



### The Darker Side of the Feminine Divine

November 2011

To see a World in a grain of sand,  
And a Heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And Eternity in an hour . . .  
We are led to believe a lie  
When we see with, not thro' the eye,  
Which was born in a night, to perish in a night,  
When the Soul slept in beams of light.

William Blake, *Songs of Innocence*

“Just as a mother hovers over the bed of a sick child, so too, the **Schechina** hovers over the bed of a sick person.” As the Talmud teaches in the name of Rav: *From where do we know that the **Schechina** rests on the top of the bed of a sick person? As it says (Psalm 41:4): “The Compassionate One will support him on the sickbed.”*

Nedarim 40

*"This is the law pertaining to animals and birds in order to distinguish between those that may be consumed and those that are prohibited." Here is a hint (remez) regarding the notion of Passover for I received from my masters the idea that the **Schechina** is called by the name *chaya*. And the *sitar achra* is also called by the name *chaya*...so making a distinction between pure and impure animals means distinguishing between the **Schechina** represented by matzo and that aspect represented by chametz.*

*Degel Machaneh Efraim: Parsha Sh'mini*

When the Holy King (Tiferet) begins to yearn for the Queen (**Schechina**) and for Israel  
He climbs up on roofs, runs down stairs, scales walls:

He climbs up on roofs, runs down stairs, scales walls:  
He peers through the holes in walls just to see them!

When he catches a glimpse of them he starts to cry.  
As it is written:

"My beloved is like a gazelle, like a young deer;  
Jumping from wall to roof, from roof to wall"

(Song of Songs 2:9)

**Zohar III: 114b**

So it is with a word of Torah: she reveals herself to no one but her lover. Torah knows that one who is wise of heart hovers about her gate every day. What does she do? She reveals her face to him from the palace and beckons him with a hint, then swiftly withdraws to her hiding place. No one there knows or reflects - her lover alone does, and heart and soul and everything within flows out to her. This is why Torah reveals and conceals herself. With love she approaches her lover to arouse love within. Come and see the way of Torah. At first when she begins to reveal herself to someone, she beckons with a hint. If he perceives, well! If not she sends him a message calling him simple. Torah says to her messenger: "Tell that simple one to come closer, so I can talk with him." He approaches. She begins to speak from behind a curtain she has drawn, words he can follow, until he reflects a little at a time. Then she converses with him through a veil, words riddled with allegory. Once he has grown accustomed to her, she reveals herself face to face, and tells him all her secrets, all the hidden ways, since primordial days secreted in her heart. Now he is a complete human being, spouse of Torah, master of the house. All her secrets she has revealed to him, withholding nothing, concealing nothing. She says to him, "Do you see that word, that hint with which I first beckoned you? So many secrets there! This one and that one!" ... Human beings should become aware, pursuing Torah to become her lovers.

Zohar II, 99b

To reproach mystics with loving God by means of the faculty of sexual love is as though one were to reproach a painter with making pictures by means of colors composed of material substances. We haven't anything else with which to love.

SIMONE WEIL: The Notebooks of Simone Weil,  
Trans. Arthur Wills, London (1976) vol 2: 47

*Only a part of it is known, the sun part. The moon part is not even known yet; the psychology for the feminine energy has yet to evolve. Freud and Jung and Adler and others, whatsoever they have been doing are more or less centered on man. Woman as yet remains an uncharted territory. The moon center, even the moon center, is not yet a known fact.*

*A few people have had a few glimpses...for example Jung had a few glimpses. Freud remained completely sun-oriented. Jung moved a little toward the moon, of course, very hesitatingly because the whole training of the mind is scientific, and to move toward the moon is to move in a world totally different from science. It is to move in the world of myth, it is to move in the world of poetry, imagination, it is to move in the world of "irreason," illogic.*

*Let me tell you a few things; Freud is sun-oriented, Jung is leaning a little toward the moon. That's why Freud was very angry with his disciple Jung. And Freudians are very much annoyed by Jung; it seems he betrayed his master.*

*The sun-oriented person always feels that the moon-oriented person is dangerous. The sun-oriented person moves on the clean-cut superhighways of reason, and the moon-oriented person starts moving in labyrinths. He starts moving in the wilderness, where nothing is clear-cut – everything is alive, but nothing is clear-cut.*

