Chapter 2

Syncretic
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In the first chapter, we have learned the origin and meaning of the words ‘syncretic,’ (‘syncretismus,’ in Latin and ‘synkretismos’ in Greek) means ‘a fusion of different divinities and doctrines’ or ‘a combination, reconciliation, or coalescence of varying, often mutually opposed beliefs, principles, or practices, typically marked by internal inconsistencies’; and ‘mystical’ (‘mustes’ in Greek) means ‘an initiate,’ and (‘muein’ in Greek) means ‘to close the eyes.’ ‘Mysticism is the innermost experience of the being in communion with the Being.’

Now, we have reached at a juncture, wherein, we need to understand the meaning of the term ‘literature’ and then arrive at a working definition, which will serve the principal purpose of this brief search.

At the outset, let me attempt, to shake some of the certainties that we associate with the term ‘literature’ in order to point out the various assumptions that underlie our general understanding of the term. The aim being also to make our notion of ‘literature’ less exclusive than it seems now.

What is literature? At this point, we might wonder, we have been studying literature for quite some time now - years if not decades - and surely there is no need to define it as though it were something new! It is like an old couple, asking each other questions like “What is love? What makes a home? What is the sum and summit of marriage? What is ideal couple?” etc. All the more, as the couple does, so we must attempt to answer the question, in order to ward off the vague, the fuzzy, the open terms which we had taken all along. Here are some definitions:
1. “Literature is written works (such as novels, plays and poems) which are of artistic value.” e.g. Greek and Sanskrit has a very ancient literature.

2. “Literature is all the works, articles, etc. on a particular subject.” e.g. Now there is a plethora of literature on the ‘God particle’ which caught the eyes of the whole world.

3. “Literature is printed material, especially giving information.” e.g. Have you got any literature on this tablet (or tablet computer)?

Among all the above three definitions, the first one is the most relevant to our purpose. “Literature is written works which are of artistic value.” Here, the obvious question arising in the mind is, what is artistic value? The dictionary says “artistic” means “of, concerning, or typical of art or artists.” “Art” itself is defined as “the making or expression of what is beautiful,” e.g. in music, literature, etc. Here we must realize that “beauty” is not only a vague but also a changing concept. What is beautiful to one, may not be so to another; what was regarded as beautiful few years ago may not be so now; and what is beautiful in the north-east of our country may not be considered so in the south. All the more, we may argue, “literature” is works which are regarded as containing “beauty” at all times and in all ages. But “beauty” here is understood in a particular way and this particular way has changed, and/ or is changing over the years. It is like Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, who said, “There is nothing permanent except change.”

The other definitions on literature are the following.

1. “Literature and butterflies are the two sweetest passions known to man.”
   (Vladimir Nabokov)

2. “Literature is language well used.” (Laurence Lerner)
3. “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost degree.” (Ezra Pound)

4. Writing is not literature unless it gives to the reader a pleasure which arises not only from the things said, but from the way in which they are said; and that pleasure is only given when the words are carefully or curiously or beautifully put together into sentences.” (Stopford Brooke)

5. “Literature is news that stays news.” (Ezra Pound)

6. “Literature is the art of saying something that will be read twice.” (Cyril Connolly)

7. “Literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity and unity.” (Lionel Trilling)

8. “Literature gives us a picture of life - not the picture that is actually (historically) true, but a picture that has its own kind of truth - a “truth” that includes important elements that science, from its very nature, is forced to leave out. The truth of literature takes the form, not of abstract statement, but of a concrete and dramatic presentation, which may allow us to experience imaginatively the “lived” meanings of a piece of life.” (Cleanth Brooks, John Thibaut Purser and Robert Penn Warren)

9. “While the other arts ... are the algebra of emotional expression, literature is the arithmetic. Music and the plastic arts seek to express the generated essence of man’s predicament in the universe. Literature, for the most part, attempts to illuminate some particular predicament of a particular man or a particular woman at a given time and place.” (John Strachey)

10. “Literature is the expression of a nation’s mind in writing.” (Channing)
11. “Literature becomes free institutions. It is the graceful ornament of civil liberty, and a happy restraint on the asperities which political controversies sometimes occasion.” (Daniel Webster)

12. “Literature, strictly considered, has never recognized the people and, whatever may be said, does not today. Speaking generally, the tendencies of literature, as hitherto pursued, have been to make mostly critical and querulous men.” (Walt Whitman)

13. “All that is literature seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature, to communicate knowledge.” (De Quincey)

All the above definitions tell us that literature has not been easy to define, that it has meant different things to different people, that some people have tried to understand it by what it is, some by what it does. In this sense, can we dare say, ‘literature is all things to all people!’ This ‘all inclusive’ idea of literature may be far-flung, and thus far-fetching. Hence, let me design a working definition of literature - of course, within the circumference of the term - which suits the purpose of this quest.

