

Jewish Prayer in the Past and Present

as Service Rendered to the Shekhinah (the Divine Presence)*

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Prayer upholds the life of the Jewish people from within. In the people's life, prayer preceded the written wording given it in numerous biblical texts. It was reorganized several times, in particular when the people returned from the Babylonian Exile (starting in 538 BCE) and after the destruction of the 2nd Temple (70 CE), and during the Middle Ages it was enriched by numerous additions. More changes were made with the appearance of cabbalistic communities in Safed in Galilee in the 16th century, and of Hassidic communities in Eastern Europe in the 18th century.¹ Today, at least in principle, it remains open to adaptations or developments which might prove to be necessary.² We shall try to show how Jewish prayer is at the same time old and new by looking at one of its aspects, the theological and spiritual significance of which is perhaps not sufficiently taken into consideration: the aspect of prayer as 'service of God' which is service rendered to the Shekhinah, God's Presence in the world.³ This

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¹ Cf. A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and its Development*, Schocken Books, New York, 1960, Chapter VII, pp. 56-70.

² One recent development is the institution of prayers for the State of Israel's Independence Day. This institution, which was decided upon by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in 1949 and about which people have argued and can argue, is rejected by certain Jewish communities in Israel and in the Diaspora.

³ In saying that this aspect of prayer is not sufficiently taken into consideration, we obviously do not have in mind the immense message of the Tradition of Israel on prayer, on the Shekhinah and on the Holy Spirit. Rather, we are referring to the insufficiency of Christian listening to Jewish prayer and to its theological and spiritual message which are at the root of the gospel message. Concerning the Shekhinah and the Holy Spirit in rabbinic literature, two basic and exhaustive studies are to be mentioned and consulted: Arnold A. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Shekhinah in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1969; Peter Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung vom Heiligen Geist in der rabbinischen Literatur*, Kösel Verlag, München, 1972. However, because of their own perspective, such studies do not propose any interpretation of the rabbinic findings which might shed light on the New Testament and Christian faith and prayer. Our study aims at something else. It is situated within the perspective that was opened up by the Catholic Church, which, since the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (October 28, 1965), invites people to get to know the patrimony common to Judaism and Christianity. At each step in this presentation, we shall first listen to what the Tradition of Israel says of itself. It understands itself as oral Torah and claims not only to teach the faith and hope of the people in its liturgy, but also to enlighten its practice. By doing this, we shall hear and suggest listening to the resonances of the

is the aspect which Simon the Just had in mind when he said: “The world rests on three things: the Torah, the Service (abodah) and the reciprocal actions (proceeding) from love (gemilut hasadim).”⁴ The Service meant in this sentence is the ‘service of the altar’, the sacrificial cult in the Temple, to which the prayer of the synagogue, the established and obligatory prayer (tefillat ha-qeba’ ve-ha-hobah) organized by the Pharisaic masters before and after the destruction of the 2nd Temple, is linked. The established and obligatory prayer, which constitutes the substance of what can be called the Jewish liturgy, was understood by the Pharisaic masters as the ‘service of the heart’ of which Scripture speaks (Deut 10:10).⁵ This interpretation will help us in the first part to present Jewish prayer and most of all the liturgy as service rendered to God both in praise and in petition. We shall then see in the second part how prayer addresses God and how it can encounter God to the extent to which God makes himself present to it by means of his Shekhinah, God’s Presence in the space and time of the world.

In the conclusion, we shall indicate towards what Jewish prayer as service points: towards a service for which God, so to speak, needs humankind. This service is that of the ‘prayer for the Shekhinah.’

I. Prayer as service (abodah, worship) rendered to God in praise and petition

The prayer of the synagogue, which the Pharisees linked closely to the Temple liturgy, succeeded that liturgy and took its place after the destruction of the Temple; this is to continue until God causes his Presence to return to Zion in the rebuilt Temple.⁶ The link between the prayer of the synagogue and the Temple worship is so

Tradition of Israel in Christian faith and prayer. We shall point out these resonances whenever we believe that they are to be heard, without, however, concealing our conviction that Christian faith can help one to discover still unexplored riches in the Jewish sources.

Concerning the Tradition of Israel which is to be considered as oral Torah, cf. P. Lenhardt - M. Collin, *La Torah orale des pharisiens, Supplément au Cahier Evangile 73*, Cerf, 1990. On the liturgy as the place where Israel’s faith and hope are expressed, cf. S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, Schocken Books, New York, (1909) 1961, pp. 10-11; J. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud*, Berlin – New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1977, p. 30.

⁴ Mishnah Abot 1,2. It is difficult to situate historically Shimeon the Just, of whom the Mishnah says that he was one of the last members of the Great Assembly. He is perhaps Shimeon, the son of Onias, the High Priest, of whom Ben Sirach speaks at length (Sir 50:1-21). On him and on the Great Assembly, cf. E. Nodet, *Essai sur les origines du judaïsme*, Cerf, 1992, pp. 215-222.

⁵ On all of these points: the link between the Temple worship and the prayer of the synagogue, the status of established and obligatory prayer which constitutes the substance of Jewish liturgy, we are following J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*

⁶ K. Hruby, L’attente eschatologique dans la liturgie synagogale, in *Eschatologie et Liturgie*, Conférences Saint-Serge, XXXI^e semaine d’études liturgiques, C.L.V. Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma, 1985, pp. 125-137; P. Lenhardt, La valeur des sacrifices dans le judaïsme d’autrefois et d’aujourd’hui, in *Le sacrifice dans les religions*, Paris, 1994, Beauchesne, pp. 61-84; P. Lenhardt, “L’eschatologie dans la liturgie d’Israël,” *La Maison-Dieu*, 220, 1999/4, pp. 119-146.

The 17th blessing in the community prayer for ordinary days ends with the words: “Blessed are You, Lord, who causes his (sic!) Presence to return to Zion.” (The coexistence of the 2nd and 3rd persons in the same sentence was maintained in order to recall that God is at the same time absent – 3rd person – by his transcendence and present – 2nd person – by his immanence.) The 14th blessing of the community prayer for ordinary days ends with the words: “Blessed are You, Lord, who build Jerusalem.” In the context of the blessing, this formula, which was taken from Ps 147:2, means the reconstruction of the

close that Tradition wanted to call the community prayer the prayer *par excellence* (tefillah), ‘service (abodah, worship).’ This becomes apparent in the interpretation given to the verse in Deut 11:13 by anonymous Tradition, which is contemporary with the New Testament: “Surely if you truly heed my every commandment that I am commanding you today – loving the Lord your God, and serving him (u-le-obdo) with all your heart...” To the question as to what the ‘service of the heart’ is, the Midrash replies: “It is prayer (tefillah); just as the ‘service of the altar’ (abodat ha-mizbeah) is called ‘service (abodah),’ so also the ‘prayer (tefillah)’ is called ‘service (abodah).”⁷ Of course, this interpretation is not exclusive, and the midrash also suggests that the ‘service of the heart’ is the ‘talmud’, that is to say, the study-teaching of the Torah. For as always, the midrash came to open the discussion, not to close it. Thus, we might think with Nahmanides that in reality, every activity that is inspired by the love of God is the ‘service of the heart’ which Deut 11:13 asks for.⁸ It remains that the established liturgical prayer, the prayer of the community or the individual prayer said in the name of the community, is ‘service of the heart’, as was the ‘service of the altar’ which was formerly rendered to God’s Presence that was established in the Temple.

Let us see how the liturgy is service in praise and in petition.

1. The Prayer of Praise

The service owed to God according to Deut 12:13 is exclusive. With the exodus from Egypt, Israel had become the people of the ‘servants of the Lord.’⁹ The exclusive service meant here is that which the slave or the servant, designated by the same Hebrew word (ebed), owes his or her master. At the service of a tyrannical master, the slave can be exploited unto death. At the service of God, the servant is liberated for life. The passage of Passover, a passage from the slave’s condition to that of a servant, is magnificently summed up in this short interpretation of Psalm 113:1: “Hallelu-Yah! Praise, servants of the Lord!” Rabbi Levi (end of the 3rd century CE) said: ‘Servants of the Lord (‘abdey YHWH)’ and no longer slaves of Pharaoh (‘abdey par’oh)!’¹⁰ Psalm 113 is the first of the Hallel psalms (Psalms 113 – 118) which are said during the night and the day of Passover. Within the framework of this feast, its interpretation, summed up by Rabbi Levi, is greatly developed during the Passover night liturgy, at the end of the great narration of that night (haggadah), as an

Temple. The following is how Rashi (1040 – 1105) imagined such a reconstruction: ‘The future sanctuary for which we are waiting will appear constructed and completed and it will come from heaven, as is said (Ex 15:17): “The sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established.” (T.B. Sukkah 41a, I Nami). Rashi distinguishes between a sanctuary built by human hands and that which God will build with his hands.

⁷ Sifre on Deut 11:13, p. 88. The midrash Sifre is the oldest collection we have on Deuteronomy. The word ‘midrash’ means first of all the action of seeking God and the meaning of God’s Word in Scripture. Then it means the result of the search for the meaning of the Word, and finally, the collection of the results of that search. Cf. P. Lenhardt, “L’exégèse (midrash) de la Tradition d’Israël, sa grandeur et ses limites,” *Cahiers Ratisbonne*, no. 5, 1998, pp. 9-43.

⁸ Nahmanides (1194-1270), Hassagot on Maimonides (1135-1204), Positive Commandment 5.