*And the greatest fear for man is woman. Somehow man suspects that death is going to come from woman, because life has also come from her. Everybody is born out of a woman. When life has come from woman, then somehow death is also going to happen through her, because the end always comes to meet the beginning; only then is the circle complete.*

***In India, in Indian mythology, we realized it. You must have seen pictures or statues of Mother Kali, who is the symbolization of the feminine mind, and she is dancing on the body of her husband, Shiva. She has danced so terribly that Shiva is dead, and she goes on dancing. The feminine mind has killed the male mind; that is the meaning of the myth.***

***And why is she painted black? That's why she is called Kali; kali means black. Why so dangerous? In one of her hands she is carrying a freshly cut head with blood dripping from it – almost a personification of death. She is dancing wildly, on the chest of her husband, and the husband is dead and she goes on dancing in great ecstasy. Why is she black? Because death has always been thought of as black, as a dark, black night.***

*And why has she killed her husband? The moon always kills the sun. Once the moon arises in your being, logic dies; then logic cannot remain, then reason cannot remain. Now you have attained a totally different dimension.*

When I was visiting the graves of my forefathers (*kever ovos*) in Cochin, India, I travelled via Bombay where my mother was born. Dirty and overcrowded, I couldn't wait to leave for the greener idyllic pastures of Kerala. In Bombay I saw "Uncle Freddy" Sopher OBM (my mother's first cousin) an amazing host to all wondering Jews and Israelis who passed through Bombay. He lived right across from the Chabad house that was bombed. While walking through the smelly streets I came across a small edifice with a horribly odor. It smelled as if they were frying butter! They were! To a deity! The statue was horrific, Kali! My orthodox upbringing weighed in as I had just witnessed "*Avodah Zarah*" for the first time, with no legal/Halachic differing of opinions here! All authorities would agree! I rushed out impulsively once realizing the horror of the image (and the decaying butter smell). But the image remained and began to haunt me. Kali, holding a bloody sword in one hand and the head of a male god on the other, represented the angry murderous divine feminine, too close to the image of powerful women of my childhood for comfort! If I was to develop what I now term "Schechina consciousness" meaning the notion of the feminine divine with all its maternal, and romantic imagery provided by our Rabbinic tradition, I would need to resolve this very duality, this darker image as well.

Who was this Kali goddess? Why was she haunting me so? In reading the author Subhamoy Das I received a clearer image of workings in the mythology of Hindu culture and a more deliteralized reading. The love between the Divine Mother and her human children is a unique relationship. Kali, the Dark Mother is one such Indian deity with whom devotees have a very loving and intimate bond, in spite of her fearful appearance. In this relationship, the worshipper becomes a child and Kali assumes the form of the ever-caring mother.

*"O Mother, even a dullard becomes a poet who meditates upon thee raimented with space, three-eyed, creatrix of the three worlds, whose waist is beautiful with a girdle made of numbers of dead men's arms..."*

(From a *Karpuradistotra* hymn, translated from Sanskrit by Sir John Woodroffe)

Kali is the fearful and ferocious form of the mother goddess.<sup>1</sup> Kali is represented with perhaps the fiercest features amongst all the world's deities. She has four arms, with a sword in one hand and the head of a demon in another. The other two hands bless her worshippers, and say, "fear not"! She has two dead heads for her earrings, a string of skulls as necklace, and a girdle made of human hands as her clothing. Her tongue protrudes from her mouth, her eyes are red, and her face and breasts are sullied with blood. She stands with one foot on the thigh, and another on the chest of her husband, Shiva.

Her symbolic nature has now been unpacked by scholars of Hindu mythology and provides me with deeper understanding.

Kali's fierce form is strewn with awesome symbols. Her black complexion symbolizes her all-embracing and transcendental nature.