Literature is a corpus of beautiful, imaginative and complex writing, with reasoning and intellection, which evokes aesthetic pleasure, and has surpassing value.

Syncretic mystical literature is the corpus of a beautiful, imaginative and complex writing, which is the resultant experience of the being in communion with the Being, and this experience is the fusion of different divinities and doctrines or a combination, reconciliation, or coalescence of varying, often mutually opposed beliefs, principles, or practices, typically marked by internal inconsistencies.
An Outline of the Mystical Literature in General. What are the syncretic trends that emerge?

Mysticism in itself is an ecstatic experience or the experience of the transcendental reality, which, given the limited nature of language, is beyond expression. Here, natural language can hardly meet the communicative demands of the mystic’s experience. Hence, the mystic seeks the aid of literary language, which is more symbolic than direct. Let us glance through some of the mystical literatures and observe the syncretic elements therein.

1. Jewish Syncretic Mystical Literature

The Bible contains ample literature with mythic and mystical speculations. Prophet Ezekiel’s visions (Ezekiel 1, 8, 10) in particular attracted much mystical speculation, as did Isaiah’s Temple vision (Isaiah 6). Jacob’s vision of the ladder to heaven (Genesis 28) provided another example of esoteric experience. Moses’ encounters with the Burning bush (Exodus 3:1-15) and God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:29) are evidence of mystical events in the Bible that form the origin of Jewish mystical beliefs cum literature. Contemporary scholarship suggests that various schools of Jewish esotericism arose at different periods of Jewish history, each reflecting not only prior forms of mysticism, but also the intellectual and cultural milieu of that historical period and incorporating it into one’s own.

1.1. Syncretic Hekhalot Literature

The term Hekhalot (transliterated Heichalot) is derived from the Hebrew word for “palaces”, relating to visions of ascents into heavenly palaces. The hekhalot literary genre overlaps with Merkahah or “Chariot” literature, so at times the two are referred together as “Books of the Palaces and the Chariot.” The Hekhalot literature is a unique genre of Jewish esoteric and revelatory texts produced sometime between
late antiquity, some believe possibly from Talmudic times and earlier, to the early Middle Ages. Many motifs of later Kabbalah are based on the Hekhalot texts, and the Hekhalot literature itself is based upon earlier sources, including traditions about heavenly ascents of Enoch found among the Dead Sea scrolls and the Hebrew Bible pseudepigrapha.

The Hekhalot mysticism and its literature began after the end of the second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (530 B.C.E.-70 C.E.) when the physical temple cult had ceased to function. The idea behind the pilgrimage to the heavenly hekhal (palace) was a kind of spiritualization of the pilgrimage to the earthly hekhal (i.e. Temple of Jerusalem) which was now no longer possible. The principal theme of all Hekhalot literature is the account of mystical ascents into heaven, divine visions, and the summoning and control of angels, in order to gain insight into the Torah. The loci classicus for these practices is the biblical accounts of the Chariot vision of Ezekiel (Chapters 1, 8, 10) and the Temple vision of Isaiah (Chapter 6), and a plethora of extra-canonical apocalyptic writings of heavenly visitations, wherefrom Hekhalot literature emerges. Still, it is distinctive from both Qumran literature and apocalyptic writings for several reasons, and chief among them is Hekhalot literature which is not at all interested in eschatology, largely ignores the unique status of priesthood, has little interest in fallen angels or demonology, and it democratizes the possibility of divine ascent. It may represent a rabbinization of these earlier priestly ideologies.

The Hekhalot mystical literature is the description of the divine abodes seen by the mystics following a long period of ritual purification, self-mortification, and ecstatic prayer and meditation. According to Merkabah, in their visions these mystics would enter into the celestial realms and journey through the seven stages of mystical
ascent - the seven heavens and seven throne rooms - a journey is fraught with great
danger, and the adept must not only have made elaborate purification preparation, but
must also know the proper incantations, seals, and angelic names needed to get past
the fierce angelic guards, as well as know how to navigate the various forces at work
inside and outside the palaces. At times, heavenly interlocutors will reveal divine
secrets. In some texts, the mystic's interest extends to the heavenly music and liturgy,
usually connected with the angelic adorations mentioned in Isaiah 6:3. The mantra­
like repetitive nature of the liturgies recorded in many of these compositions seems
meant to encourage further ascent. The ultimate goal of the ascent varies from text to
text. In some cases, it seems to be a visionary glimpse of God, to 'Behold the King in
His Beauty'; others hint at 'enthronement', that the adept be accepted among the
angelic retinue of God and be given an honoured 'god-like' seat. One text actually
envisions the successful pilgrim getting to sit in God's lap. Scholars such as Peter
Schaefer and Elliot Wolfson see an erotic literature implied in this kind of image,
though it must be said sexual motifs, while present in highly attenuated forms are few
and far between if one surveys the full scope of the literature.

