishes "to speak with the moon or with the stars about any matter." Such a conversation is rather unique, particularly in light of what is at stake, namely, the love between two people. To begin with, the charm aims at establishing a verbal exchange with non-animate objects. In other words, it moves in a fetishist setting. This is one of the unique features of magic, and is amply recorded in a variety of texts. However, the linguistic factor is only a formal part of the matter. It has endless parallels in the psycho-linguistic behavior of children and adults alike. In a sense, this is also the characteristic stance in prayers, particularly to idols. In the rational life experiences of adults, this is often viewed as an oddity, but as long as it happens in the privacy of the locutor it does not draw psychological attention. In our case, but not only here, it marks a major characteristic of the magical praxis.

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<sup>15</sup> *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV (italics added).

The magical situation described above evolves in unique cognitive stances or mental dispositions. A cognitive stance is based on the assumption that it makes communication possible. In the terms used by Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Language is whatever one can use to communicate."<sup>16</sup> However, Wittgenstein significantly adds,

What constitutes communication? To complete the explanation we should have to describe what happens when one communicates; and in the process, certain causal connections and empirical regularities would come out. But these are just the things that wouldn't interest me...

Neither do they interest me, unless, of course, they give way to the expansion of our understanding of the communicative features of magic. If we want to understand the various kinds of communication that magic, and for that matter also mysticism, facilitate and aim at establishing, empirical modes of communication give only a vague idea of the unique diversity of roads that may be taken in this respect. In other words, communication with the moon and the stars requires what Wittgenstein calls a unique "keyboard"—that is, a new and completely different mode of cognitive expression. The epistemological presuppositions that underlie magic and mysticism are not the same as those of the sciences and everyday religion. Among these presuppositions, I would point out the fact that both in magic and in mysticism one finds experiential stances in which the boundaries between the subject and the object, on the one hand, and the spiritual and the material, on the other, are eliminated. Saying this, we have to take into consideration the fact that in quantum theory, in psychology, and in religion, similar things are likely to happen. Thus, in magic and mysticism we not only move into utterly new modes of expression, but also into alternate states of elevated empiricism. We may allude to them as entailing extra-empirical modes of existence and, hence, of communication.

Next, we move to the magical recipe. Here, those familiar with magic reach familiar territory. One is told to take "a white cock and fine cereal flour; then slaughter the cock in living water." Living water is water drawn from a flowing source used, for instance, in the cleansing

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<sup>16</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1974), p. 191.



ritual of lepers (Lev 14: 5–6).<sup>17</sup> There the priest takes two birds and slaughters one of them, letting the blood flow into an urn filled with living water. This special mix is sprinkled on the leper and not used, as in the case of the magical practice, for the baking purposes to which we shall immediately turn. The instructions read as follows: “Knead the flour with the water and the blood, make three cakes, and then place them in the sun.” On its face value, this looks like a sacrificial rite, familiar to those who have studied magical rites. However, the mixing of blood with water is not a familiar rite in Judaic religion, let alone magic. Hence its application here requires a few comments. On the one hand, the blood is diluted in water; on the other, the water is given a blood-like look. Scripture often mentions the fact that both blood and water are, separately though, instrumental in bringing about physical and moral purification. Reasonably, the mixing of blood and water wishes to accomplish, on the pre-active level, two complementary aims: enhancing the respective efficacy of these elements and assuring that the magical act will successfully create love between two people.

Although the person in question expresses his willingness to speak with the moon and the stars, the sun is the functional factor in the charm. The food ingredients, which he prepares, are exposed to “the sun” to dry and become cakes, that is, bonded wholes. As indicated, neither oven nor fire is mentioned. The heat of the sun does not equal a pot or any other cooking ware placed on a fire. However, its heat can be used to dry or harden food. Furthermore, the sun, which is “the big light,” is here used as the channel through which the request to the “smaller lights,” the moon and the stars, is transmitted. Finally, the cakes are stored away in a place hidden from the sun. This act, which marks the completion of this part of the ritual, involves the typical locale of darkness, so familiar to students of magic.