*"Just as all colors disappear in black, so all names and forms disappear in her". Her nudity is primeval, fundamental, and transparent like Nature — the earth, sea, and sky. Kali is free from the illusory covering, for she is beyond the all maya or "false consciousness."*

Mahanirvana Tantra

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<sup>1</sup> She assumed the form of a powerful goddess and became popular with the composition of the *Devi Mahatmya*, a text of the 5th - 6th century AD. Here she is depicted as having born from the brow of Goddess Durga during one of her battles with the evil forces. As the legend goes, in the battle, Kali was so much involved in the killing spree that she got carried away and began destroying everything in sight. To stop her, Lord Shiva threw himself under her feet. Shocked at this sight, Kali stuck out her tongue in astonishment, and put an end to her homicidal rampage. Hence the common image of Kali shows her in her *mêlée* mood, standing with one foot on Shiva's chest, with her enormous tongue stuck out.

Kali's garland of fifty human heads that stands for the fifty letters in the Sanskrit alphabet, symbolizes infinite knowledge. Her girdle of severed human hands signifies work and liberation from the cycle of karma. Her white teeth show her inner purity, and her red lolling tongue indicates her omnivorous nature — "her indiscriminate enjoyment of all the world's 'flavors'." Her sword is the destroyer of false consciousness and the eight bonds that bind us.

Her three eyes represent past, present, and future, — the three modes of time — an attribute that lies in the very name Kali ('Kala' in Sanskrit means time).

*"Kali is so called because She devours Kala (Time) and then resumes Her own dark formlessness."*

John Woodroffe "Garland of Letters"

Kali's proximity to cremation grounds where the five elements or "Pancha Mahabhuta" come together, and all worldly attachments are absolved, again point to the cycle of birth and death. The reclined Shiva lying prostrate under the feet of Kali suggests that without the power of Kali (Shakti), Shiva is inert.<sup>2</sup>

In my own spiritual recovery I have had to integrate the mother image of my childhood with my psychic projections onto the divine. I have always felt an imbalance between the male dominated logocentric scholarship-based left hemispheric articulate objective textual-based tradition I inherited and schooled in, and the more feminine intuitive artistic and even musical texts I discovered in the mystical side of my faith. In these texts there was much discussion of Schechina as a divine hypostasis, often in conflict other times in union and imaged in the Midrash. In my own psychic development I have also needed to heal from the over-dominant matriarchal image of mother and the apparent lack of paternal balance. Let me cite a few examples of this trajectory that influenced my own notion of "Schechina consciousness" buried in rabbinic and kabbalistic texts.

In an early Midrash we find an interpretation of that enigmatic passage in Exodus whereby the elders of the Children of Israel beheld the divine. The Midrash is bothered by the very same text claimed that "no man shall see Me and live"!

In *Leviticus Rabba*, xx. 10, commenting on *Exodus*, xxiv. "And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand; also they saw God, and did eat and drink", the Midrash comments as follows:

*"R. Tanhuma said that this verse teaches us that they [i.e. the nobles of Israel] uncovered their heads and made their hearts swell with pride and feasted their eyes on the Schechina . . . . But Moses did not feast his eyes on the Schechina, and yet he gained a benefit from the Schechina [viz. that 'the skin of his face shone' (Exodus, xxxiv. 35) 1."*

There is a notion of gazing and staring at the magnificent beauty of the Schechina as the nobles sat down for a festive meal with the divine. Note the Midrash translates the name for God from the biblical Elohim into "Schechina", as if a mere mortal could not possibly behold the divine as Elohim, whereas for the Schechina, it might be possible to view and gaze upon it. Throughout Targum and Midrash there seems to be a sense of embarrassment when mere mortals visually see any notion of the transcendent divine so the idea of Schechina allows for humans to apprehend a representation of the divine here in this world, *and that is a feminine image.*

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<sup>2</sup> From the writings of Subhamoy Das

Later the Zohar equates the Schechina with the divine feminine and the Sabbath in the following passage:

*"One must prepare a comfortable seat with several cushions and embroidered covers, from all that is found in the house, like one who prepares a canopy for a bride. For the Shabbat is a queen and a bride. This is why the masters of the Mishnah used to go out on the eve of Shabbat to receive her on the road, and used to say: **Come, O bride, come, O bride!**' And one must sing and rejoice at the table in her honor ... one must receive the Lady (Matronita) with many lighted candles, many enjoyments, beautiful clothes, and a house embellished with many fine appointments ..."*

The Holy Ari of Safed writes in the following poem how Schechina consciousness is an integral part of the preparation for the Sabbath in line with the Zohar:

"I sing in hymns

to enter the gates

of the Field

of holy apples.