⁹ Cf. Lev 25:42,55; Ps 113:1; 134:1; 135:1. Israel-Jacob is called ‘servant’, ‘my servant’, ‘servant of the Lord’ in the ‘Songs of the Servant’ (Isa 42:1,18; 43:10; 44:1,2,21: 49:3,6), and ever since Rashi’s comment on Isa 52:13-15; 53, one can consider the ‘suffering servant’ to be, for the Jews, first of all the people of Israel. This interpretation, which is the main one for the Jews, in no way excludes the possibility that for Christians, the ‘suffering servant’, is first of all, Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ T.J. (Jerusalem Talmud) Pesahim 5,5, 32c.

introduction to the Hallel praise: “ From generation to generation, each of us has the duty to believe that he himself/she herself came out of Egypt, as it is said (Ex 13:8): ‘You shall tell your child on that day, “It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.”’ It is not only our ancestors whom the Holy One, Blessed be He!, rescued, but he also rescued us with them, as is said (Deut 6:23): ‘He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors.’ This is why we have the duty to thank, to praise, to glorify, to exalt, to celebrate, to bless, to magnify and to honor Him who did all these miracles for our ancestors and for us. He led us from slavery to freedom, from distress to joy, from mourning to the feast, from darkness to the great light, from servitude to redemption. Let us sing a new song in his honor: Hallelu-Yah! (Ps 113:1). ‘Hallelu-Yah! Praise, servants of the Lord!’...”¹¹ Let us note how strongly this Jewish pascal praise resonates with the Christian pascal experience of the passage from darkness to light (Acts 26:18; 1 Pet 2:9; Col 1:12-13), of the liberation from sin to the service of God, from death to life (Rom 6:15-23).¹² Thus, let us note that the first movement, the first service rendered by the freed servants is the prayer of praise. This begins in history with the ‘Hallelu-Yah’ of the first redemption. If we adopt Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s opinion (1st half of the 3rd century), for whom ‘Yah’ is a divine name (perhaps to be considered to be the 1st half of the ineffable name YaHWH), then ‘Hallelu-Yah!’ means, ‘Praise YaH!’, and we can say with him that “‘Hallelu-Yah’ is the highest praise to be found in the book of Psalms, because it joins the Name (of God, YaH) and praise (the verb ‘to praise’ in the imperative: praise = hallelu!).”¹³ In reality, there is no more theological or more adequate praise than that by which Israel praises God with his Name. Thus, ever since the beginning of its historical existence, Israel reaches God by means of the service of its praise. Of course, Israel is not the only one in creation to praise God. Other peoples do so (Ps 117:1). The heavens, the firmament, the sun and moon, the mountains and hills, all creatures also do so (Ps 19:2; Ps 148:1-14). The seraphim in Isaiah (Isa 6:3) and the living creatures in Ezekiel (Ezek 3:12) also celebrate God’s glory. However, Israel’s praise is worth more than all the praises. For it is not only added to or associated with the heavenly praise, as is the case in the 3rd blessing of the community prayer for ordinary days. It goes further and reaches its peak when Israel proclaims the ineffable Unity by saying twice a day (Deut 6:4): “Hear, O Israel! The Lord, our God, the Lord is One!” This pre-eminence of the earthly liturgy entrusted to Israel is taught in the 3rd blessing of the additional prayer for Shabbat and feasts.¹⁴ Indeed, the blessing begins with the heavenly praise

¹¹ Haggadah de Pâque, Ed. J. Bloch, Paris, 1970, p. 51 (the translation into English followed the French author’s translation into French). Cf. also Mishnah Pesahim 10,5.

¹² The resonance to which we are drawing attention shows that the Jewish Passover liturgy, for which it is difficult to date the various developments with any precision, is substantially at least as old as the texts echoing it in the New Testament.

¹³ T.B. (Babylonian Talmud) Pesahim 117a.

¹⁴ This blessing is called the “Great Sanctification (kedushah rabbah).’ The liturgy establishes various ways of proclaiming God’s sanctity with explicit recourse to Isa 6:3: “Holy (kadosh), Holy, Holy is the Lord Sabaoth. His glory (kabod) fills the whole earth,” and Ezek 3:12: “Blessed is the Glory of the Lord in his Place!” The seraphim in Isaiah (6:2) see the Lord’s Glory and do not know whence it comes. The living creatures in Ezekiel (3:13) answer that his glory comes ‘from his Place (mi-mekomo)’ which is unknown (cf. T.B. Hagigah 13b). These proclamations of God’s holiness (kedushshah), which are called ‘kedushshah,’ plur. kedushshot,’ usually written ‘kedushah,’ ‘kedushot,’ are included in the 3rd blessing of each community prayer and in the 1st blessing which precedes the reading of the morning Shema Israel. There is also the ‘kedushah de-sidra’ which is said after the morning prayer (cf. D. Flusser, *Sanktus und Gloria*, Festschrift für Otto Michel, Leiden-Köln, 1963). Thus, the Jewish liturgy teaches the paradox of revelation five times a day: the unknown God who makes himself known. This

(Isa 6:3 and Ezek 3:12) with which Israel associates itself, but it continues with the earthly praise (Deut 6:4) which is spoken by Israel alone, and it is completed by means of God's response (Ex 6:7): "I am the Lord your God."¹⁵ Let us note the profound resonance between this structure and that of the eucharistic prayer of the Catholic Church: the praise of the angels, with which the Church associates itself in saying the Preface and in proclaiming the Sanctus, gives way to the praise of the Church, which alone offers Jesus Christ to God and which concludes by proclaiming the Unity of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, 'true God and true man' for Christians, confirms for them the message of the Jewish liturgy; he reveals to them that human and earthly praise is destined to become God's praise of God.

If the prayer of praise reaches this height, we can understand that it serves as a framework for both Jewish and Christian established prayer.

The community prayer begins with three blessings of praise and ends with three blessings of petition. The thirteen blessings of petition on ordinary days, and the unique central blessing on Shabbat and feast days, are at the center of this framework.

Such a structure corresponds well with the meeting of a servant (ebed, slave) with his master. This is the model which Rabbi Hanina proposes (middle of the 3rd century): "In the first blessings, we resemble a servant who addresses praise to his master; in the intermediary blessings, we resemble a servant who begs for a reward from his master, and in the last blessings we are like a servant who has received a reward from his master, who is taking leave and who goes away."¹⁶ The point of the image is to show that in prayer, the human being serves God with an exclusive service that is comparable to that of a slave who only has the right to speak within praise. The image corresponds with the reality of the existence of the believer who knows God well enough to know that he/she is totally dependent on God. But the image does not describe the whole reality; the exclusive service of prayer, which is realized above all

paradox underlies the paradox of the Incarnation, the 'paradox of paradoxes' of which H. de Lubac spoke so well. Cf. H. de Lubac, *Paradoxes, suivi de Nouveaux Paradoxes*, Seuil, 1959. It is regrettable that the present-day Christian liturgies proclaim the Trisagion (Isa 6:3) without its complement (Ezek 3:12); this is an impoverishment in relation to its Jewish source. The 'Apostolic Constitutions' however, had preserved this (*Constitutions Apostoliques*, S.C. no. 336, Cerf, 1987, Book VII 35, 3, Vol. III, p. 77). Saint John Chrysostom, in his time, had seen the value of this complement (*Sur l'incompréhensibilité de Dieu – On the Incomprehensibility of God – Homily I*, 302-320, S.C. no. 28bis, Cerf, 1970, Vol. I, pp. 127-129). E. Peterson did not understand the message given through this complementarity, a message which remains valid and relevant in the Christian economy (*Le livre des anges*, Ad Solem, Geneva 1996 (1935), pp. 55-56). L. Bouyer did not hear any better what Israel's liturgy teaches with Ezek 3:12, cf. *La vie de la liturgie*, Cerf, Paris, 1956, pp. 170-173. It is regrettable that the Greek anaphora of Saint James of Jerusalem does not have this complement from Ezek 3:12 (cf. André Tarby, *La prière Eucharistique de l'Eglise de Jérusalem*, André Tarby, Beauchesne, Paris, 1972, pp. 51-53).

¹⁵ J. Heinemann showed clearly: the pedagogical arrangement of the various 'kedushot' seeks to inculcate the conviction that the human, earthly praise entrusted to Israel is more important in the eyes of God than the heavenly or cosmic praise. Cf. J. Heinemann, *Prayer...*, p. 36; cf. also J. Heinemann – A. Shinan, *tefillot ha-qeba we-ha-hobah shel shabbat we-yom hol*, Hakibbutz Hameuhad, Tel Aviv, 1976, pp. 70ff.

¹⁶ T.B. Berakhot 34a. Well before Rabbi Hanina, the anonymous, old Tradition justifies the structure praise-petition-praise by showing that Moses, David, Solomon in their prayers, and the first prophets who decreed the 18 Benedictions (of the community prayer for ordinary days) implemented it. Cf. Sifre on Deut 33:2, pp. 394-395.

in praise, is given out of love and in view of love.¹⁷ Not only the structure of the groups of blessings teaches the value of praise. Each blessing, in the words of the liturgical formula, “Blessed are You, Lord...”, recognizes God as the source of all that is good and of all blessing. The liturgical formula which introduces the praise or petition that follows, necessarily situates this praise or this request within the dependency on God. Thus the petition itself becomes praise when it is made within a blessing.

The eucharistic prayer is composed in an analogous way: it begins with praise, goes on to petition and ends with praise. The Our Father, which follows the eucharistic prayer in the Catholic liturgy, also begins with praise, continues with petitions, and ends, according to some manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew, with praise: “For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours forever.” These manuscripts witness to a tradition which highlighted the Our Father as a Jewish community prayer and which gave it an ending of praise.¹⁸

2. The Prayer of Petition

The pre-eminence of praise which we have just emphasized does not take away anything from the importance of the prayer of petition. For if the praise gives the framework and the context of prayer, the petition constitutes its center and its heart. The blessings of petition are placed at the center of the community prayer for ordinary days because they express the needs of the community which prays for itself and for each of its members. The petition is also and perhaps even more so at the center because God wants the petition and takes pleasure in it, so to say.

For example, God wants Moses to intercede for Israel after the sin of the golden calf. For when Moses had not yet begun to pray, God said to him (Deut 9:14): “Let me alone that I may destroy them!” Moses understood that that “let me alone!” was an invitation to pray and he immediately began to intercede for Israel, which is what God wanted.¹⁹ It is easy to understand that God wants us to pray for the community, especially when it is in danger as it was after the sin of the golden calf. But is it possible to think that God also likes to hear the petition of a simple person who is interested in a particular matter? Scripture gives a positive answer to this question; it is centered on Hannah and her request for a son, which she addresses to the Lord Sabaot (1 Sam 1:11-21). With Hannah as with Moses, we can find here in Scripture a point of departure capable of amusing the people and of catching its attention. Thus, it will lead so far as to inculcate into the people the conviction that God not only hears the prayer of petition but also desires it. In the case of Hannah, God will be very happy, so to say, to be treated with insolence and even threatened with blackmail.²⁰

¹⁷ Cf. Deut 11:13 which prescribes the service of the heart out of love, as we have seen, footnotes 7 and 8.

¹⁸ Cf. J. Heinemann, “The Background of Jesus’ Prayer in the Jewish Liturgical Tradition”, in *The Lord’s Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, Ed. J. Petuchowski and M. Brocke, New York, The Seabury Press, 1978, pp. 81-89.

¹⁹ Cf. T.B. Berakhot 32a. This teaching is given by Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat (2nd half of the 3rd century).