The whole ritual entails a kind of logic that requires explanation. To me, the shift from the moon and the stars to the sun introduces the factor of change, which in itself is an essential element in magic and in the rituals that accompany it. We have already referred to the factor of transformation. It consists of changes of various kinds. If one

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<sup>17</sup> In this paper, I shall limit myself, as much as I can, to explicit examples from the Hebrew Scriptures. I do so in order to show the interesting points of contact that magical practices have with forms of institutionalized, normative, religion. I believe that this procedure has paradigmatic implications for this study.

accepts the characterization—namely, that magic is the art of efficaciously causing changes to happen in a manner in which they cannot happen in ordinary life—then the shift of role the luminaries are made to play, or signify, as mentioned above, is significant.

In this connection, it is worth reiterating that the word “sacrifice” is not mentioned in the material quoted above. Fire, which is essential to any sacrificial rite, is altogether missing from the ritual scene. This suggests to me that what we encounter here, as in many magical acts, is a *sui generis* mode of ritual(s) connected to a *sui generis* event. Magical acts activate modes of behavior and events that are configured in the spells that follow the pro-active rituals. In our case, fire does not belong in the preparatory parts. It forges the core of the emotional shift that is the purpose of the magical act. However, one should notice that the fire here is intended to work in two opposing directions. The person who wishes to bring into effect the desired change turns to the moon and the stars and asks them to “place fire from your fire in the heart of this N or that N so she will *abandon* the house of her father and mother, because of *love* for this N son of N.” The added italics tell the whole story, moving from one pole to the other. On the one hand, there is fire that causes abandonment and, on the other, the love that creates unity.

One should note, though, that the emotional aspect of the charm is expressed in terms that describe the formation of astrophysical proximity:

Bring the constellation of N and his star near to the star and constellation of N, so that his love will be tied with the heart of N son of N.

In other words, magic causes the physical to have an effect on the spiritual-emotional and, *vice versa*, the spiritual to effect the material.

Although the ritual begins with an act of slaughtering, much of it prescribes the mixing of various ingredients and of making them into a cake. In my view, these acts are no sacrificial gestures to please or win the attention of the angels and the other elements adjured in the magical act. Instead, I believe that the mixing indicates a pro-active stance—namely, of bringing together. The various ingredients are brought to a condition in which they make three separate wholes—that is, the cakes mentioned in the text. They are not consumed in any ritual way. On the contrary, at the very end of the first part of the spell, there is a prescription to store away two of the three cakes. This brings

us to a more crucial question: Does this mean that the cakes that are “baked” in the sun, and then stored away in a place that is not exposed to the sun, indicate a process leading from creation to annihilation? Or does the separation of two out of three cakes indicate that a choice or selection is involved? Annihilating gestures, either of two or one as the case might be, are a central component in many rituals and in those connected with magic, in particular.

In the case under discussion, the edibles are not consumed in the usual manner, to sustain the body and preserve it from deterioration. Instead, they are stored away in the shade—that is, they are destined to decay (?) in hiding. Whether this is the case here or not, the factor of annihilation may be viewed as entering through the back door. Is it done in order to avoid annihilation to happen in real life? In other words, does it have apotropaic functions? This is not an easy question to answer. This act may of course have an apotropaic or substitutional function, but it may equally have a pro-active, or pre-active, function. In pro-active cases, annihilation epitomizes what happens in the magical act: a temporary suspension, or cancellation, of the laws of nature. Such a suspension may indeed indicate some kind of disorder or disturbance that in the eyes of people may amount to annihilation.

As the charm we are studying shows, changing the location of the constellations in favor of a person who wishes to find love with another one clearly indicates such an *ad hoc* suspension of the laws of nature. It should be noted, though, that annihilating acts are performed in the course of many festivities. Notable examples are the breaking of plates at the doorsteps of the families that celebrate betrothals, and in Jewish weddings, the breaking of a glass underneath the wedding canopy. More will be said on this matter later on.

There is another enigmatic segment in this ritual. The names of the relevant angels should be written with the blood of the cock on the cakes that have been made with the same blood mixed with the living water. Writing the names of angels and other magical powers is a commonly known way of conjuring them. There are two principal ways of adjuring, or conjuring, angelic beings, either by naming them or by writing their names. At times, this may involve secretly held ways of pronouncing them either from texts or from written scripts. Writing, or even drawing their schematic figure, is probably the more potent way of the two, more than just pronouncing the names orally.