"A new table

we prepare for Her,

a lovely candelabrum

sheds its light upon us.

"Between right and left

the Bride approaches,

in holy jewels

and festive garments..."

This notion of the human being able to apprehend the divine in its form of Schechina is based on the rabbinic understanding that the Schechina rests in the heart of each and every Jew.<sup>3</sup> Rav Tzadok HaKohen uses this principle to explain the meaning of a kabbalistic intention composed by the Ari prior to ritual acts and Mitzvot.<sup>4</sup>

The intention is stated as "I am performing this act for the sake of unifying *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* with His Schechina." For Reb Tzadok, in line with the Midrash above, The Name "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu*" denotes the divine that cannot be apprehended by humankind. "Kadosh" means "apart," or "separated." *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is actually not part of Creation, but outside of it. He cannot be described in terms familiar to those that are but part of His Creation. "Schechina," on the other hand, describes the divine as He is perceived by His creations and as he is made

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<sup>3</sup> See Alshich to Vayikra 23:40 -- "v'Shachanti betocham"; Jer, 7:4, "They are the Temple of Hashem; Rashi to Lev. 20:3.

<sup>4</sup> Reb Tzadok Hakohen, *Dover Tzedek* (pars. 1,3).

apparent to the world. He is perceivable precisely He is manifest as Schechina conscious in the heart of the Jew.

For Reb Tzadok, the goal of all of Creation is to recognize and manifest its Creator to the fullest extent possible -- to close the gap between "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu*" and "His Schechina." This is accomplished through the performance of Mitzvot in a state of "*dveykut*" somehow closes the gap between the transcendent divine and the immanent incarnated in the heart.

What is this Schechina consciousness, if the transcendent divine is beyond all apprehension? How can we access the divine within the heart? The heart is so duplicitous! What image are we allowed? The famous comment of between the Raavad on Maimonides as to whether any conception of divinity is permissible sheds little light. The Maharal and the Ramchal wrote philosophical treatises on the architecture of divinity, placing the Schechina in the hierarchy, but left me cold as being too intellectual.<sup>5</sup>

The Baal Shem Tov and his disciples provided me with a more emotionally rounded image as I will now cite from his grandson Reb Efraim in his *Degel Machaneh Efraim*.

*"This is the law pertaining to animals and birds in order to distinguish between those that may be consumed and those that are prohibited." Here is a hint (remez) regarding the notion of Passover for I received from my masters the idea that the **Schechina** is called by the name *chaya*. And the *sitar achra* is also called by the name *chaya*...so making a distinction between pure and impure animals means distinguishing between the **Schechina** represented by matzo and that aspect represented by chametz.*

*Degel Machaneh Efraim: Parsha Sh'mini*

This *Degel* I cited in the foreword allows for the devotee or the Zaddik to determine how the Schechina energy will "come down" or be channeled, whether light or dark, "*matza or chametz*" judgment or grace. I see in this Torah the idea that the undifferentiated divine must be "channeled" to use modern terminology. In this differentiating process there is the possibility for a feminine image depending upon the "receiver". However for Reb Nachman, his nephew, this idea is taken to a new level inasmuch Schechina is seen to make demands. He is claiming a much less autonomic control by the receiver. There seem to be times when the spiritual work of a generation is insufficient and requires "*mesiras nefesh*" or martyrdom by the divine. In the following Torah (*Likutei Mehoran* I: 260), he speaks of the connection between martyrdom and Schechina:

*A name (reputation) is the soul of a person. And there is a concept of "mesiras nefesh" (martyrdom) as there occurred in the history of the Ten Martyrs<sup>6</sup> gave themselves over for martyrdom "al Kidush Hashem" for the sake of the unification of Hakadosh Baruch Hum and the Schechina as is known<sup>7</sup>. (And according to the Ari the main function of "mesiras nefesh"). And they realized in those generations that any other kind of supernal unifications (Yichudim) was impossible without (the martyrdom of) their souls, so they martyred their souls "al Kidush Hashem".*

*For when souls are martyred and return heavenward "al Kidush Hashem" they return to the Schechina, since they originated there, for Israel is a portion of the divine literally, i.e. a part*

<sup>5</sup> Sorry! Rabbi Ginzburg does a great job in articulating their positions vis a vis Chabad in inner.org.