²⁰ Cf. T.B. Berakhot 31a. It is again Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedat who emphasizes how valuable the prayer of petition is for God. We obviously have to do with a legitimate request. Hannah has, so to say, the

We cannot not hear how this message and the popular form in which it is presented resonate with Jesus' words on the value of the prayer of petition. Jesus even goes so far as to present an iniquitous just person so as to make people understand by means of *a fortiori* contrasting reasoning that is typically popular and rabbinic that insolence 'pays off' even with regard to God (Lk 18:1-8).²¹

In reality, we have to do here with faith. God supports the prayer of petition because it puts to the test the faith of those who ask and who apparently are not heard. Rabbi Isaac (beginning of the 3rd century) asked: "Why were our ancestors sterile (having a son only in their old age)?" And the answer was: "Because the Holy One, blessed be He!, desires the prayer of the just."²² This teaching is shocking when we first hear it. It was perhaps no longer so for those who had already known for a long time the splendid teaching of Rabbi Akiba (died 135 CE), which he gave in a parable at the end of the 1st century under the following circumstances: Rabbi Akiba's prayer for rain during a time of drought and scarcity was granted, whereas the prayer of his teacher Rabbi Eliezer, who had prayed first, was not granted. To save the honor of his teacher, Rabbi Akiba improvised the following parable: "A king had two daughters. One was insolent and the other was respectful. When the insolent one went in to him with her requests, he said: 'May what she is asking be given her and may she go away!' But when the respectful one went in to him, he held back his desire (to satisfy her), for he loved to hear her conversation."²³ Over and beyond this admirable way of explaining why his teacher's prayer had not been heard, Rabbi Akiba makes us enter into the secret of God's love. It is out of love that God does not immediately grant the prayer of those whom he loves. By means of their insistent and trusting prayer, the just testify to God who is love in everything and against all odds. They are the ones who thus serve God to the highest degree, out of love.

An image of Rabbi Akiba's which is deliberately "earthly" invites us to take a further step. Rabbi Akiba was in prison, probably some time before being skinned alive and put to death by the Romans for having supported the Bar Kokhba revolt around 135 CE. His disciple, Rabbi Shimeon bar Yohai, asked him to teach him, which was forbidden by the Romans during that time of religious persecution. Rabbi Akiba didn't want to endanger the life of his disciple; thus, he refused to teach him. When Rabbi Shimeon Bar Yohai rebelled against this refusal, Rabbi Akiba told him: "My son, the cow wants to give milk to her calf more than the calf wants to suck."²⁴ This makes clear that the teacher wants to teach the Torah more than the disciple wants to learn it. The crude and unforgettable image was later applied explicitly to God.²⁵ But already with Rabbi Akiba we can hear the point: God (the teacher) wants to give life (the Torah) out of love more than his creature (the disciple) wants to receive it. Thus,

right to a son. Her request is entirely particular, for she did not know that Samuel would be a great prophet. However, she did know that she would consecrate him to God (1Sam 1:11,28).

²¹ Contrasting *a fortiori* reasoning is particularly convincing. The Pharisaic masters often used it, and Saint Paul made use of it, for example in the Letter to the Romans (5:9,10,15).

²² T.B. Yebamot 64a.

²³ T.J. Taanit 3,4, 66 c-d.

²⁴ T.B. Pesahim 112a.

²⁵ For example, by the Great Maggid of Mezhirech (died 1772), a disciple of the Baal Shem-Tov (1700-1760, founder of modern Hassidism), in *maggid devarav le-ya'akov* of The Maggid Dov Baer of Mezhirech, Ed. R. Shatz-Uffenheimer, The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, no. 82, p. 144; no. 129, p. 221. Cf. also Rabbi Levi Yitshak of Berditchev, in *qedushat ha-levi*, Par. Nasso. Cf. further L. Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, London-Washington, 1993, pp. 30ff.

in the creator God, we reach the root of all human desires and needs. The blessing said after eating fruit or consuming a drink makes God known as ‘Life of the worlds (hey ha-olamim)’ and source of every request coming from creatures. This blessing is worded thus: “Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, creator of many souls (living beings) and of what is lacking them, for all that you have created in order to make live the soul of all that lives. Blessed is the ‘Life of the worlds (hey ha-olamim)’”. This prayer which calls God ‘the Life of the worlds’ has its origin in the oldest Jewish mysticism known to us, the Merkabah mysticism. This mysticism celebrates ‘hey ha-olamim’ by probably still giving it the meaning of ‘eternal Living One’ or ‘Eternally Living One’.²⁶ The name ‘hey ha-olamim’ is connected with what can be found in Daniel in the form of ‘hay alma’ (4:31, which means ‘the Life of the world’) or ‘hey ha-olam’ (12:7, which means ‘the eternal Living One’).²⁷ It is also to be found in the Apocalypse of Saint John in the form of ‘o zôn eis tous aiônas tôn aiônôn’ (vivens in saecula saeculorum, the Living One forever and ever).²⁸ ‘The Living One forever and ever’, ‘Life of the worlds’, the two translations come from the double meaning of the word ‘olam’ (in the plural ‘olamim’ or ‘olamot’): hidden, unlimited time or space, whence, for time, eternity, and for space, the world. The old meaning is temporal; the more recent meaning is spatial. The Apocalypse of Saint John is on the side of the temporal meaning, but this fact does not exclude the spatial meaning, the ‘Life of the worlds’, which was already known in the 1st century CE. In any case, ever since Isaiah (6), Ezekiel (1-3), Daniel (4, 7, 12), we have a vision of the creator God, of the living God who draws his creation towards his Throne (kisse), towards his Chariot (merkabah), towards his Glory, towards the known place which reveals ‘his unknown Place’, that is to say, his living, infinite and eternal transcendence.²⁹ The ‘kedushot’ of Jewish liturgy, the blessing after consuming certain types of food and drink of which we spoke above, and the Jewish-Christian Apocalypse of Saint John express the conviction that the creator God is the ‘eternal Living One’, the ‘Life of the worlds’, the Life of all his creatures.³⁰ He is at the source of all the needs and of all the desires of his creatures. He asks to be known as such, to be the addressee of the request which he wants to satisfy. We see that the prayer of petition is based on God himself, and we can understand why it is encouraged with insistence and vehemence in the Tradition of Israel, of the Bible, the Pharisees and the New Testament. Jesus’ call to the prayer of petition: “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find,” is based on this age-old Tradition, according to which God is the

²⁶ Cf. G. Scholem, *Les grands courants de la mystique juive*, Payot, Paris, 1973, p. 72, and *Les Origines de la Kabbale*, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1966, p. 170. In his edition of the ‘Bahir’, G. Scholem translated ‘hey ha-olamim’ as the ‘Life of the worlds’ (das ‘Leben der Welten’); cf. G. Scholem, *Das Buch Bahir*, Leipzig, 1923, Darmstadt, 1970, p. 134. The recent French edition of the Bahir also translates as ‘la Vie des Mondes’ (‘the Life of the Worlds’), *Le Bahir*, Translation into French by J. Gottfarstein, Verdier, Lagrasse, 1983, pp. 134-135.

²⁷ Cf. the commentary by S. Hakohen and Y. Qil, *Sefer Daniel*, Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, 1994.

²⁸ Rev 4:4,10.

²⁹ Cf. footnote 14.

³⁰ G. Scholem is without doubt correct in translating ‘hey ha-olamim’ as the ‘Eternally Living One’ in the hymn of merkabah mysticism, and as the ‘Life of the worlds’ in the Bahir. What we would suggest is that ‘hey ha-olamim’, which is attested by the Apocalypse in the temporal sense, is perhaps also understood in the 1st century as ‘Life of the worlds’. Let us point out that the ‘Life of the worlds’ is to be found in the Bahir (12th century) as a hypostasis. One would like to be able to decipher clearly the message of the Apocalypse of Saint John as regards ‘the eternal Living One’ in his chapter 4. In any case, the Gospel of John lets the ‘Life of the worlds’ resonate strongly with Jesus (Jn 11:25-26; 14:6,13). Does the New Testament give first indications of a hypostasized ‘Life of the worlds’ in Jesus Christ?

first to love and to seek in order to be loved and sought in return.³¹ This ‘interest’ of God’s in the prayer of petition invites one to go further. We shall see in the last part of this presentation that one can go so far as to conceive of a prayer for the Shekhinah, for God’s Presence in the world. But first we have to talk about that Shekhinah, God’s Presence in the world, God’s Presence to Israel’s prayer.

II. Liturgical Prayer as Service Rendered to the Presence (Shekhinah)³²

God is the creator of heaven and earth; he never ceases to keep the world in existence. Scripture, the Tradition of Israel and of the Church teach this ‘ongoing creation’ of the world’s space and time.³³ God is present to the world, and his Presence (Shekhinah) in the world is first of all his ‘action of dwelling’ in the world by constantly creating it.³⁴ The Presence (Shekhinah) is then the result of the action of dwelling: it is God himself who is everywhere and always present in the space and time of the world. Rabban Gamaliel declared: “No place on earth is empty of his Presence (Shekhinah).”³⁵ This formula, which appears to be limited to space, could be enlarged in the following way: No place on earth and in the heavens, no time since the beginning and for all time is empty of his Presence (Shekhinah). But God did not create the world only in view of this general and universal Presence. He wanted to make his Shekhinah dwell in particular places and times so as to meet there men and women created in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27).³⁶ It is to Israel that he first revealed himself as the creator. It is also to Israel that he entrusted the service to be

³¹ Cf. Mt 7:7-11; Lk 11:9-13; 18:1-8. These words of Jesus call to mind Deut 4:29; Jer 29:13-14. That God is the first one to love, is taught in 1 Jn 4:10,19 and in the 2nd blessing which precedes the morning Shema (“With great love you have loved us...” or “With an eternal love you have loved us...”). That God is the first one to seek, is taught in Deut 11:12 and in the liturgy of the feast of Sukkot. In this liturgy, at the beginning of the ‘hoshannot’ processions, God is called upon as ‘He who seeks us (literally, ‘Our Seeker’ – dorshenu).’

³² For a detailed presentation of the Presence (Shekhinah), cf. P. Lenhardt, “La Tradition d’Israël sur la Présence Divine (Shekinah) dans le Temple et dans le monde éclaire la foi chrétienne en l’Incarnation”, *Cahiers Ratisbonne* no. 2, 1997, pp. 137-161.

³³ The 1st blessing before the morning Shema Israel celebrates God who “in his goodness renews each day, constantly, the act of the beginning.” For ‘ongoing creation’, cf. H. de Lubac, *La Révélation Divine*, Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de la Constitution “Dei Verbum” du Concile Vatican II, Paris, Cerf, 1983, pp. 64-65; cf. also P. Lenhardt, *La Terre, Jérusalem, le Temple, leur valeur pour les juifs et les chrétiens*, *Cahiers Ratisbonne* no. 1, 1996, p. 110, footnotes 11 and 12.

³⁴ From the root ShaKHaN, of which there are many examples in various forms in biblical Hebrew, rabbinic Hebrew (‘language of the Sages – leshon hakhamim’) forms the noun of action SheKHiNah, which means first of all the action of dwelling, but then and above all, the reality which results from that action, that is, the divine Presence which dwells in the world and, in a particular way, the places and times in which it wants to let itself be encountered.

³⁵ Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, Piska 1, p. 4. Rabban Gamaliel is the grandson of Gamaliel, Saint Paul’s teacher. The Zoharic formula (Tikkunei Zohar 57): ‘No place is empty of him (leyt atar panuy minneh),’ comes from Rabban Gamaliel, but serves another purpose. The Zoharic formula does nothing but affirm forcefully God’s immanence in every created reality. The Hassidic masters later extended the formula’s application to the areas of psychology and ethics: God is present everywhere, even where sin occupies the entire space (in the sinner’s soul).