The ascent literary texts are extant in four principal works, all redacted well
after the third but certainly before the ninth century C.E. They are:

1. *Hekhalot Zutartey* (The Lesser Palaces), which details an ascent of Rabbi
   Akiva;
2. *Hekhalot Rabbati* (The Greater Palaces), which details an ascent of Rabbi
   Ishmael;
3. *Ma'aseh Merkabah* (Account of the Chariot), a collection of hymns
   recited by the 'descenders' and heard during their ascent; and
4. *Sepher Hekhalot* (Book of Palaces, also known as *Enoch III*), which recounts an ascent and divine transformation of the biblical figure Enoch into the archangel Metatron, as related by Rabbi Ishmael.

Further, a fifth work provides a detailed description of the Creator as seen by the ‘descenders’ at the climax of their ascent. This work, preserved in various forms, is called *Shi’ur Qomah* (Measurement of the Body), and is rooted in a mystical exegesis of the Biblical Book of the Song of Songs.

The seven thrones in the Song of Songs and the two thrones in Daniel (Chapter 7) is a domesticated version of the twoness theme for the single Jewish God which would be acceptable to Rabbinic officialdom. The non-Messianic and Metatron-oriented version of this ‘two-thrones’/‘two-powers’-in-heaven motif is described in *Paradigmata*. The generic point in all of this is that by the time of the final editing of the Mishnah,¹ this whole motif, along with other dimensions of Merkabah-oriented study and practice, were severely discouraged by Rabbinic officialdom. However, those who still pursued these concepts were marginalized by the Rabbinic Movement over the next several centuries, thus becoming a separate group responsible for the *Hekhalot* literature. These *Hekhalot* mystical cum literary concepts like ‘twoness,’ ‘messiah,’ ‘metatron,’ et al are but a syncretic adaptation from Zoroastrianism.

1.2. **Syncretic Merkabah Literature**

*Merkabah* (or Chariot mysticism), the first distinctly mystical movement in Jewish history, appeared in the late Greco-Roman period in 70 C.E., which grew out of the priestly mysticism already evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls centered on

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¹ The Mishnah or Mishna (Hebrew means ‘repetition’), from the verb *shanah*, or ‘to study and review’, also ‘secondary’; is the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions known as the “Oral Torah.” It is also the first major work of Rabbinic literature.
visions such as found in Ezekiel chapter 1. or in the Hekhalot ("Palaces") literature concerning stories of ascents to the heavenly palaces, which are the literary artifacts of Merkabah. The main corpus of the Merkabah literature was composed in Israel in the period 200-700 C.E., although later references can also be found in the literature of Chassidei Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages. The major Merkabah text is Ma’aseh Merkabah (or Works of the Chariot). It is a form of pre-Kabbalah Jewish mysticism, which taught both the possibility of making a sublime journey to the divine, and the ability of the human person to draw down divine powers to earth. The Torah also refers to the Mer-Ka-Vah (as it is spelled in Hebrew) having two meanings - Chariot or vehicle and Throne of God.

1.2.1. Syncretic Origin of Merkabah

Merkabah mysticism or Ma’aseh Merkabah is the name given to the first chapter of the Biblical Book of Ezekiel in Mishnah Hagigah 2:1. The term was used by the rabbis to designate complex speculations, homilies, visions and visitations connected with the Throne of Glory and the chariot (Merkabah) which bears it and all that is embodied in this divine world. The term, which does not appear in Ezekiel, is derived from 1 Chronicles 28:18 and is first found with the meaning of Merkabah mysticism at the end of Ben Sira 49:8: "Ezekiel saw a vision, and described the different orders of the chariot." According to S. Spiegel, the Hebrew expression Zanei Merkavah is interpreted as the different sights of the vision of the chariot in Ezekiel, chapters 1, 8, and 10, or as the different parts of the chariot, which later came to be called Hadrei Merkavah, i.e. the chambers of the chariot. Israel Levi, in his commentary on Ben Sira, L’Ecclesiastique. 1 (1898) and 2 (1901) suggested that the text be corrected to Razei Merkavah, i.e. secrets of the chariot. The divine chariot also engrossed the Qumran sect, wherein one fragment speaks of the angels praising, “the
pattern of the Throne of the Chariot” (Strugnell, in vt. 7 supplement, 1960, p. 336). In Pharisaic and tannaitic circles Merkabah mysticism became an esoteric tradition of which different fragments were scattered in the Talmud and the Midrash. interpreting Mishna Hagigah 2:1.