<sup>6</sup> The *Ten Martyrs* (*Aseret Harugei Malchut* מלכות הרוגי עשרת) refers to a group of ten rabbis living during the era of the Mishnah who were martyred by the Romans in the period after the destruction of the second Temple. They are listed together, in the piyut *Eleh Ezkera*.

<sup>7</sup> See Eitz Chayim of the Ari Gate 39:1.

*of the Schechina, literally. And when they do return to the Schechina then the Schechina is beautified (mitpaeres). This in turn evokes a desire in the supernal world and causes a Yichud, as is known.*<sup>8</sup>

*And on occasion this requires a pogrom, God forbid, in which some Jewish souls must be killed, God forbid, in order that the Yichud is accomplished by the souls returning above.*

*And on occasion this Yichud requires many souls, God forbid, so a pogrom arises, God forbid.*

This stunning and enigmatic Torah from Reb Nachman leaves one mute with anguish. Rabbeinu suggests that the Schechina somehow requires Jewish blood, in the form of a pogrom, involuntarily the way the Ten martyrs had historically done voluntarily. The image of the feminine divine requiring the spilling of Jewish blood flies in the face of our conventional image of the ever-loving unconditionally- accepting aspect of the divine as embodied in Schechina. This image of Her demanding blood for her own desire for unification with the divine is more reminiscent of the Kali image that haunted me.

In attempting to bridge the gap between these texts that allow for minimal, even if non-physical visual representation of the feminine divine within tradition, (for fear of breaking the taboo of the second commandment that haunts all rabbinic scholars), and stretching the mythic image to its limits, I turned to modern scholarship for help in integrating the darker side of the divine as feminine.

Raphael Patai was an Israeli scholar born in Hungary whose book *The Hebrew Goddess*<sup>9</sup> tries to equate the Schechina with the Matronita of kabbalah. In this book, Patai argues that the Jewish religion historically had elements of polytheism, especially the worship of goddesses and a cult of the mother goddess. The book<sup>10</sup> supports the theory through the interpretation of archaeological and textual sources as evidence for veneration of feminine beings. Hebrew goddesses identified in the book included Asherah, Anath, Astarte, Ashima, the cherubim in Solomon's Temple, **the Matronita (Schechina), and the personified Shabbat Bride**. The later editions of the book were expanded to include recent archaeological discoveries and the rituals of unification (*Yichudim*), which are to unite God with his Schechina. When we read in the medieval midrashic anthology "Yalkut Shimoni," for instance, that the Schechina "came down and kissed" Aaron, thus drawing out his soul at the time of his death, the Schechina is certainly being sexualized, while in kabbalistic texts the Shechinah's feminine nature is openly stressed. She is daringly imagined as both the masculine God's daughter and wife, and as the mother of Israel who worries and cares for her children — "a passionate and compassionate female deity," in the words of Patai.

Elsewhere he cites the Zohar Chadash:

*"The Matronita, surrounded by her maidens, repaired to her couch set up in the Temple, there to await the coming of the groom. The curtains round about were decorated with myriads of precious stones and pearls. At midnight, the tinkling bells he wore around his ankles announced the coming of the King. As he approached, he was accompanied by a host of divine youths, and the maidens of the Matronita welcomed him and them by beating their wings with joy. After singing a song of praise to the King, the Matronita's maidens withdrew, and so did the youths who accompanied him. Alone, the King and the Matronita embraced and kissed, and then he led her to the couch. He placed his left arm under her head, his right arm embraced her, and he let her enjoy his strength. The pleasure of the King and the Matronita in each other was indescribable. They lay in tight embrace, she impressing her image into his body like a seal that leaves its*

<sup>8</sup> Zohar in Derech Enes and Nitzuztei Oros

<sup>9</sup> Patai, Raphael. (1990) *The Hebrew Goddess*. 3rd enl. / edition. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press

<sup>10</sup> In "Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual" (1947) New York: Nelson, he cites textual evidence, which was not repeated, in his later works.

*imprint upon a page of writing, he playing between her beasts and vowing in his great love that he would never forsake her."*

I was so moved by the following story retold by Moshe Idel<sup>11</sup> because it related the visual with the longing of the heart and when She was seen, Reb Abraham fainted.