³⁶ It is always the same Shekhinah, the Shekhinah of the One and Unique God, which Israel encounters in its faith and its religious experience. As we shall see further on, the various aspects in which the Shekhinah is contemplated and encountered by Israel always bring it back to the same God. The Shekhinah’s ‘concentration’ in a particular time and place takes nothing away from its ‘concentration’ in other times and places.

rendered to his Shekhinah in the particular places and times of prayer. We shall begin with those places, because the reality of the Presence revealed itself first of all in the Bush, then by means of God's will to dwell in the space of the world, in the midst of the children of Israel: "Have them make me a sanctuary (mikdash), so that I may dwell (u-shakhanti) among them." (Ex 25:8) We shall then speak of the times, that is to say, the feasts, which are called 'times (zemanim)' by Tradition and which are arranged in relation to the Sabbath, which has a higher status.³⁷ We shall end with the Sabbath. It is there, at the summit of Jewish life, that prayer assumes at the same time the world's space and time, which are already transfigured and unified in the eternal life which the Sabbath anticipates.

1. The places of encounter with the Shekhinah

As Tradition and Scripture reveal them, these places of particular encounter with the Shekhinah are, in 'chronological' order, the Burning Bush (Ex 3), the Tent of Meeting (Lev 1:1, meeting = moed, encounter), the Jerusalem Temple (the 1st Temple of Solomon, then the 2nd Temple), the community and the individual person, who pray liturgical prayer.³⁸

The Burning Bush was the first particular place to which God descended in order to reveal himself. There, he "lowered his Shekhinah" into the bush in order to speak with Moses, to convince him to accept the mission of bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt.³⁹ The Lord announced that he would come down again to deliver his people from the hand of the Egyptians (Ex 3:8) because he saw the misery of his people (Ex 3:7). God descended into this bush that was low and full of thorns in order to show that he shared in the suffering of his people. Thus, he showed and announced that his Shekhinah is and will always be with Israel, with the community and with each person, in distress as in well-being.⁴⁰ From then on, through his Shekhinah, God is accessible to the prayer of petition in distress, to the prayer of praise in joy.

The Tent of Meeting was then the first place in which God wanted to dwell in the midst of his people (cf. Ex 25:8; Lev 16:16). Rabbi Akiba and his disciple Shim'eon ben Azzai marvelled to see how far God's love for Israel goes. For God 'restrained his Glory', which fills heaven and earth (cf. Jer 23:24), not only to the reduced volume of the tent, but even more so into the space between the mercy seat and the two cherubim (cf. Ex 25:22). That is where God let himself be encountered by Moses, and from there, God gave orders for the children of Israel (cf. Ex 25:22).⁴¹ This vision of a God who 'withdraws' or 'restrains' himself out of love is very rich in giving an

³⁷ The conclusion of the Kaddish blessing for a feast which falls on a Sabbath teaches the following hierarchical order: "Blessed are You, Lord, who sanctify the Sabbath, Israel and the times (zemanim)." The word 'times' designates the feasts, which Scripture calls 'appointed times for encounter' (mo'ed, mo'adim, mo'adot), cf. footnote 51.

³⁸ The 'chronological' order which we are following here is, of course, above all pedagogical. In relativizing the chronology in biblical and traditional material in this way, we adhere to the well known rabbinic principle: "There is no before or after in the Torah" (Sifre on Num 9:1, p. 61 and Rashi ad locum; T.B. Pesahim 6b and Rashi ad locum, ein mukdam u-meuhar ba-torah).

³⁹ Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimeon ben Yohai, Ed. J.N. Epstein – E.Z. Melamed, Jerusalem, 1955, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 1-2.

⁴¹ Cf. Sifra on Lev 1:1, 4a. The Glory is the Shekhinah, God's Presence which fills heaven and earth (cf. Isa 6:3 and footnote 14).

account of the experience of Israel and then of the Church of God's omnipotence.⁴² This omnipotence manifests itself in a paradoxical way in revelation, for which God limits the "strength" of his Word to the "strength" of the human person to whom the Word is addressed.⁴³ This limitation of God's in order to give the Word to Israel, at the same time allows Israel to speak to God and to meet him there, where God wanted to let himself be met.

Finally, according to Deut (12:5), it was the Temple in Jerusalem which was the main dwelling place: "It is only to the place chosen by the Lord your God from among your tribes to place his name there and to make it dwell there that you shall come to seek him." The 'choice', the 'seeking' - what we have here is the vocabulary of love. And it is love which expressed itself in what the Lord said to Solomon when he had just finished constructing the Temple (1 Kings 9:3): "I consecrate this house that you have built by putting my Name there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time." As the old anonymous Tradition interprets this verse, God's particular and apparently exclusive love for this place testifies in reality to his love for every place in his creation.⁴⁴ God is the first to seek this place; in that way, God indicates that this is the place where people must seek him in order to find him. Let us note the wordings used in the accounts of the foundation of the Temple: God causes his name to dwell in the Temple (1 Kings 9:3 and before that, 2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kings 8:29, 44, 48), whereby it is also said (1 Kings 8:11): "The glory of the Lord filled the Temple of the Lord," which meant for Solomon (1 Kings 8:12-13): "The Lord has decided to dwell in the dark cloud. Yes, I have built you an exalted dwelling, a place for you to dwell in forever."⁴⁵ These different wordings indicate the distinction to be made, according to 1 Kings 8:27-30, between the known place where the Name (the immanent Presence = the Shekhinah) dwells and where the people will make its prayer heard, and the unknown Place where the Lord resides (heaven, the place of the transcendence). This distinction is maintained throughout the history of the Temple until the end of the 2nd Temple which was destroyed in the year 70 CE. It does not contradict what goes without saying: the Shekhinah was in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, in the 2nd Temple as in the first.⁴⁶ So let us state clearly that the Shekhinah was in the 2nd

⁴² God's omnipotence manifests itself in a paradoxical way in creation, in revelation and in redemption. God's restriction for creation is, so to say, what gives the world and human freedom the necessary space to exist. This restriction was contemplated above all by the Jewish mystics, the cabbalists, starting in the 16th century. Cf. G. Scholem, *Les grands courants...*, pp. 277-282. God's restriction in redemption is just as paradoxical. It can be summed up in the formula suggested by E. Urbach: "God's power is his silence." (E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 80-96 on the interpretation of Ps 89:9 by Abba Hanan, Abot de-Rabbi Nathan B, Chapter 7, 10a and on the Mekhilta de- Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 15:11, p. 142).

⁴³ Cf. the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 20:18, p. 235.

⁴⁴ Cf. Sifre on Deut 11:12, p. 80.

⁴⁵ Cf. also Ex 25:8 and Lev 16:16 which were already mentioned in connection with the tent of meeting and according to which the Lord himself dwells in the midst of his people.

⁴⁶ Cf. the 'Aleinu' prayer which was composed before the destruction of the 2nd Temple and in which it is said of God: "The seat of his splendor is up on high, and the presence (dwelling = shekhinah) of his power is at the highest of the heights." Concerning this wording, J. Heinemann (*Prayer...*, p. 273) wrote: "Only while the Temple stood could it be stressed that the Divine Presence dwells 'up on high' without explicitly stating that it also dwells in the Holiest of Holies. On the contrary, when its presence in the Temple could be taken for granted, it was necessary to caution against an oversimple faith that might see the Temple as God's actual dwelling place, and to insist that His presence also dwells in the heavens and that the Temple below is only a mirror image of the one above." There is a summary of the 'Aleinu' prayer at the end of the daily morning prayer.

Temple until its destruction, while nevertheless also saying that it was not there exactly like it had been in the first Temple.⁴⁷

The destruction of the Temple brought with it the departure of the Shekhinah and the end of sacrifices. But the prayer of the synagogue which was established by the Pharisees remained, as we saw, as ‘service of the heart’, which is inseparable from the ‘service of the altar’. Thus, Israel’s liturgy after the destruction of the Temple kept its orientation towards the Land, towards Jerusalem, towards the Temple, which had been since the beginning (1 Kings 8:33, 38, 44, 49). The Shekhinah did not disappear from the world. It remained in every place of creation and in particular, in every place, in every community, in every person where the name of the Lord is called upon.⁴⁸ But this does not mean that Israel resigned itself to the Shekhinah’s departure from its place of rest (Zion, the Temple, Ps 132:13-14). In the community prayer for ordinary days, Israel’s liturgy asks in a coherent way (blessing 14) for the reconstruction of Jerusalem, which is to say, of the Temple, with the restoration of the Davidic dynasty (blessings 14 and 15) which from the beginning has been inseparable from Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Sam 6 and 7). The community prayer also asks God every day to re-establish the Temple worship and the sacrificial offerings; it ends this request by blessing God “who will cause his Shekhinah to return to Zion,” that is to say, to Jerusalem into the Temple.⁴⁹ In the central blessing of the additional community prayer for the Sabbath and feast days (the 4th of the 7 blessings), the Temple sacrifices are remembered in order to ask for their re-establishment. Thus, by the blessings which the liturgy of Israel establishes and in which the Name of the Lord is called upon, the liturgy brings the community or the person who is praying into contact with the Shekhinah. It is the service of the heart rendered to the Shekhinah which is present in the blessing addressed to it, while waiting that it might again be possible to join this service to the service of the altar, when God wills to bring back his Shekhinah to Zion (Jerusalem) into the Temple that has been rebuilt.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ We cannot ignore a tradition according to which the Shekhinah was not in the 2nd Temple (cf. for example Genesis Rabbah on Gen 9:27, p. 342 and Rashi ad locum). But for competent scholars such as J. Heinemann (cf. the preceding footnote) and S. Safrai, *Ha-Aliyah ba-Regel bi-Mey ha-Bayt ha-Sheni*, Jerusalem, 1965, in German translation, *Die Wallfahrt im Zeitalter des zweiten Tempels*, Neukirchner Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981, it is certain, even obvious, that the Shekhinah was in the 2nd Temple. This is very important for christology (cf. P. Lenhardt, *La Tradition d’Israël sur la Présence Divine (Shekhinah)...*, pp. 147-148).

⁴⁸ The conviction that the Shekhinah is present to every community and to every person who calls upon it, is expressed forcefully in Mishnah Abot 3,2,6, in the Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 20:21/24, p. 243, and in T.B. Berakhot 6a. The main support for this conviction is Ex 20:21/24: “In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.” For a more detailed presentation, cf. P. Lenhardt, *La Tradition d’Israël sur la Présence Divine (Shekhinah)...* However, let us point out here the resonance between these traditions and the word of Jesus in Mt 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in their midst.” In speaking this way, Jesus presents himself as the Shekhinah.

⁴⁹ This blessing is the 17th of the 19 blessings of the community prayer for ordinary days. It is the 5th of the 7 blessings of the community prayer for the Sabbath and feasts.