Adolf Jellinek stated that Persian Sufism gave rise to Merkabah, and Bloch (Monatsschrift, 1893, pp. 18-25, 69-74, 257-266, 305-311) traced them all back to Arabic mysticism. However, recent researches concerning the Mithra worship have cast altogether new light on the whole Merkabah lore. Mithra, the heavenly charioteer, with his quadriga (i.e. chariot drawn by four horses), who was worshiped in ancient Persia as the god of light and regarded in early Roman times as the prime mover of the world, was invoked under mysterious rites as the mediator between the inaccessible and unknowable deity in the ethereal regions of light. These rites bear such a striking resemblance to those by means of which the Merkabah-riders approached the deity that there can scarcely be any doubt as to the Mithraic origin of the latter (Eine Mithras Liturgie by Dieterich, 1903, pp. 7-15). The only difference between them is that while the Mithra-worshipers, at least those of Roman times, had the coming forth of Mithra as the highest god their aim, the Merkabah-riders have the seeing of the Lord on high as their goal. Ἐστάφρων-Mithra, the archangel, being the divine charioteer who ushers them into the presence of God. Otherwise there is the same hallucination at work which makes the ecstatic imagine that he is lifted up from the earth to heaven to see the sun, stars, and winds come forth from their places; to behold the sun (or sun-god) and the entire celestial world, the seven rulers or the archangels of the celestial poles; and finally, to gaze at the luminous youthful Mithra in all his beauty - the youthful Ἐστάφρων of the Jewish mystics.
Judaism incorporated via imitation a wide range of Egyptian religious customs, traditions and practices, resultant of its extensive - over 400 years - live-in contact with the latter in the Egyptian bondage, prior to the exodus in 1300 B.C.E. According to researchers, religious experiences via mystical rites had their origin in Egypt rather than in Persia. Jamblichus, in his *De Mysteriis* 3:4-5, describes the optic and acoustic illusions under which the Egyptian mystics laboured as if they were realities. Further, he states that in the ecstatic state brought about by magic songs with compatible environment, the soul is encompassed by a chariot of light, on which it beholds the celestial glory in the light reflected from above. Accordingly, Neoplatonic ideas aided in rendering the *Mithra* worship the centre of the mystics' belief, in which the world of antiquity sought relief during a period when the gods of classical antiquity were losing their authority and divinity; and Jewish wisdom, following the tendency of the age, embodied it under the name of ‘Enoch Metatron’ as secret lore in its system.

Philo took the *Merkabah* idea with its charioteer Metatron and applied it to his Logos. Maimonides in his antagonism to mysticism went so far as to dissolve the whole *Merkabah* theophany of Ezekiel into mere physics, notwithstanding the rabbinical warning against disclosing these mysteries. All the more, the zeal of the mystics grew stronger as is evidenced in the renewed form of the Kabbalah, which lent to the *Merkabah* lore and all the ecstatic visions and mystic operations connected therewith new life and vigour. *The Book of Raziel* and the later Kabbalah are ample proof of this syncretic tradition.

1.2.2. Ma’aseh Merkahah or Work of the Chariot

*Ma’aseh Merkahah,* also called as Work of the Chariot, or Throne or Chariot of God, is a Hebrew-language Jewish mystical text dating from the Gaonic period.
Ma'aseh Merkahah is a mystical lore concerning the heavenly throne-chariot with special reference to Ezekiel 1-3, 8, 10. The conception of Yahweh riding upon cherubim in the fiery clouds is undoubtedly Jewish (Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalms 18:11, 68:5; Isaiah 19:1); hence, it is His war-chariot (Habakkuk 3:8; Isaiah 66:15) and name-chariot for the ark with the cherubim (1 Chronicles 28:18). Just as the Assyrian sun-chariot with its horses is deployed in Elijah’s legend of the ride to heaven (2 Kings 2:11; Enoch 70:2, 72:5, 73:2), so did prophet Ezekiel’s vision, probably influenced by Babylonian sculpture (Muller, Ezechiel Studien, 1895, pp. 8-11; Bertholet, Das Buch Hezekiel, 1897, p. 12), which became a sacred mystery known by the term ‘Merkabah’ during the time of Ben Sira in 200-175 B.C.E. (Ecclesiasticus 44:8). The ancient Mishnah lays down the rule: “The Ma’aseh Merkahah should not be taught to anyone except he be wise and able to deduce knowledge through wisdom (‘gnosis’) of his own” (Mishna Hagigah 2:1). According to the Testament of Job: “Job beheld the throne of God, and his daughters sang the doxology of the Ma’aseh Merkahah” (The Testament of Job, ed. Kohler, 7:39; 11:25).