In some cases, the written names are put in water, making the waters magically potent.<sup>18</sup>

In my view, all these cases epitomize the factor of making the angelic or demonic beings present and, consequently, at hand to assist or protect the magician. While in biblical literature angelic beings appear spontaneously, in post-biblical literature—in apocalypticism, magic and Merkavah mysticism—their names are uttered, or written, in order to coerce them to make themselves present. Their very presence is vital to the success of the performance. Typically, magical artifacts like amulets, bowls and even parts of the human body are covered with such names. In a way, the artifacts carrying the names are like a stage on which these beings live their performative lives in a visibly potency-enhancing manner. The artifacts provide a working space without which the efficacy of the ritual is likely to dissipate. The material artifacts bind the names of the angelic beings to the material platform on which they cannot but act to the requests of the owner. These names do not always have a familiar ring, a fact that has given rise to various speculations about the nature of their names and the contextual and cultural forms of diversification which these names project.

In any event, these comments point to the existence of a cognitive cosmos that is utterly different from the one we are accustomed to experiencing in everyday life. This cosmos unfolds as a cognitive reality the parameters of which are definable by a variety of factors, most prominently in rituals and their respective ritual theory in their applicability to magic and Merkavah mysticism. An experiential bridge connects between this reality and ordinary life. The magical and mystical practices create this bridge in a manner that only the magician and the mystic seem to be able to handle and to sustain epistemologically. For the magicians and the mystics alike the existence of these kinds of cosmos creates no problem. On the contrary, they believe that they thrive in them and can bring into effect their respective initiatives to shape them as the center of the special experiences that they control. In them they can display their professional proficiency. Crossing the

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<sup>18</sup> A notable example is Num 5: 21–24, where the Sotah (allegedly wayward) woman is told to drink the water which contains the diluted priestly curse. For a discussion of this ritual, and the assumption that it was never done, see, Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *The Rite that Was Not: Temple, Midrash, and Gender in Tractate Sotah* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 2008).

borders between one mode of reality and the other is part of their respective art.

The factor of coercion, whether on the level of making the angelic beings present or of forcing them to do the will of the people addressing them, signifies a new stage in the development of the religion of Ancient Israel. In as much as Scripture induces the impression that divine intercession is the unique prerogative of the divine, in magic divine powers are no longer free to decide for themselves. They depend on what is done by the humans who are in need of getting their cooperation. What should draw our attention in the charm under discussion, though, is the fact that the cakes with the names of the conjured angels on them are doomed to disintegrate and decay. This is not the only case we know of in which such a procedure that leads to disintegration and annihilation takes place in magical rituals. However, what does all this mean? Does it mean that the presence of these angelic or demonic beings is doomed to dissolve into non-beings, or to return to their original place? Those who make them present are also the ones who cause their disappearance. I believe that the essence of the two parts of this particular ritual is the fact that the special names, conjured for any particular magical act, are usable for no other purpose than the one for which they are conjured. They cannot be used for any other purpose or on any other occasion, however similar they might be to the original one. They are exclusively used for one particular act and purpose.

If the last comments make sense, then we may reach the conclusion that magical rituals and acts are *ad hoc* events. They are potent only for the purpose for which they are prescribed and done. This may explain the fact that we possess so many magical texts and rituals. No amulet written for one person is useable for the needs of another person. Duplication and reproduction render the artifact produced powerless. This explains the fact that preferably one needs direct contact with the magical craftsman who writes the amulet, the inscription on the bowl, and the person performing the act of exorcism. It is a personal contact marking the *ad hoc* and *ad hominem* commission created in the special contact between the expert and the user.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The same holds true of miracles. At one time Moses is told to beat the stone (*tsur*) in order to extract water from it (Ex 17:6); at another time, he has to speak to the rock (*sel'a*), while beating it was a fatal sin (Num 20: 8–10).

Finally, before the adjuration is said, the magician is told to put the cakes on a table made of myrtle wood, and then—as is often the case—direct his face to the adjured objects. In religion, seeing the god/goddess means that one is also seen by him/her. This empathic encounter is the essence of pilgrimage and of visits paid to temples.<sup>20</sup> This fact may be explained on a number of levels, including psychoanalytic ones. Space constraints prevent me from doing so. However, I intend to publish my findings on this subject in the near future.