⁵⁰ The blessing mentioned in the preceding footnote associates the prayer (tefillah, community prayer) with the sacrificial offerings: “Accept the offerings (ishey) of Israel and its prayer (tefillah) with love! Always accept the service (abodah) of your people Israel.” The word ‘service’ signifies at one and the same time the ‘service of the altar’ (the sacrifices) and the ‘service of the heart’ (the prayer).

2. The times of encounter with the Shekhinah, the feasts and the Sabbath

In Scripture,⁵¹ the feasts are called ‘appointed times for encounter’ (mo’ed, plur. mo’adim, mo’adot). They are all arranged in relation to the Sabbath, which is called ‘beginning of the holy convocations’, but which is not part of the convocations and which is not called ‘appointed time for encounter’ (mo’ed).⁵² The pilgrimage feasts are: Passover, Pentecost, Tents (Sukkot).⁵³ These three feasts belong to the ‘appointed times for encounter’ enumerated by Scripture (Lev 23) after the Sabbath, which precedes and dominates them (Lev 23:3), as we have seen. An ancient tradition noted in Scripture that these feasts are the time of a vision: in fact, every person (in the name of those whom he/she represents) must “be seen” before the Lord God in the place which God will have chosen (Deut 16:16; Ex 23:16). The Masoretic text is vocalized in such a way as to read ‘to be seen’, but it is possible that an older way of reading it was that every person must ‘see’ the Lord God. Whatever the case may be, the important thing is that an old anonymous tradition, which is at least contemporaneous with the New Testament, knows that the consonantal text of Deut 16:16 can be heard in two ways. It thus teaches: “Just as he/she (every person) came to be seen, so he/she will see.”⁵⁴ Thus, at each pilgrimage feast, in the chosen place (the Temple), there is reciprocal vision which is the feast’s *raison d’être*. It is not said what the human person sees of God in this vision. Certainly, it is not speaking of a material vision. However, we cannot think that it was less real than a material vision; in fact, it is inseparable from the obligation to offer communion sacrifices, the flesh of which, received at the Lord’s table, nourishes the guests’ joy.⁵⁵ The joy of these pilgrimage feasts is attributed to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who is spread out over the people on that occasion.⁵⁶ This outpouring is linked substantially with the vision of God who was encountered in the Temple. It gives complete certainty as to the fact that the Shekhinah was present in the 2nd Temple, a reality about which we spoke above.⁵⁷ In fact, at the time of the 2nd Temple, numerous traditions testify to the fact that everywhere where the Shekhinah appears, there is a concomitant manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The one does not go without the other, to the point that these two realities are sometimes mentioned interchangeably in the texts.⁵⁸ This concomitance is magnificently highlighted by the common tradition on the Holy Spirit who inspired Moses and all the people for the ‘Song of the Sea (shirat ha-yam,

⁵¹ Cf. Lev 23:2, 4, 44. The translations are to be deplored which propose ‘solemnities’ instead of ‘appointed times for encounter’.

⁵² Cf. TB Arakhin 10b. The blessing which proclaims the holiness of the Sabbath (the Kiddush blessing) calls the Sabbath the ‘beginning of the holy convocations’. This is based on Scripture where, in Lev 23:3, the Sabbath is in fact situated at the beginning of the holy convocations (Lev 23:4), which are then enumerated. Cf. footnotes 37 and 51.

⁵³ Cf. S. Safrai, *Ha-Aliyah ba-Regel...*

⁵⁴ Sifre on Deut 16:16, pp. 195-196. Cf. L. Finkelstein’s footnote at the bottom of page 195.

⁵⁵ The obligation of the ‘vision (reiyyah)’ is mentioned in Mishnah Hagigah 1,1. It is accompanied by the obligation of offering a holocaust and communion sacrifices which are also mentioned by the Mishnah (ibid. 1,2-3). Let us point out that the joy (simhah) of the pilgrimage feasts is prescribed (cf. Deut 16:11-14 and Mishnah Sukkah 4,1), and that it is based on the eating of the flesh of the communion sacrifices (cf. Rashi on T.B. Sukkah 42b, we-ha-simhah, and on T.B. Sukkah 9a, al ha-hagigah). This joy of the vision, of the communion meal, as great as it might be, does not reach the strictly divine level of the ‘delight (oneg)’ of the Sabbath (cf. footnote 89).

⁵⁶ Cf. Genesis Rabbah on Gen 29:2-3, par. 70, p. 806; T.J. Sukkah 5,5, 55a; Pesikta Rabbati Pisk. 1, 1ab – 2a.

⁵⁷ Cf. footnotes 46 and 47.

⁵⁸ Cf. P. Lenhardt, *La Tradition d’Israël sur la Présence divine...*, p. 140, footnote 6. Cf. A. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen...*, pp. 465-468; P. Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung...*, pp. 140-143.

Ex 15:1-18).’ The Holy Spirit intervened in connection with the fact that Israel had “seen the great hand (the Shekhinah) of the Lord acting against the Egyptians” (Ex 14:31).⁵⁹ It was the Holy Spirit who made this vision of the Shekhinah possible, and the cry of gratitude uttered by each person within the people testifies to this (Ex 15:2): “This is my God!”⁶⁰ Thus, the joy of the pilgrimage feasts comes from a vision of the Shekhinah which is made possible through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This joy is experienced in the eating of the flesh of the communion sacrifices. It is particularly exuberant during the feast of Sukkot, the night of the second day of the feast, in the rite of water libation which is called ‘house of water drawing (beit ha-shoevah)’, ‘because from there (from the water drawn at Siloe for the libation) you drew the Holy Spirit according to Isa 12:3: “And you shall draw water with joy from the springs of salvation.”’⁶¹

The overabundance of joy during the feast of Sukkot certainly highlights the greatness of this feast which is called simply ‘the Feast’ by Tradition and which is chosen, according to the prophet Zechariah, to unite all peoples with Israel at the end of time

⁵⁹ Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 15:1, pp. 118-119. The ‘Song of the Sea’ is said every day in the ‘Passages of Praise (pesukei de-zimra)’ which precede the morning prayer. The problem is knowing how to say it: like the Shema Israel or like the Hallel. Rabbi Akiba and his disciple Rabbi Nehemiah start from the common assumption that the song was said in the Holy Spirit: “the Holy Spirit rested on Israel and they said the song.”

⁶⁰ Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 15:2, pp. 126-127; T.B. Sotah 30b.

⁶¹ T.J.Sukkah 5,5 55a, in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. Another tradition, in this same context in the Jerusalem Talmud, attributes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the joy. It presents Yona ben Amitai (the prophet? Cf. Jon 1:1) during the time of the 2nd Temple: “Rabbi Yona said: Yona ben Amitai was one of those who went up on pilgrimage. He entered into the joy of the ‘house of water drawing’ and the Holy Spirit came upon him. This teaches you that the Holy Spirit only comes upon a joyful heart.” Another tradition speaks of ‘the joy of the water’ (Genesis Rabbah on Gen 29:2-3, p. 706). These various wordings converge, testifying to an experience which links joy, water, the Holy Spirit. According to the Gospel of John 7:37-39, in the context of the feast of Sukkot, Jesus refers to Scripture saying: “From his/her heart will flow streams of living water.” He is certainly thinking of what Zechariah announced in the chapter that is read on the feast of Sukkot (Zech 14:8): “On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem.” Jesus identifies himself with Jerusalem, which is Zion, which is the Temple where dwells the Shekhinah. He then announces that those who believe in him will receive the Holy Spirit, which isn’t possible so long as he has not been glorified. Thus, by resonance, the context of Israel’s pilgrimages suggests strongly the following teaching: Jesus glorified, acknowledged as Glory (Shekhinah) is the Place (the known Place, Jerusalem, Zion, the Temple) whence living waters will flow, that is to say, the Holy Spirit. Without the Shekhinah, present and acknowledged, there is no Holy Spirit; but equally, without the Holy Spirit, the Shekhinah is not acknowledged (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). According to the Gospel of John 7:37, this teaching is given on “the last day of the feast which is also the most solemn.” We would have expected it rather to be given on the 2nd day of the feast, linked with the water libation (the ‘house of water drawing’), about which we spoke above. In fact, the joyful celebration of the water libation takes place in the evening and during the night of the second day; of this Mishnah Sukkah 5,1 says: “The person who has not seen the joy of the ‘House of water drawing’, has not seen joy in his/her life,” and the Mishnah describes the songs, the dances and the lights which filled the Temple during the entire night, to the extent that “there was no courtyard in Jerusalem which was not lit up with the light of the ‘House of water drawing.’” (Mishnah Sukkah 5,3). These passages of the Mishnah were compiled orally, based on testimonies given by witnesses who knew the Temple before its destruction and who experienced the joy of the feast linked with the water and the Holy Spirit (which the water signifies in a sacramental way). Jesus certainly knew this reality which he refers to himself without in any way wanting to diminish it, or even less, to replace it. His reference to Zech 14:8 is made within a broader reference to the lived tradition of the feast. For it is Tradition which instituted the rite of the ‘House of water drawing’ without deducing it from Scripture, without even giving it support from Scripture.

in the adoration of the One God.⁶² But the eschatological note of the last pilgrimage feast does not make one forget the importance of the other two which precede it: Pentecost and Passover. These two feasts are also ‘meetings’ with God with a ‘vision’ of his Shekhinah in the Temple that is made possible by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The feast of Pentecost has all of these traits, even though it is celebrated for only one day in the land of Israel (in contrast to the 7 days for Passover and the 8 days for Sukkot), and although at the time of the 2nd Temple, it had not yet been given officially its meaning as the feast of the gift of the Torah at Sinai.⁶³

As for the feast of Passover, it begins the year of pilgrimages and commemorates the first redemption in history. Its liturgy, which is particularly rich on the night of the first day, includes the Haggadah, the great account of the intervention of the Lord who “passed (passah) above the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt” (Ex 12:27). The Haggadah mentions the ‘revelation of the Shekhinah (gillui shekhinah)’ during the Egyptian night twice in different ways and insists on the fact that it was the Lord himself and no one else, who made Israel go out of Egypt. The narrative leads to the great praise of the Hallel (Psalms 113 to 118) and to the request for the final redemption. This request is made in the ‘blessing of redemption (birkat ha-geullah)’ which interrupts the Hallel to give space for the festive meal. This blessing gives a perfect model of liturgical remembering. It is worded in the present (“this night”), and based on the past (the redemption from Egypt), it asks for the future: “other meetings and pilgrimages in a future of peace,” in the joy “of the reconstruction of your city (Jerusalem) and in the rejoicing of your worship (re-established).” What follows makes the rest of the request clear: “There, we shall eat of the flesh of the sacrifices and of the passovers, the blood of which will have been poured out on the sides of your altar so that they might be accepted. We shall give you thanks with a new song for our redemption and for our liberation. Blessed are You, Lord, who have redeemed Israel.” The extraordinary realism of these petitions might be surprising.⁶⁴ We know that it comes from a tradition which was passed on by Rabbi Akiba.⁶⁵ This tradition and the Tradition which repeated it in the Passover liturgy cannot be considered exaggerated or marginal. Their intensity shows the love that is felt for the Shekhinah and the desire for its return. It is for the Shekhinah that the reconstruction of the Temple and the re-establishment of the sacrifices are requested. The presence of the

⁶² Zech 14:1-21 is the established prophetic reading for the first day of the feast of Sukkot. The peak of this reading is Zech 14:9: “And the Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day, the Lord will be One and his Name will be One.” This verse is cited in the liturgy of Rosh ha-Shanah, in the blessing of the Kingships (Malkiyyot) in the additional prayer, and every day in the summary of that liturgy, the ‘Aleinu’ prayer at the end of the morning office (cf. footnote 46). It is called to mind in the central blessing of the community prayer for the afternoon of the Sabbath. This blessing puts the verse into the present tense: “You are One and your Name is One,” because in the Sabbath, the Lord is already One and his Name is already One (cf. footnote 88).