Among the principal works of the Qabalah, significant portion is devoted to the description of the Celestial Chariot (Merkabah) or Throne of Glory of El Shaddai (God of the mountains). The Chariot is generally an allusion to the Tree of Life, and especially to the four Sefiroth in the central matrix of the three-dimensional Tree of

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2Sefirot or Sephiroth meaning ‘enumerations’, are the 10 attributes / emanations in Kabbalah, through which Ein Sof (The Infinite) reveals himself and continuously creates both the physical realm and the chain of higher metaphysical realms (Seder hishtalshelos in Hebrew). The term is alternatively transliterated into English as Sefirot / Sefiroth, singular Sephirah / Sefirah, etc.
Perfection. These four are collectively referred to as the ‘inner court’ of the Tree. The Lord Yahweh ‘seated upon the throne’ in the similitude of a celestial man, Adam Kadmon, is said to be ‘riding in the chariot.’ In the *Ketubim* or writings of the *Tanakh* or Jewish scripture, this apocalyptic literary concept is found in the Book of Ezekiel 1-3, 8, 10 and Isaiah 6. The specific verses in this book yields a three-dimensional, six-pointed form of the Tree similar to the one delineated by the *Sefer Yetzirah*, but with distinct differences in the Inner Court and additional imagery associated with four of the Directional Sefiroth.

As a toponym, *El Shaddai* is ‘God of the mountains.’ In Ugarit / Canaanite language *El* means ‘god’ and *Shadai* means ‘mountain’ - an influence of the Ugaritic religion, referring to the Mesopotamian divine mountain. The term was one of the patriarchal names for the tribal god of the Mesopotamians. In the Torah, Exodus 6:3, *El Shaddai* is explicitly Yahweh, the God of Abraham. This also has a reference to the Israelite camp’s stay at Mount Sinai (*El Shaddai*) where God gave Moses ‘The Ten Commandments.’ *Shaddai* as a theonym was a late Bronze Age Amorite city on the banks of the river Euphrates, in northern Syria. The site of its ruin-mound is called *Tel eth-Thadyen*: ‘Thadyen’ being the modern Arabic rendering of the original West Semitic *Shaddai*. It has been conjectured that *El Shaddai* was therefore the ‘God of Shaddai’ and by tradition associated with Abraham, and the inclusion of the Abrahamic stories into the Hebrew Bible may have brought the northern name with them.

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*Ketubim* is the third and final section of the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible) after Torah (instruction) and *Nehim* (prophets), which in English is entitled “Writings” or “Hagiographa.” These include Psalms, Job, Proverbs, the Megilloth or the Festival Scrolls, Songs of Solomon, Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

*Sefer Yetzirah* (Hebrew, *Sepher Yisirah* “Book of Formation” or “Book of Creation”) is the title of the earliest extant book on Jewish esotericism, although some early commentators treated it as a treatise on mathematical and linguistic theory as opposed to Kabbalah. *Yetzirah* is more literally translated as ‘Formation’; the word *Briah* is used for ‘Creation.’
1.2.3. Merkabah Concept of Creation

The concept of creation was not at all of paramount importance throughout the era of Merkabah mysticism. Sefer Yetzirah or Book of Creation represents an attempt at cosmogony from within a Merkabah milieu. This text was probably composed during the seventh century C.E. with the evident influence of Neo-Platonism, Pythagoreanism, and Stoicism. It features a linguistic theory of creation in which God creates the universe by combining the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, along with the sefirot or emanations represented by the ten numerals.

In Jewish mystical literature Adam Kadmon is the ‘Primal Man’ with rays of light projecting from his eyes. In Lurianic Kabbalah, Adam Kadmon acquired an exalted status equivalent to the Purusha in the Upanishads, denoting an anthropomorphic concept of the universe itself. In this variant of mythopoeic cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis, the ‘Adam Soul’ is described as the primeval soul that contained all human souls. Adam Kadmon is comparable to the Anthropos of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. There is also a similar concept in Alevi and Sufic philosophy called al-Insan al-Kamil, the Perfect or Complete Man.