A word is also due about the “table made of myrtle wood.” One can write detailed studies on the flora and fauna used in magic. The myrtle—in Hebrew, **סדר**—is a plant used in various rituals. The closest connection I can find here in terms of ritual theory is the statement made by Pliny to the effect that the myrtle tree and marriages are under the auspices of Venus, the Roman goddess of love.<sup>21</sup> In rabbinic literature, the branches of the **סדר** are used as the crowns tied to the heads of bridegrooms.<sup>22</sup> Myrtle branches have additional uses in betrothal and wedding festivities. Thus, if we keep in mind the fact that the main body of the adjuration is about the joining in love of two people, the myrtle emphatically shows the extent to which the rituals and their various segments are integrated into the essence of the magical act. They are not arbitrary superimpositions that create the formal frame.

## V

The center of the adjuration consists of two parts. The first one expresses the wish “to bring the constellation of N and his star to the star and the constellation of N, so his love will be tied to the heart of

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<sup>20</sup> Pilgrimage [to the Jerusalem Temple] is technically referred to as “seeing.” The proof texts that the Talmudic rabbis use in this case is Ex 23: 17: “Three times in the year all your males should be seen in [lit. to] the face of the Lord God.” The Talmud, Bav. *Sanhedrin* 4/b, quotes Rabbi Yohanan ben Dehavai in the name of Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima: “A person with a blind eye is exempt from ‘seeing’; as it is said (Ex 23: 17) ‘shall be seen’—in the manner that he comes to see he also comes to be seen. As the act of seeing means [using] both of one’s eyes, so the act of being seen means with two eyes.” Since God is physically perfect, those who come to see Him must be physically whole, too. No wonder, then, that the facial depiction of idols and effigies in many religions are marked by big and open eyes.

<sup>21</sup> Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, 15.29, 2; 35–38.

<sup>22</sup> Tosefta Sotah 15: 8.

N son of N.” Evidently, this part has a strong astrological component. The zodiac and its constellations play a major role in the religions of the ancient world. One does not have to look for the extravagance of magical performances to find a heavy astrological influence in ancient religion. There is also plenty of rabbinical and extra-rabbinical material on this issue. The floor mosaics in ancient synagogues just repeat the familiar story. What has magic to do with all this? It purports to be able to change the course of the stars and relocate the constellations, something that is not straightforwardly indicated in the mosaics and the relevant rabbinic texts. In other words, it causes spectacular transformations to happen on the cosmic level.<sup>23</sup> These transformations are conditional to what follows. “Place fire from your fire of this N or that so that she will abandon her father’s and mother’s home because of love for this N son of N.” The two parts of the adjuration show some confusion in the use of gender. This gave rise to the speculation that homosexual love is included. In any event, what is described in the Book of Genesis 2: 24 as the natural procedure between lovers—“Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his spouse, and they become one flesh”—is here viewed as requiring magical intervention, apparently because the person who is to leave the parents’ home is a woman who has to disobey her parents’ wish.

In its magical context, the notion of abandoning the parents’ home, as referred to in this adjuration, looks to me to be more dramatic than the way-of-the-world kind of reference to leaving one’s parental home, as mentioned in the Book of Genesis. The drama is created by an act of placing fire in the heart of the beloved person. Fire (in Hebrew: **שֵׁן**) may, in this case, be a metaphorical expression of lust and passion, but it may also be a play on the term **שֵׂן** (man) used in the Book of Genesis. In any event, the adjuration sounds to me as if it wishes to bring about, in the first place, a break between the loving person and her parents. As indicated above, the parents may have expressed their objection to the love and the resulting marriage. In other words, the act of slaughtering in the anticipatory ritual creates a perfect symbiosis with

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<sup>23</sup> Relevant to this discussion is Meir Bar-Ilan, *Astrology and the Other Sciences Among the Jews of Israel in the Roman-Hellenistic and Byzantine Periods* [in Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 2010). Bar-Ilan deals mainly with *Sefer Yetzirah* (“The Book of Creation”), but the material he discusses may be used in the context of the present discussion. Less relevant, but still adding interesting aspects to the discussion, is Attilio Mastrocinque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism* (Tübingen, 2005).

the magically induced departure from the parents' home. Thus, cutting the cock's throat is a first act in the coherently developing drama. In that drama, separation—a drastically enacted transformation—is the key issue. Yet, it is physically anticipated in the realms of the heavenly stars and constellations.