The great sixteenth century Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, informed his disciple, Reb Abraham Berukhim, that unless he prayed before the Wailing Wall and saw the Shekinah, he would die. (I had read that he had had a dream three times, informing of his impending death and then went to the Holy Ari for a tikkun):

*"When that pious man heard the words of Isaac Luria, he isolated himself for three days and nights in a fast and [clothed himself] in a sack, and nightly wept. Afterward he went before the Wailing Wall and prayed there and wept a mighty weeping. Suddenly, he raised his eyes and saw on the Wailing Wall the image of a woman, from behind, in clothes, which it is better not to describe, that we have mercy on the divine glory. When he had seen her, he immediately fell on his face and cried and wept and said: 'Zion, Zion, woe to me that I have seen you in such a plight'. And he was bitterly complaining and weeping and beating his face and plucking his beard and her hair of his head, until he fainted and lay down and fell asleep on his face. Then he saw in a dream the image of a woman who came and put her hands on his face and wiped the tears of his eyes...and when Isaac Luria saw him, he said: 'I see that you have deserved to see the face of the **Shekinah**'."*

Reb Abraham's vision was not an isolated incident. Two of his famous contemporaries, Rabbis Joseph Karo and Solomon Alkabetz, are also reported to have had revelations of the Shekinah. After much fasting and weeping, the Kabbalistic author Reb Hayyim Vital was granted a similar vision. He cried out to a woman who appeared to him, "Mother, Mother, help me, so that I may see the Lord..."<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth century, both Reb Isaac Yehudah Yehiek Safrin (the Kamarnar Rebbe) and the Berditchever Rebbe, Reb Levi Yitzchak, after a period of weeping, also experienced vision of a feminine figure identified with the Shekinah. In both cases she told them "Be strong, my son ..." <sup>13</sup>

Professor Arthur Green discussed the traditional approach to the divine feminine as follows;

*A new myth of Judaism emerged in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, hiding behind the word kabbalah, which means tradition itself. Here is presented a Judaism of mythic complexity that had been previously unknown, one in which the single, static, monotheism is and essentially masculine God of biblical-rabbi replaced by a dynamic, multifaceted, ever-flowing, separating and uniting, new kind of ten-in-one monotheistic deity. In that paradigm of the inner life of God, described through so many rich and varied images in the kabbalistic literature, the Shekinah took a major role.*

*Using an ancient term for the indwelling or presence of God, the Kabbalists employed Shekinah to symbolize a particular realm within the divine world. Described as daughter, bride, mother, moon, sea, faith, wisdom, speech, and a myriad of other figures, usually but not always feminine by fact or association, the Shekinah is the chief object of both the divine and human search for wholeness and perfection. She is the bride of God within God, mother of the world and feminine side of the divine self, in no way fully separable from the male self of God. Indeed, the root of all evil, both cosmic and human, is the attempt to bring about such a separation. The picture of that feminine aspect of divinity is a complicated one. As the tenth of the sefirot, or manifestations of*

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<sup>11</sup> Moshe Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, Jerusalem

<sup>12</sup> ibid 81

<sup>13</sup> ibid 83, see also stories about the Lelover Rebbe, who at his Shabbes tisch would murmur "mamale, mamale" invoking the Schechina.

divine selfhood, she is, when facing those above, passive and receptive. She takes all the upper powers into herself; "All the rivers flow into the sea," as the Kabbalists love to quote from the Book of Ecclesiastes (1:7). But as the sea transforms all the rivers, gives them new life as a dynamic power all her own, and reaches her destined shores as a new being, so is the Shekinah, when facing the lower worlds, described as giver, provider, ruler, and judge. In a way that cannot be fully understood, she represents the mystical embodiment of the Community of Israel: the Kabbalist has transferred the locus of mystical marriage from the relationship of God and the earthly Israel to an entirely divine plane. Rather than seeing himself and his people as the bride of God, he now joins with God above in rejoicing at a sacred marriage that has taken place, as it were, within God. Perhaps most interestingly, Shekinah is the only aspect of divinity that most Kabbalists ever claim really to experience. The Shekinah, the outermost gate to the divine mysteries, is all the Kabbalist dares to say that he has attained. It is through the union of Shekinah with God above that the Kabbalist, too, is bound to those higher forces. He serves as "attendant of the bride," knowing secretly at the same time that his soul is born of this union that he has helped to bring about. We of the Schechina from the earliest text we have in all of Kabbalistic literature, the Sefer HaBahir, that appeared in southern France in the latter decades of the twelfth century. The Bahir is written in an intentionally mystifying and yet defiantly simple tone, one that does much to set the stage for the later symbolic development within Kabbalah. Here the Bahir is commenting on the biblical verse "Blessed be the Glory of God from His place" (Ezek. 3:12). Glory, in Hebrew kavod, is the Biblical term, which the Kabbalists (following the Targum) usually took as a code word for the Schechina.