The most prolific descriptions of the Merkabah literature appear in Enoch I, II, and III, which influenced romantic poets such as Thomas Moore, William Blake, and Lord Byron. The texts address a wide range of topics - messianic references, extensive angelologies and demonologies, elaborate descriptions of the various heavens and hells, lists of divine names, lists of names of Metatron, and allusions to

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5 The Book of Enoch or The Secrets of Enoch is a pseudepigraphic (i.e. authorship is unfounded) of the Old Testament, and consider it to be part of the apocalyptic literature of late 1st century C.E. It is not regarded as scripture by Jews or any Christian group. Most scholars consider the Book of Enoch to be composed by an unknown Jewish sectarian group, while some others think it is a 1st century Christian text.
mystical states associated with ascending the Tree, i.e. The Tree of Life, a mystical symbol deployed in the Kabbalah to describe the path to God, which corresponds to the Tree of Life in Genesis 2:9. The most prominent Merkabah sections describe the ascension and transformation of Enoch ben Yared into Metatron, known as Nar or ‘The Youth’, to whom the Lord Yahweh revealed the deepest secrets and made him the ‘operational manager’ of this universe. Metatron, chief of the angels, is referred to in the Jewish Bible (Proverbs 22:6; Job 32:6), as well as in the Zohar (1:223b).

Another important treatise in the Merkabah literature is the Sefer Raziel HaGadol or “Book of Raziel the Great”, which has a subtext called Sh’ir Qoma or “Measure of the Divine Body.” The Sh’ir Qoma contains copious lists of divine names cum a series of dimensions ascribed to the ‘Divine Body’ or Yosher (literally upright) is a distinctly anthropomorphic form of the name Yahweh. All current Hebrew texts of the Sh’ir Qoma come from a single text, the corrupt edition published by Eleazer of Worms in Amsterdam in 1701 C.E. The English translation of the Sh’ir Qoma is included in its edition of the Books of Enoch.

The Sh’ir Qoma is the vision of the creation as a unity in the name Yahweh. It is seen when returning from the negatively existent roots of the Tree, looking down at the Sefirah in the throat centre from the Sefirah at the crown of the head. It is encircled by the Leviathan of Vast Face, described as a ‘snake devouring its tail.’ The Leviathan acts as a circular fence around the Yosher and defines the field of superimposition. It also displays the ubiquitous mystical principle that ‘the end is contained in the beginning.’ An obscure teaching says that the Yosher drips out from

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In all mystical traditions, the ‘Mysterious Unknown at the Roots of All Things’ is spoken of as having both inactive (impersonal) and active (personal) aspects or attributes, which the Qabalah calls ‘Faces.’ The Zohar calls the inactive aspect as ‘Vast Face’ and active aspect as ‘Small Face.’ Sanskrit literature calls it Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman respectively.
Leviathan’s fang. This is paralleled in the Tantric tradition, where Lord Shiva is described as swallowing the poison of Maya (illusion) and holding it in his throat. In the Sifra Detniyutha 1, the verse goes thus:

The engraving of all engravings appears as a long serpent.

And extends this way and that. The tail is in the head.

The head goes around to the shoulders. Passing and indignant.

Guarding and concealing, revealing itself in a thousand short days.

1.2.4. The Influence of Rabbinic Gnosticism on Hekhalot and Merkabah Mystical Literature

In early twentieth century, Gershom Scholem, Jewish scholar and historian posited that Hekhalot and Merkabah mysticism - a mystical movement that arose in Rabbinic Judaism in the second and third centuries - was, in fact, a form of Jewish Gnosticism. Furthermore, Scholem proposed that this Jewish Gnosticism was also the mysticism that was practised by the same orthodox rabbis that produced the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrashim. Scholem’s thesis has been debated ever since, and this is where Deutsch’s book comes in to help clarify the relationship between Gnosticism, and Hekhalot and Merkabah mysticism.

Despite the basic similarities (such as heavenly ascent) between Gnosticism, and Hekhalot and Merkabah mysticism, there are also serious differences, such as the way they understand the Jewish Bible (Gnosticism denigrated it, while Hekhalot and Merkabah mystics held it in high regard). Deutsch points out that when Gnostic texts are analysed and compared to Hekhalot and Merkabah texts, it is only a few of the Gnostic texts that really seem to have parallels to those in the Hekhalot and Merkabah
corpus. And, those texts that do look related may be related because they were influenced by the *Hekhalot* and *Merkabah* texts, not the other way around.