⁶³ Let us draw attention here to the importance of the Christian Tradition, which speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the feast of Pentecost to the Jews, the ‘brothers’ of the apostles (Acts 1:15), united in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-36).

⁶⁴ This realism goes beyond that of the petitions in the central blessing of the additional prayer for the Sabbath (cf. footnote 87). Is this because Israel particularly aspires to eating the passover and to experiencing the joy which this procures?

⁶⁵ Mishnah Pesahim 10,6 transmits a discussion between Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba and the traditions which they proposed for the praise of the night of Passover. These traditions were adjusted and adopted as an anonymous text of the ‘blessing for redemption’.

Shekhinah in the community which prays and which blesses is not enough. God is asked to make the Shekhinah return to the Temple, to Zion, to the place of its rest (Ps 132:13-14).

The 10 days of Repentance (Teshuvah) The feasts of Rosh ha-Shanah and Kippur

The 10 days beginning with Rosh ha-Shanah, on the first day of the 7th month, and going until Kippur, the 10th day of that month, are the '10 days of repentance (teshuvah)'. They include a Sabbath which is called 'Shabbat Shuvah' (or 'Shabbat Teshuvah') because of its prophetic reading (Hos 14:2-10) which begins with the call: "Return (shuvah), O Israel, to the Lord your God!" This wording highlights that the repentance taught by Israel's Tradition, both biblical and rabbinic, is not only a reversal, a conversion (metanoia) that is oriented towards God; it is a return which must go "as far as the Lord your God ('ad YHWH Eloheykha)." This return is necessary every day, since the beginnings of humanity, because of the sin which constantly turns away and separates from God.⁶⁶ The community prayer for ordinary days thus includes three penitential blessings which bless God in the following significant order: "Blessed are You, Lord, who give knowledge (da'at) through grace;" "Blessed are You, Lord, who take pleasure in repentance (ha-rotseh bi-teshuvah);" "Blessed are You, Lord, who multiply pardon." The teaching given here in the prayer for every day sheds light on the prayer for the days of repentance: Only knowledge of God can lead the sinner to know himself/herself and to acknowledge his/her sin; and it is God who, through the Holy Spirit, gives this knowledge.⁶⁷ From the beginning of the road of return, God intervenes in order to give knowledge without destroying the sinner's freedom. Again, it is God who delights in repentance, who supports the sinner's free journey on the road of return and who will go out to meet the sinner if he/she cannot get as far as God.⁶⁸ Finally, God multiplies the forgiveness.⁶⁹ Thus, the daily prayer and that of the days of repentance are supported by the Holy Spirit and oriented towards the Shekhinah, from which sin had separated the sinner. Here we see how great is repentance.⁷⁰ It is so important that it was to be counted among the six things which preceded the creation of the world.⁷¹ Thus, it is

⁶⁶ Rabbi Eliezer taught: "Return (shuv, do repentance) one day before his death!" To his disciples who said: "Can the human person know which day he/she will die?!" he replied (not without humor): "Precisely, so let him do repentance today for fear of dying tomorrow; let him do repentance tomorrow for fear of dying the day after tomorrow, and thus all of his days will be in repentance." (Mishnah Abot 2,10; Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 15; B, Chapter 29, 31b; T.B. Shabbat 153a.

⁶⁷ Cf. E. Munk, *Le monde des prières (The World of Prayer)*, Philipp Feldheim Inc., New York, 1961, Vol. I, p. 135), C.L.K.H., Paris, 1970, pp. 154-156, who quotes Rashi's laconic commentary on Ex 31:3: "the knowledge (da'at) = the Holy Spirit."

⁶⁸ Here, we cannot unfold the splendor of Israel's Tradition which resonates perfectly with the teaching of Jesus on repentance, in particular in the parable of the 'prodigal son' (Lk 15:11-31).

⁶⁹ Here, the blessing resonates with Isa 55:7. Saint Paul does the same in Rom 5:20 and perhaps drew inspiration from the prayer of the synagogue during his time.

⁷⁰ Cf. T.B. Yoma 86a: Rabbi Levi said: "Great is repentance..." Cf. footnotes 82 and 83.

⁷¹ Genesis Rabbah on Gen 1:1, Par. 1 no. 4. Rav Yehouda Léon Askénazi (1922-1996) showed the profound wisdom in this teaching: "The human being of good will, who was created free and thus fallible, able to sin and not a sinner, knows that the possibility of repentance is his/her due within the same necessity which obliges him/her to freedom." (*Ki Mitsion II*, Fondation Manitou, Jerusalem,

believed to exist before the sin which separates the man and the woman from God. It makes it possible that sin does not separate Adam, Eve and humanity definitively from the Shekhinah. In the beginning, the Shekhinah was in the world below (with Adam and Eve), but because of the first sin, it detached itself and rose to the first heaven. With the other sins which followed, it distanced itself further, until the 7th heaven. Abraham and other righteous people and finally Moses had to come in order to make it come back down to the earth in the Tent of Meeting.⁷² This colorful tradition makes us understand the importance of the Tent of Meeting and of the Temple after it as places in which God wanted to set up his Shekhinah in order to communicate with Israel. Repentance has to be done every day and on the 10 days of repentance in order to keep the Shekhinah in the Temple. Since the destruction of the Temple, repentance must be done so that the Shekhinah will return to Zion in the rebuilt Temple. In any case, the Shekhinah remains accessible and present in liturgical prayer, as we saw.⁷³

Let us see how this prayer for the days of repentance is oriented on the common basis of the confession of sins, of fear linked with love, of the joy promised to the sinner who repents. The first step to be taken by the sinner is to know who God is and to acknowledge his/her sin before God. The knowledge of God, the fear of God, the confession of sins which are asked, taught and organized by the liturgy, open the way for the repentance in which God takes delight and to which God encourages the sinner by teaching through the liturgy that his justice is enveloped by his mercy.⁷⁴ The Rosh ha-Shanah liturgy presents this ‘meeting’ as the ‘day of judgment’ of the human person by God. This meeting must be lived in fear, for one must experience the distance which separates the Holy, transcendent God from the sinner. Thus, the prayer asks insistently that God give his fear: “Yes, truly give your fear, Lord our God...”⁷⁵ Fear, requested and experienced, accompanies the sinner until the end of the closing office which completes the liturgy of the ‘days of fear.’⁷⁶ This fear of the Lord is certainly positive, because it encourages repentance and because it is inseparable from the love of the Lord, but it also remains the fear of judgment so long as the separation caused by sin is not removed through forgiveness. A tradition about Rabbi Eliezer after the destruction of the Temple testifies to the way in which the sinner’s separation from the Shekhinah is experienced. Rabbi Eliezer said: “Woe to us! Whoever attaches himself/herself to impurity, on him/her impurity rests. Whoever attaches himself/herself to the Shekhinah, *a fortiori* the result must be that the Shekhinah rests on him/her. And what is the reason (why the Shekhinah does not rest on us? Israel’s sin, as it is said, Isa 59:2): “For your iniquities have made the separation between you

1999, pp. 60-61) It seems coherent to think that if repentance preceded the creation of the world, this is to teach that it can only be free, offered to the sinner’s freedom.

⁷² Genesis Rabbah on Gen 3:8, Par. 19 no. 7; Pesikta de-Rav Kahanah Pisk. 1 on Num 7:1, pp. 2-3.

⁷³ Cf. footnote 48.

⁷⁴ Two major rites signify divine mercy. The blowing of the Shofar on Rosh ha-Shanah announces, among other things, that God so to say leaves his throne of justice in order to sit down on his throne of mercy, Leviticus Rabbah on Lev 23:24, Par. 29 no. 3, pp. 674-675. The liturgical recitation of the ‘13 attributes of mercy’ (Ex 34:6-7) is an effective call to divine mercy, cf. T.B. Rosh ha-Shanah 17b. The reading of these attributes stops at (Ex 34:7): “who ... bears iniquity, transgression and sin” and thus calls to mind only the mercy in the attributes.

⁷⁵ This request returns forcefully in the 3rd blessing of the 4 community prayers for the day and also in the prayers for Kippur. It enumerates the vocabulary of fear: fright, terror,..., in order to teach that the fear of the Lord (Give your fear...) frees from all other fears. Cf. the teaching of Jesus in Mt 10:28-31.

⁷⁶ Since the Middle Ages, the days of repentance have been called the ‘days of fear’ (yamim noraim; literally ‘terrible days’).

and your God.”⁷⁷ This experience which corresponds to Israel’s situation after the destruction of the Temple, seems to testify to a double difficulty: since the Temple was destroyed, the Shekhinah was no longer accessible through the request for forgiveness addressed to God by the High Priest in the name of the people before the destruction. It is also not accessible outside of the Temple, and the Holy Spirit is no longer poured out over Israel or even over the righteous who would deserve it because of the sin of the whole of the people which makes the generation unworthy of the Shekhinah and of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ Only repentance, concretized in the confession of sins, confirmed through charitable offerings, the prayer and fasting of Kippur, can enable one to reach the Shekhinah and obtain forgiveness.⁷⁹

Let us now see how the liturgy of Rosh ha-Shanah and Kippur show today that the prayer of the people reaches the Shekhinah.⁸⁰

On Rosh ha-Shanah, the community kneels down and prostrates itself in the synagogue when it says in the blessing ‘Kingships (Malkhiyyot)’ in the additional office which begins with the ‘Aleinu’: “And we kneel down and we prostrate ourselves and we give thanks before the King of kings of all the kings, the Holy One, blessed be He!, who unfolds the heavens and makes firm the earth; the seat of his glory is in the heavens above and his powerful Shekhinah is at the highest height.”