This may be compared to a king who had a matron in his chamber. All his hosts took pleasure in her. She had children, and those children came each day to see the king and greet him. They would say to him, "Where is our mother?" And he would answer, "You cannot see her now." To this they would reply, "Blessed be she, in whatever place she is."

Immediately the Bahir adds a second parable:

This may be compared to a princess who came from a faraway place. Nobody knew where she came from. Then they saw that she was an upstanding woman, good and proper in all her deeds. They said of her, "This one surely is taken from the place of light, for by her deeds the world is enlightened." They asked her, "Where are you from?" She said, "From my place." They said, "In that case, great are the People of your place. Blessed are you; blessed is she and blessed is her place."

The Shekinah, the mysterious woman, queen or princess, hidden or coming from a place beyond, is the only one we see, the only one we greet. What is her place, what is her origin? These are hidden somewhere in the mysteries of God beyond. All we can say of the God we know, of that feminine God we encounter is "Blessed is she and blessed is her place." The glory of God is apparent to us, the glory of God lies within the realm of human experience. The Shekinah is the God we know. Surely, that Shekinah stands in relation to a transcendent deity, whether described in male terms or in terms of more pure abstraction, but our knowledge of that is only through her. Blessed is she and blessed is her place. While the Shekinah plays a central role in all of Kabbalistic literature, it is especially in the Zohar that its feminine character is highlighted. The author of the Zohar was possessed of a seemingly boundless mythic imagination, a great deal of it centering on female figures, both sacred and demonic, as well as on deeply ambivalent fantasies concerning human women in this world." In what is surely one of its most strikingly impassioned passages, the Zohar speaks of the love of God through the symbol of the kisses that Jacob gives to Rachel. From the passage it becomes clear that the experience of the mystic is that of being aroused, drawn into, and kissed by God. As the passage develops, Rachel, the recipient of the kisses, is really related to an entirely hidden and abstract God beyond, a God so abstract and hidden, however, that He cannot be described as one who kisses. How, indeed, can one be loved by a God who is hidden beyond all being? Jacob is the personified manifestation of

*this hidden God, personified in order that the great mystery be enabled to kiss the bride. The passage reads as follows:*

*When it (the spirit of love) enters the palace of love, the love of supernal kisses is aroused, those of which Scripture says: "Jacob kissed Rachel" (Gen. 29:11). This arousal brings about the kisses of supernal love, as needs to be. These kisses are the beginning of all love, attachment, and binding above. That is why the Canticle opens its praises with: "Let Him kiss me." Who is to "kiss me"? The one hidden in sublime hiding. But should you ask: "Do kisses apply to the most hidden One? Does that one kiss below? "come and see: that most hidden of hiddens, no one knows it. It reveals of itself but a slim ray of hidden light, revealed only through a narrow path that proceeds from it. But this is the light that gives light to all. This is the arousal of all the sublime secrets, yet it remains hidden. Sometimes hidden, sometimes revealed. But even when it is not revealed at all, it remains the source of arousal for those ascending kisses. And since it is hidden, the Canticle begins its praises in a hidden (i.e., third-person) way.'*<sup>14</sup>

Back to my haunted image of Kali, and my absent image of any counterpart within my own tradition. These images as well as the dramatic statue of Kali reminded me that there is a darker side to the divine feminine as much as the divine masculine. I shelved the question until recently when thinking about the Divine Schechina, as I studied a Torah in Likutei Mehoran (*lehavdil eleph havdolos!*)

This image of the Schechina as devouring or needing Jewish blood for Her connection and yichud with the divine was horrific. After all was She not on "our side"? Was She not exiled with us into Galut, into exile to suffer alongside us? How could I attempt to fill out Her consciousness without any tools? Never mind the baroque kabbalistic definitions of "yichud" or unifications, it appeared as if the split within the divine was somehow mitigated only by literally spilling Jewish blood! My mind turned to that day in Bombay and the image of the dark goddess Kali. It was this fascination with the darker divine feminine I had felt when I shuddered through Likutei Mehoran's most enigmatic passage.