The whole event ends when two of the cakes and the cock are put in a sealed flask, storing them away in a "place not exposed to the sun." The sunless environment fits well with the opening line: "If you wish to speak with the moon or the stars." The fact that the sun, too, is involved may be indicative of the fact that when magic is concerned, no logical rules necessarily prevail. Even when a specific time and place are indicated, the magical act is a map with no fixed boundaries.

A final issue, in this respect, is the one that relates to the third cake: What does the magician do with it? Two answers suggest themselves to the question. One is rather speculative, but gives a chance to raise a point, in principle. It may be argued that three parties were involved—the third one, apparently, either the parents or an unknown lover from whom the woman's mind or love must be distracted. That party must be extracted from the scene. Thus, putting the third cake aside signifies a pro-active act. On the speculative level, another explanation may suggest itself as a possible solution. We have already referred to the ritual of cleansing the leper in the Book of Leviticus 14. The priest has to take two birds, one of which he slaughters over "living water" and the other one he sends to seek its freedom. Sacrificial acts entail a choice between two elements, one of which is sometimes not used for any ritual purposes. In Lev 16 the priest takes two goats, one of which is slaughtered, the other sent into the desert.<sup>24</sup> A somewhat similar procedure is known from the Temple service in Jerusalem, where the unused blood of the sacrifices is allowed to drain into the earth. Furthermore, in the Book of Judges 6, Gideon brings a sacrificial offering to the angel, and the angel tells him to put it all on the rock, to be later on devoured by fire. However, the angel tells Gideon to spill away the soup that he has brought. In other words, one may argue that not everything that is a part of the intended sacrificial "meal" is used. The sacrificial prescriptions in the Book of Leviticus are full of

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<sup>24</sup> The reader may find a detailed analysis of this procedure in my book, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, Chapter Five.



such examples. There is always more than is needed for the sacrificial act to fulfill its tasks.

However, the text of *Sefer Ha-Razim* thinks of the matter in completely different terms. It adds another part to the previous magical act.

II. If it concerns an act of loving kindness (*gemilut hasadim*), take the remaining cake, crumble it into aged wine in a glass cup, and say the names of the angels in face of the moon and the stars, using these words:

I adjure you that you will give favor, graceful kindness, and affection that radiate from your face, I, N. son of N., so that I will find favor, kindness, affection and honor in the eyes of every man.

Then blow into the wind and wash your face each dawn, for nine days, with the wine and the cake crumbled in it.

The logical connection of this part to the passage quoted above is far from clear. Were it not for the prescription regarding the third cake, it may have looked as an altogether artificial annex. Let us, for the sake of the argument, see this passage as an integral part of the whole, and discuss it accordingly.

The blood mentioned in the first part is no longer mentioned here. Instead, one finds old wine in a glass cup into which the third cake is crumbled. If Temple rituals are relevant to the understating of magical rituals, then one may infer from the *Minha* sacrifice (cereal offering) that the crucial stages in doing it properly are mixing it with oil, baking it, and then crumbling it and pouring oil on it:

And if your offering is a cereal offering baked on a griddle, it shall be of fine flour, unleavened, mixed with oil; you shall break it in pieces, and pour oil on it; it is a cereal offering (Lev 2: 5–6).

No wine is mentioned in this connection. Generally speaking, though, various rabbinic sources indicate that aged wine is preferable to new wine. However, in line with the comments on ritual theory made above, the act of crumbling baked edibles marks disintegration, fragmentation and in a sense even destruction. If this is the case, what is the causal connection between those elements and the magical act in which a person adjures the angels to “find favor, kindness, affection and honor in the eyes of every man”? A reasonable answer, in this case, may be that a pre-active act has to eliminate the reverse of kindness and favor before the desired qualities can become effective.

Furthermore, smearing blood and red colors is known from the magical practices in various cultures. Wine, probably red wine is meant, is more rarely used. The cake that was prepared with the blood of the cock is now crumbled and mixed with aged wine. On top of all this unique procedure, the person involved is told to "blow into the wind and wash your face each dawn, for nine days, with the wine and the cake crumbled in it." It should be noted that neither the cake nor the wine are consumed as edibles. Furthermore, they are not offered to the angels. Their major use is for cosmetic decoration or to induce the element of disguising oneself.