Then, how are we to understand the relationship between Gnosticism, and *Hekhalot* and *Merkabah* mysticism? Deutsch proposes that the best way to study these texts is to look at them from a comparative standpoint of how each group approached the sacred. It is only then that the similarities and differences will be revealed to a greater extent because, as Deutsch puts it, “only a framework can be constructed on the foundation of the available evidence.” (p. 150). A work like Joseph Dan’s *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* provides a detailed analysis of some of the debates within *Hekhalot* and *Merkabah* mysticism. Deutsch pays attention to detail and argues his points persuasively. In the end, the evidence for *Hekhalot* and *Merkabah* mysticism being Jewish Gnosticism looks weak. But although there was no unified Rabbinic Gnosticism, probably there were some Gnostic rabbis who helped to shape the movement that produced the *Hekhalot* and *Merkabah* mystical texts.

1.3. Syncretic Kabbalah Literature

The word ‘Kabbalah’ is derived from the Hebrew root *khl*, which means ‘to accept’ or ‘to receive.’ It is a body of mystical and esoteric beliefs and teachings of rabbinical origin, based on the commentaries on the Torah. It is also a secret doctrine resembling these teachings, essentially in oral tradition, and it claimed to have secret wisdom of the Torah communicated by God to Adam and Moses. It provided Jews with a direct approach to God, a notion regarded as heretical and pantheistic by Orthodox Judaism. Further, it is essentially a Jewish school of mysticism having

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7 Torah, also called as Pentateuch, is the first five books of the Hebrew (Jewish) Bible - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
its syncretic adaptations in Christian, New Age\(^8\) and Occultist\(^9\) schools. Kabbalah is a set of esoteric teachings meant to explain the relationship between an unchanging, eternal and mysterious *Ein Sof\(^10\)* (i.e. no end) and the mortal and finite universe (His creation). Inside Judaism, it forms the foundations of religio-mystical interpretation. Outside Judaism, its scriptures are read outside the traditional canons of organised religion. This convention is also syncretically prevalent in Islam, wherein orthodox Islam doesn’t consider its mystical branch, i.e. Sufism, into its accepted canons. Invariably, Kabbalah explains the nature of the universe and of the human person, the nature and end of existence, and innumerable other ontological questions. It also presents methods to aid understanding of these concepts and thereby attain spiritual realisation.

Kabbalah evolved entirely within the realm of Jewish thought, and Kabbalists often use classical Jewish sources to explain and demonstrate its esoteric teachings. These teachings are held by followers in Judaism, such as, Christian Cabbalah,\(^11\) Hermetic Qabalah\(^12\) and Islam, for the exegesis of both the Jewish Bible and traditional Rabbinic literature.\(^13\)

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\(^8\) New Age is a collection of beliefs and practices based on the idea that humankind is about to enter into a ‘new age’ of peace, prosperity and spiritual enlightenment brought about by humans’ own efforts to change themselves. Many New Age proponents believe that humans will be able to do this as a result of contact with higher spiritual beings who will teach them to be one with the universe.

\(^9\) Occult is a collection of beliefs and practices that are based on the idea that there is a supernatural world, and that human person can tap into it in order to control one’s environment or other people through secret, special knowledge and rituals.

\(^10\) *Ein Sof or Ayn Sof* (Hebrew) in Kabbalah is understood as God prior to His self-manifestation in the production of any spiritual realm. It is probably derived from Ibn Gabirol’s term, ‘the Endless One’ (*sh-e-en lo tiklah*). *Ein Sof* may be translated as ‘no end’, ‘unending’, ‘there is no end’, or ‘infinite.’

\(^11\) The Renaissance saw the birth of Christian Cabbalah (often transliterated with a ‘C’ rather than a ‘K’ or a ‘Q’ to distinguish it from Jewish Kabbalah and Hermetic Qabalah), also spelled Cabbala / Cabala. Interest grew among some Christian scholars in what they saw to be the mystical aspects of Judaic Kabbalah, which was compatible with Christian mystical thought. Although somewhat obscure, the tradition of Christian Cabbalah or Catholic Cabbalah still persists today.