On Kippur, the additional office includes the beginning of the prayer ‘Aleinu’ in its central blessing, and the community prostrates itself in the synagogue like on Rosh

⁷⁷ Sifre on Deut 18:12, p. 220. The editor of Midrash Sifre, L. Finkelstein, proposes the following eclectic text: “Woe to us! Whoever attaches himself/herself to impurity, on him/her the spirit of impurity rests. Whoever attaches himself/herself to the Shekhinah, *a fortiori* the result must be that the Holy Spirit rests on him/her. And what is the reason...” The mistake of this wording is that it comes from an eclectic reading of the manuscripts. Nevertheless, it is not inconceivable. We can even say that it corresponds to the reality of the gospel accounts of the healing of demoniacs by Jesus (Mt 8:28ff.; Mk 5:1ff.; Lk 8:28ff.; cf. also Mt 17:19; Mk 9:14-29; Lk 9:37-43; and also Rom 7:14-25). Whoever attaches himself/herself to impurity is possessed by the spirit of impurity; whoever attaches himself/herself to Jesus (Shekhinah) through faith, is freed or can free others of the spirit of impurity which is replaced by the Holy Spirit. Rabbi Akiba, a disciple of Rabbi Eliezer’s, testified to the same painful experience of separation from the Shekhinah and of being deprived of the Holy Spirit. Cf. T.B. Sanhedrin 65b. The text variants, to which the commentary attributed to Rashi (*ad locum*) testifies, show that Shekhinah and Holy Spirit are interchangeable, which signifies that they are inseparable; cf. footnote 58. Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Akiba and Saint Paul (Rom 7:14-25) experience painfully the imbalance between the good that a person wants to do and the sin that person commits.

⁷⁸ According to a tradition that is older than the destruction of the Temple, the Holy Spirit separated from Israel when the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachy, died; cf. T.B. Yoma 9b-10a; T.B. Sanhedrin 11a and Tosefta Sotah 13, 3-4, pp. 230-231. To this are linked traditions about Hillel the Elder (end of the 1st century BCE), “who was worthy of the Holy Spirit” (or, according to certain versions, “who was worthy of the Shekhinah resting on him”). These traditions say the same thing about Samuel the Small, a teacher at the end of the 1st century CE. Another tradition teaches that among the 80 disciples of Hillel, “thirty were worthy of the Shekhinah resting on them, as it rested on Moses”, T.B. Sukkah 28a.

⁷⁹ It is not certain that repentance is commanded by a positive commandment. According to Maimonides, the commandment which opens up repentance is the commandment to confess one’s sins, cf. B. Gross, *Les lumières de retour*, Albin Michel, 1998, Liminaires, p. 15, footnote 13; and Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 1,1. The confessions begin on Rosh ha-Shanah with the ‘avinu malkenu, Our Father, Our King! We have sinned against you...’ and are multiplied on Kippur.

⁸⁰ Even though the Temple remains destroyed, a certain possibility of propitiation remains attached to times: to the time of the 10 days of repentance (cf. Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 2,6) and to the day of Kippur (*ibid.* 1,4).

ha-Shanah at the passage indicated above. But above all, there is in the additional office, the ‘Seder Abodah (Order of Service),’ the solemn repetition of the High Priest’s service in the Temple on the day of Kippur. All the details of that service are described according to the testimonies that were scrupulously collected shortly after the destruction of the Temple. The only difference between the reality and today’s faithful reconstruction is that the community does not pronounce the ineffable Name which the High Priest pronounced 10 times during his service on Kippur. But the community prostrates itself three times at the moments when it recalls the High Priest’s three confessions for himself and his family, for the house of Aaron (the priests), and for the house of Israel. The community kneels down and prostrates itself saying: “And the priests and the people who were standing in the forecourt, when they heard the glorious, fearsome, explicit Name come forth from the mouth of the High Priest, knelt down in holiness and purity, and they prostrated themselves and gave thanks and fell with their face to the ground and said: ‘Blessed be the glorious Name of his Kingdom for all time and forever!’” On Rosh ha-Shanah and on Kippur, the people proclaims God’s kingship; repentance brings the people close enough to touch this kingship.⁸¹

We can thus understand what Rabbi Levi (end of the 3rd century CE) asserted: “Great is repentance, for it brings one even to the throne of glory, as it is said (Hos 14:2): ‘Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God!’”⁸² Maimonides repeated this saying at the beginning of a magnificent praise of repentance, while hiding the name of Rabbi Levi in order to present it as a common teaching: “Great is repentance, for it brings a person to the Shekhinah, as it is said (Hos 14:2): ‘Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God!’”⁸³

To conclude, it is only right to emphasize that repentance and all the prayer which supports it on ordinary days and on the 10 days of repentance are illuminated already in advance by the joy which awaits the sinner who has repented and has been forgiven. This is what is manifested on the day of Kippur, which is always lived as a day of joy; as Rabban Shimeon ben Gamaliel, who was perhaps the son of Saint Paul’s teacher and who could testify to life in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple, said: “There were no ‘good days’ (feast days) like the 15th of the month of Ab and the day of Kippur.”⁸⁴ There is no greater joy than the joy of the sinner who has repented and been forgiven, as Psalm 97:11 proclaims. This is sung three or seven times at the beginning of the Kippur liturgy, before the ‘Col Nidrei’: “Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart,” which is interpreted as meaning: Joy for those who have set right their heart by means of repentance!⁸⁵

The joy which awaits the sinner who has repented and been forgiven is not only his/her joy. Above all, it must be said that it is also the joy of the Lord who makes

⁸¹ Here the link is clearly shown between repentance and the Kingdom, which was so clearly taught by John the Baptist and Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry; cf. Mt 3:1; 4:17; Mk 1:15.

⁸² T.B. Yoma 86a. This saying of Rabbi Levi’s is situated within a magnificent series of praises which all begin with the words, “Great is repentance...”

⁸³ Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 7,6-8.

⁸⁴ Mishnah Ta’anit 4,8. What follows in this mishnah really shows that the day of Kippur was joyful: the young girls of Jerusalem, wearing white dresses, went to the vineyards, they danced and sang and invited the young people to marriage.

⁸⁵ Cf. S. Y. Agnon, *Days of Awe*, Schocken Books, New York, 1945, pp. 209-210.

himself known through fear and love, who takes delight in repentance and who multiplies forgiveness.⁸⁶

The Sabbath

The Sabbath is called “delight (oneg)” (Isa 58:13), a name which indicates the happiness that it obtains, the bliss that Israel experiences in finding God, as the prophet (Isa 58:14) says: “Then you shall find your delight in the Lord.” Doubtlessly, God is not entirely present to Israel so long as the Temple is not rebuilt; God has not caused his Shekhinah to return to Zion, and the ‘service of the altar’ (the sacrifices) has not been re-established. Thus, there is still reason for asking the Lord in each community prayer for the return of the Shekhinah to Zion, and in the 4th blessing of the additional prayer of the Sabbath, for the re-establishment of the sacrifices.⁸⁷ But these petitions are, so to speak, out of date through the praise in the central blessing of the community prayer for the Sabbath afternoon. In that blessing of the last prayer of the day, the liturgy with its authority strongly expresses an experience which points towards Israel’s unity with God: “You are One, and your Name is One, and who is like your people Israel, a people that is One on the earth?”⁸⁸ This proclamation enables us to imagine why the ‘delight’ of the Sabbath assumes the ‘joy (simhah)’ of the pilgrimage feasts while going beyond it.⁸⁹ Since its creation, the world receives its completion in the Sabbath, in the divine rest on the 7th day (Gen 2:2-3). Based on this original completion, the Sabbath practiced by Israel leads Israel, and with it, the entire world, from week to week to the ‘day’ announced by the Psalm (92:1): “‘A Psalm, a song for the Sabbath day,’ for the day which will be entirely Sabbath, on which there

⁸⁶ It would be good to be able to unfold more the riches of the Tradition of Israel on the joy of God who shows sinners the way of repentance (Ps 25:8), who takes the initiative in seeking those who are far away (Isa 58:19). This message resonates perfectly with that of the New Testament (Lk 15).

⁸⁷ This 4th blessing in the additional prayer recalls in detail the Sabbath sacrifices and offerings and requests their re-establishment.

⁸⁸ The wording points towards unity, towards unification with God, but we must remain prudent and know that Israel’s teachers do not easily admit speaking of unification with God. However, some Hassidic masters speak of union – *ahdut* – with God in the context of the Sabbath experience. For example, Rabbi Meshullam Leib Feibush of Zbarah (d. 1795), *Divrei Yosher Emet* 46. Except for these masters, the closest relationship that seems to be proposed is attachment (*deveikut*) to God, which is certainly prescribed by the Torah (Deut 11:22) but understood and practiced by Israel in very diverse ways (cf. for example G. Scholem, ‘La deveikut ou la communion avec Dieu,’ in *Le messianisme juif*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris, 1974, pp. 303-331).

Let us mention the position which Maimonides holds; he presents ‘*deveikut*’ as the most elevated degree which the human being (sinner) can reach: “How eminent is the degree of repentance! Yesterday evening, this man was separated from the Lord God of Israel, as it is said (Isa 59:2): ‘Your iniquities have made the separation between you and your God.’ ... And today he is attached (*mudbak*) to the Shekhinah, as it is said (Deut 4:4): ‘But you who are attached to the Lord your God are all alive today.’” (Hilkhos Teshuvah = Paths of Repentance 7,7). In this context, let us point out the wording which J.Z. Lauterbach uses to say that God, Israel and the Torah constitute what one might call ‘the Jewish Trinity’ (J.Z. Lauterbach, ‘The Pharisees and their Teachings’ (1929), in *Rabbinic Essays*, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, 1951, p. 111): “The Holy One, blessed be He!, the Torah and Israel are One.” This formula, the origin and development of which were thoroughly studied by Y. Tishbi (“*Kudsha-berik-hu Orayta ve-Yisrael kola had*”, Kiryat Sefer, Vol. L, no. 3, 1975, pp. 480-492), is well known and used in Israel without any ‘trinitarian’ preoccupation. However, for a Christian, the formula resonates perfectly with the words of Jesus in Jn 17:11, 21-22.