What does all this signify? In my view, the key to understanding this ritual and its embedded theory is in the remarkable connection between the face of the moon and the stars, the affectionate qualities visible on the face of the angels, and the face of the person who wants to find various kinds of favorable attitudes in the eyes (= face) of others. Smearing the wine with the crumbled cake on the face of the person involved covers his own face and directs all the attention on the other faces mentioned here. Is this the only way of attracting the facial expression in the manner mentioned in the charm? I believe that the question is not relevant to our discussion, since we have to explain the ritual at hand and not the potential ones that we do not know. However, I do not believe that the mixing of a baked cake with wine has a "Eucharistic" effect or resemblance.

## VI

I would like to add a few comments on the nature of the magical materials in the Hekhalot writings.<sup>25</sup> For reasons that have a history of their own, scholars often prefer to refer to these magical elements by a variety of terms, chief among them being the one that invokes the neoplatonic notion of theurgy. This term has received various interpretations, the chief one of which speaks of applying methods to induce the gods to do things that require magic-like means.

One should be reminded, at this point, that in Merkavah mysticism the magical or theurgic acts are not used to cause changes in other people or objects. In most cases, they prepare (transform?) the

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<sup>25</sup> Most of the materials referred to in this part of the paper were discussed in *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*.

mystic for the kind of experiences he wishes to have. Basically, the preparations include avoidance of wine, certain vegetables and meat. This ascetic diet is carried out for a certain number of weeks, usually three weeks. Purifying ablutions are added and the mystics are told to pronounce the names of angels and their secret appellations. These procedures are also known from apocalyptic literature; some of them are mentioned already in the Hebrew parts of the Book of Daniel. In later Kabbalah writings other ritual procedures are mentioned.<sup>26</sup>

The point here is to enter a state of consciousness that facilitates the mystical experience. Several studies published in the last twenty-five or thirty years contain detailed discussions of magical and theurgic rituals, particularly in the context of empowering acts. Both the mystic and the magician have to empower themselves, but they also empower the acts they are doing and the practices they are told to undergo. In this context, the issue of incantations and adjurations, which belong within the sphere lately referred to by Fritz Graf as “Words and Acts,”<sup>27</sup> play a vital role. The acts connected with empowerment are believed to be potent in their own right. They belong to the very heart of the matter. However, the general approach applied in most of the studies with which I am familiar is mostly descriptive. In many cases, though not in all of them, the discussions unfold in the sphere of the comparative phenomenology of religion and ritual practice. Rarely is the subject of these practices taken up in the doing aspects, which are vital for any systematic attempt to develop the methodology of studying them in relation to the nature of magical efficacy.

As I have indicated above, my approach is informed by anthropology. Anthropology, in this respect, has opened up to me interesting channels of approaching and assessing rituals in their doing aspects. In that context, metaphors, symbolism and theology lose much of their practical and methodological relevance. However, I would like to stress that my approach is informed by a careful analysis of textual prescriptions rather than by fieldwork and actual practice. In this respect, it has a more philosophical nature than that gained in fieldwork.

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<sup>26</sup> Most of them were discussed by Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1994), pp. 205–233. See also Hans Dieter Betz, *The “Mithras Liturgy”* (Tübingen, 2003), p. 119, who, typically for such discussions, laconically remarks, “As far as speech is concerned, the *voces magicae* empower it to make sure the prayer is being heard.”

In this sense, I can point to significant results with regard to the kind of methodological oeuvre offered in the present study. If one argues that mysticism evolves in alternate states of consciousness, and magic, too, unfolds in almost similar conditions though of a different nature and with different goals, then the foundations have been laid for functional comparisons between the two—whether in a divergent or a convergent context. At stake are the special rituals, which are not used in the common practice of religion. These rituals assume an efficacious thrust that surpasses the capacity of normal human beings, both to perform and to achieve. In the framework of this efficacious thrust, things that other humans are incapable of accomplishing look achievable. As has been indicated above, one has to accept as realizable matters that in the eyes of many people defy modes of rationality and empirical experience. The way to account for them derives from the understanding of rituals and ritual theory in normal modes of life, in religion, and in more technically oriented fields. When it comes to mysticism and magic, a heavier strain on our scholarly imagination is required than in matters that are familiar to us from their occurrence in daily life. However, if stretching our imagination beyond certain experiential limits is the only effort we are required to show, then the gains are surely worth the effort.