Recently my mother's illness prompted me to be by her bedside for a 25-hour vigil following her stroke, on Sabbath, in a hospital in Jerusalem. To understand how frustrating this was to her, one must know how each day she rises to work out in the gym even at 86 years of age! She swims, works out on the slider, the treadmill and the rowing machine. People marvel that at her age she is so fit. Now paralyzed and confined to bed, I watched her and felt her frustration. During that night memories came flooding back as to how she drove herself as a young mother, for she was such a perfectionist! Whether violin (she was a concert violinist) teacher, or headmistress, she demanded as much from herself as from her pupils. To see her diminished this way was painful for me on many levels. Watching her in bed I gazed upon her beautiful long slender (violin) fingers tapering, and perfect skin. I remember watching her play the violin (rarely) feeling pride and envy as to her sheer mastery. As a child I would stare at those fingers!! Other, darker images came back to me as well. I both loved and feared her. The boundary between the two was often blurry. She was a taskmaster, demanding from her children excellence in musical, secular and theological studies. She was a disciplinarian and, at times, moody, often bringing home her frustrations with work. Corporal punishment at school and at home instilled a fear and distrust in me. My first encounter with this powerful feminine image was feeling its capability of rage. This dual image embedded in my childhood soul, was of the mother I admired and worshipped, (an image of her as concert violinist with her head holding the instrument with eyes closed in musical

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10. "Extract of Bride, Spouse, Daughter" Arthur Green 255-7 in: Heschel, Susannah (1983) *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, Schocken Books, NY.

mastery, in that black velvet evening gown on stage, a virtual goddess), yet also the disciplinarian and at times petulant irritable mother whose love was always conditional.

With such a maternal image the projected image onto the divine becomes admittedly complicated! Yet try as I must to heal the wounds of the past, I must attempt to integrate this early image onto my unconscious projections. This is as an integral part of making whole the divine image of the feminine Schechina and part of my inner spiritual work.

Both the image of Kali as well as the image provided by Reb Nachman, provide a comparing and contrasting darker picture of the way different cultures have projected the divine feminine. They also fit with my dual image of mother as nurturing as well as destructive.

In my theological work the single impediment to the luxury of the religious/mystical experience is the problem of theodicy. Like no previous age, this era is characterized by genocide and a silent divine that appears to stand by and allow His “chosen people” to be slaughtered, and other nations to be subject to technological slaughter machines. This has forced me to reimage the divine and find texts going back to midrashic sources that might support the understanding of the darker aspects of the divine. If I would be unable to integrate this notion in my spiritual practice then God’s presence in history as claimed by my tradition as the very hallmark of our “difference” to the Greek or eastern ideas of an indifferent God would be in jeopardy. However I found such texts that speak of the suffering of the Schechina alongside Her children as healing inasmuch as the divine is then conflicted within, in its differentiation between the masculine “King” who in many midrashim, decrees the exile of his subjects, and His consort the *Matronita*, the noblewoman or feminine divine who goes into exile alongside them. In these texts the Matronita was always the unconditionally loving divine who suffered alongside Her mortal children. Later kabbalistic texts formalized these divine hypostases as outlined by Arthur Green, above.

In my spiritual recovery I am more able to relate to a complex divine, torn and conflicted within, as portrayed in the midrashim of Eichah Rabba and Pesikta deRab Kahana,<sup>15</sup> than the god of the philosophers. In stretching this notion into a post-Holocaust theology I feel we need to re-discover the Kali energy that is so taboo. I found this most revealing in Rabbeinu’s Torah 260.

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<sup>15</sup> For more on this see my thesis “Imaging/Imagining the Divine” Brandeis 2000