⁸⁹ Cf. footnote 55.

will be no eating or drinking or business, but on which the righteous will be seated with their crowns on their heads, and they will be nourished with the splendor of the Shekhinah, as it is said (Ex 24:11): ‘And they contemplated God and they ate and drank,’ like the angels of service.’”⁹⁰

This interpretation of Psalm 92, which was sung on the Sabbath in the Temple liturgy and is sung today in the liturgy of the synagogue, illuminates the Jewish practice of the Sabbath and of prayer, which holds a very important place. God is not to be seen (God in his transcendence), but his Shekhinah (his immanent Presence) is already to be seen, and in anticipation, one is ‘nourished by his splendor.’ That such an experience is possible can be explained by the gift of a ‘supplementary soul’ which is given to Israel for the time of the Sabbath.⁹¹ Such a ‘soul’ brings Israel an ‘enlargement of the heart’ which makes it possible to eat three festive and joyful meals without discomfort, as Tradition prescribes for the Sabbath day.⁹² It is difficult not to hear the resonance of this experience and of the Tradition of Israel which illuminates it with the proclamation made in the 1st Letter of Saint John 3:2: “We know that when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”⁹³ To see the Shekhinah as it is (divine), is to see God face to face through it. The ‘supplementary soul’ is perhaps the Holy Spirit who indicates the Shekhinah present in the person who lives the Sabbath. In any case, according to Saint Paul, it is through the Holy Spirit that the Christian can say that “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3). To say that Jesus is Lord is to point him out as God, it is to recognize that he is the Presence of God (Shekhinah).⁹⁴

We have seen how the prayer of praise and of petition is a service rendered to the Shekhinah in the places and times in which it lets itself be encountered. From the stages travelled, it has become apparent that the God of Israel, because he wants to reveal himself to Israel and to become involved at Israel’s side, asks Israel to serve him in prayer, a service rendered to his Shekhinah, in which he takes delight. As we announced above, we must go further and see how we can conceive of a prayer of Israel which is prayer for the Shekhinah.

The Prayer for the Shekhinah

Here, we touch on what is unfathomable in God’s mercy and love for humanity, represented by Israel. Nevertheless, we must say something about this reality, which paradox alone enables us to approach.

The paradox which is to be contemplated here is the one which Hillel proposed in an astonishing way in the first person at the end of the 1st century BCE: “My lowering is my elevation, my elevation is my lowering.” The scriptural support that was sought and found for such an assertion is Psalm 113:3-5: “Who is like the Lord, our God,

⁹⁰ Abot de-Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 1, 3a. Cf. also Mishnah Tamid 7,4; Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 31:13, p. 341; T.B. Rosh ha-Shanah 31a. According to the synoptic gospels, this tradition was known to Jesus (Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 20:34-37).

⁹¹ T.B. Beitsah 16a. We shall see further on how such a tradition leads to a vision of prayer as prayer for the Shekhinah.

⁹² Cf. Rashi on T.B. Beitsah 16a, neshamah yeterah (supplementary soul).

⁹³ Cf. also 1 Cor 13:12; Rom 8:29; Col 3:4.

⁹⁴ Cf. footnotes 47-48.

who rises up to be seated and lowers himself to see in the heavens and the earth...”⁹⁵ So God himself teaches this, God, who asks that people imitate him by ‘walking in all his ways’ (Deut 11:22). Israel is constantly invited to take the way of humility and service which is the way of God and of the greatest who imitated him: Abraham who served three unknown men who might have been idolaters, Moses who served Jethro, Aaron and the Elders in a meal in which he is not even mentioned (Ex 18:12), Hillel who served a former rich man who was in distress as his slave, Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 13).⁹⁶ This obligation to imitate God in all his ways, and in particular in the way of humility and service, is part of the patrimony common to Judaism and Christianity which the Catholic Church invites us to get to know. Here, we cannot draw attention to all the resonances which exist between the Tradition of Israel and that of the Church concerning God’s humility and lowering of himself in the service of the men and women whom he created and whom he constantly upholds in their existence.⁹⁷ However, we must point out the prolongation of this teaching in prayer. For this, let us remember how God ‘humiliated his Shekhinah’ by descending into the Bush in order to show that he was entering into the suffering of his people in Egypt. This sign also indicated to Israel, to the community and to each person, that God was saying to all and to each one (Ps 91:15): “I am with him in distress.”⁹⁸ Thus, we must say that there is communication between human suffering and that of God. In deepening this line of thought, we must ask not which suffering is the greatest, but what must be done so as to diminish the suffering of the one and the other. We know, we must know and make known, that God became involved in the suffering of his people in order to bring about the Passover, the first redemption which announces all the other redemptions and the final redemption. The life and death of Jesus in suffering resonate perfectly with this great biblical and Jewish message. Jesus presents himself as the Shekhinah who suffers with those who are hungry and thirsty, with the sick and the prisoners (Mt 25:31-46). In the reciprocity of love, the believing person unites his/her suffering with that of the Shekhinah in order to carry with it the suffering of the world. This was lived and taught by Saint Paul (Col 1:24). Pascal perceived and expressed it admirably: “Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world: we must not sleep during that time... Since Jesus is in agony and in the greatest pain, let us pray longer...” And again: “It seems to me that Jesus Christ lets people touch only his wounds after the resurrection: *Noli me tangere* (Jn 20:17). We must unite ourselves only with his sufferings.”⁹⁹

We saw in connection with the prayer of petition that God creates lack so as to be able to satisfy it, that God likes to hear the prayer of the just, that God wants to give more than to receive. It is difficult, but not impossible to go beyond this encouragement for the prayer of petition and to come to conceive of a prayer for God, or rather, for his Shekhinah, which is in contact with humanity, which suffers with humanity, which is thus vulnerable. To whom is such a prayer to be addressed? Without doubt to the

⁹⁵ Leviticus Rabbah on Lev 1:1, Par. 1 no. 5. Cf. also T.B. Megillah 31a.

⁹⁶ Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Ex 18:12, pp. 195-196 on Rabban Gamaliel, who did well in humiliating himself by serving his colleagues in Yavne standing up, thus imitating Moses, Abraham and God. For Hillel who ran as a slave in front of a former rich man for whom he had bought a horse so that he might still be honored, cf. Midrash Tannaim on Deut 15:8, p. 82.

⁹⁷ However, let us point out that Hillel’s teaching, which was mentioned above, is identical to that of Jesus: “Whoever exalts himself/herself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself/herself will be exalted.” (Lk 14:7-11; 18:14; Mt 23:12)

⁹⁸ Cf. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimeon ben Yohai which was mentioned in footnotes 39 and 40.

⁹⁹ Pensées, Ed. Brunschvicg, nos. 553 and 554.

Shekhinah so as to comfort it, but the prayer must also be addressed to God in his transcendence, whence the Shekhinah emanates. We again come to the paradox of the One God who is transcendent and immanent, unknown and known. But here, there is more: with the prayer for the Shekhinah, we are entering into a domain and a time in which the Jews began to distinguish between God and his Shekhinah, which was already considered to be a hypostasis. According to E.E. Urbach, this distinction appeared for the first time in rabbinic literature in the 11th century.¹⁰⁰ It would be good to find older traces of the prayer for the Shekhinah. Without wanting to tack a Christian experience onto Judaism, one cannot help thinking that what is said in the New Testament about the suffering of Jesus testifies to an experience which could have existed in some way within the Jewish people of his time and which would already give to the Shekhinah the status of hypostasis within the divine Unity. But we know of no trace of such an experience. Perhaps we owe this silence to rabbinic prudence, which is well attested to with Rabbi Akiba concerning the spread of mystical experience outside of initiated and authorized circles. Starting in the 11th century with the spread of the Kabbalah, the conviction was expressed with boldness that Israel, through the fulfillment of the commandments and through prayer, was acting for God and for his Shekhinah. With the development of Hassidic trends, starting in the 18th century, the conviction spread among the people that one had to pray for the Shekhinah, whose suffering at the level of the visible and the invisible worlds was more real and more important, so to say, than the human suffering in which it was sharing.¹⁰¹

Let us content ourselves in giving two examples of the height and beauty of the teaching given on prayer for the Shekhinah. In both cases, the source of the teaching is the Baal Shem Tov.¹⁰² The proposed translation, which is as literal as possible, strives to give an idea of the popular character of this profound teaching.

“Of the Baal Shem Tov (it is taught) concerning the prayer for ordinary days: the essential is faith, to such an extent that the one who prays should believe that the Name, blessed be He!, that his Glory fills the whole earth (Isa 6:3) and that thus he is raising and exalting the Shekhinah... And may he also believe that as soon as the prayer’s text goes forth from his mouth, what he is asking is immediately granted. And if you say: but at certain times he does not obtain what he is requesting! The answer is that the result of his request remains hidden for him; his request, for example, is granted for the whole of the world, whereas he had asked in a particular way that suffering be withdrawn from him in particular. And in truth, it is for his good (that his request was not granted to him), either to cleanse him of a sin or for another analogous reason. For if in the intention of his request there is the expectation that it will be granted (to him), something physical is introduced into his request. But the correct thing would have been that there was only the spiritual (in his request) for the benefit of the Shekhinah (le-to’elet ha-shekhinah) and not for the benefit of this world.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ E. Urbach, *The Sages...*, pp. 62-64.

¹⁰¹ These Hassidic traditions on prayer for the Shekhinah were studied and presented in detail by Rivka Schatz, *Hasidism as Mysticism, Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1993, pp. 144-167. Cf. also Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer...*, 1993, pp. 23-35.

¹⁰² Cf. footnote 25.

¹⁰³ Keter Shem Tov no. 80.

Here is the second example. It comes to us from Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Ephraim of Sudlikov (d. 1800), the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov.

“I heard from my Lord, my Father, my Elder (my grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov), may His remembrance be blessed for the life of the future world!: ‘When one prays concerning something, may the intention be for what the Most High needs; and the matter for which one is praying, if it comes, may it come!, and if it does not come, may it not come! And thus may all the human person’s service and all his/her actions be for the Heavens and not for something for his/her benefit, whatever it may be. But there is another way which is higher, (presented) by way of a parable.

(The matter is similar) to someone who desires and wants intensely to speak with the king, and his heart is burning. And the king decreed and said that whoever will make a petition, his request will be (filled) granted. And when that man, whose desire and will it was to speak always with the king, came in order to speak of his request before the king, he feared that the king would give him and would grant him what he was lacking. For of what else could he speak to the king (if the latter granted his request)? That is why he wanted more that his request not be granted, so that he would still have something to present before the king and he might be able to speak to him another time. And that is what is said (Ps 102:1): ‘Prayer for a poor person.’”¹⁰⁴ Let us explain this support given by the title of Psalm 102: The Baal Shem Tov, who is called a ‘Jew of the Psalms’, had taught concerning this psalm that one could understand not only “Prayer of a poor person”, but also, more profoundly, “Prayer to a poor person.” The poor (human) person prays to God without expecting anything except his love. God, out of love, wants to be sought for his own sake, being poor, having nothing else to give but his love. The encounter in prayer is that of love, the encounter of a poor (human) person with the Poor One (God).¹⁰⁵

We were not able to find an old trace of a Jewish prayer for the Shekhinah that is contemporary with the New Testament. We quoted what we did at some length in order to give an idea of the level attained by Jewish prayer as service rendered to God who is present in the world through his Shekhinah. From the point of view of Christian faith, this service is one with the Christian prayer addressed to the Father through Jesus his Son in the Spirit. In the Eucharist, this prayer is the passage through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ until he comes (1 Cor 11:24-25).

¹⁰⁴ Degel Mahaneh Ephraim, Haftarah le-Parashat Ki Tetze.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Anne Avril, “Le psaume 102,1 selon diverses interprétations de la Tradition juive”, in *Cahiers Ratisbonne* no. 7, December 1999, pp. 20-34.