\(^12\) Hermetic Qabalah is a Western esoteric and mystical tradition. It is the underlying philosophy and framework for magical societies, such as the Golden Dawn, Thlemic orders, mystical societies, like the Builders of the Adytum and the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, and is a precursor to the Neo-pagan, Wiccan and New Age movements. The Hermetic Qabalah is the basis for Qliphothic Qabala as studied by left hand path orders, such as the Typhonian Order. Hermetic Qabalah draws on a great many influences, most notably: Jewish Kabbalah, Western astrology, Alchemy, pagan religions, especially
1.3.1. Origin of the Kabbalah

Traditional Kabbalists believe that Kabbalah dates from Eden (i.e. Garden of Eden) and thus its earliest origins pre-date world religions, forming the primordial blueprint for creation’s philosophies, religions, sciences, arts and political systems. Historians have noted that most claims for the authority of Kabbalah involve an argument of the antiquity of authority (Ref. Joseph Dan’s Circle of the Unique Cherub). As a result, virtually all early foundational works pseudepigraphically claim, or are ascribed ancient authorship. For example, Sefer Raziel HaMalach, an astro-magical text partly based on a magical manual of late antiquity; Sefer ha-Razim, according to the Kabbalists, was transmitted by the angel Raziel to Adam after he was evicted from Eden. Another popular work, the early Sefer Yetzirah, supposedly dates back to Abraham. This tendency towards pseudepigraphy has its roots in apocalyptic literature, which claims that esoteric knowledge such as magic, divination and astrology was transmitted to humans in the mythic past by the two angels, Aza and Azaz’el (in other places, Azaz’el and Uzaz’el) who fell from heaven (Genesis 6:4). Kabbalistic knowledge was believed to be an integral part of Judaism’s oral law (Aggadah), given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai around 13th century B.C.E.

The Kabbalah states that these esoteric doctrines are contained in the Jewish Scriptures but cannot be perceived by the uninitiated. They are, however, revealed to persons of spiritual mind. At times, the Kabbalah is regarded as occult literature. For,

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1 Egyptian and Greco-Roman (the latter being from which the term ‘Hermetic’ is derived), Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, the Enochian system of angelic magic of John Dee and Edward Kelley, Hermetism, Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, tantra and the symbolism of the tarot. Hermetic Qabalah differs from the Jewish form in being a more admittedly syncretic system, however, it shares many concepts with Jewish Kabbalah.

2 Rabbinic literature, in its broadest sense, means the entire spectrum of rabbinic writings throughout Jewish history. However, the term often refers specifically to literature from the Talmudic era, as opposed to medieval and modern rabbinic writing, and thus corresponds with the Hebrew term Sifrut Hazal “Literature of our sages of blessed memory”: where Hazal normally refers only to the sages of the Talmudic era.
the philosophical doctrines developed in its literary annals have been perpetuated by a secret oral tradition from the first ages of humanity. As British Hebrew and Biblical scholar Christian D. Ginsburg says:

The Kabbalah was first taught by God Himself to a select company of angels, who formed a theosophic school in paradise. After the Fall the angels most graciously communicated this heavenly doctrine to the disobedient child of earth, to furnish the protoplasts with the means of returning to their pristine nobility and felicity. From Adam it was passed over to Noah, and then to Abraham, the friend of God, who emigrated with it to Egypt, where the patriarch allowed a portion of this mysterious doctrine to ooze out. It was in this way that the Egyptians obtained some knowledge of it, and the other Eastern nations could introduce it into their philosophical systems. Moses, who was learned in all wisdom of Egypt, [as] first initiated into the Kabbalah in the land of his birth, but became most proficient in it during his wanderings in the wilderness, when he not only devoted to it the leisure hours of the whole forty years, but received lessons in it from one of the angels. By the end of this mysterious science the lawgiver was enabled to solve the difficulties which arose during his management of the Israelites, in spite of the pilgrimages, wars, and frequent miseries of the nation. He covertly laid down the principles of this secret doctrine in the first four books of the Pentateuch, but withered them from Deuteronomy.... Moses also initiated the seventy elders into the secrets of this doctrine, and they again transmitted them from hand to hand. Of all who formed the unbroken line of tradition, David and Solomon were most deeply initiated into the Kabbalah. No one, however, dared to write it down till Simon Ben Jochai, who lived at the time of the destruction of the second
Temple... After his death, his son, Rabbi Eliezer, and his secretary, Rabbi Abba, as well as his disciples, collated Rabbi Simon Ben Jochai's treatises, and out of these composed the celebrated work called Sohar, i.e. *Splendour*, which is the grand storehouse of Kabbalism. (*The Kabbalah: Doctrines, Developments and Literature*, 1863, pp. 181-183).

The Kabbalah proper developed from diverse esoteric and theosophical currents among Jews in Palestine and Egypt during the early Christian era. Early strands of Jewish apocalypticism and *Merkabah* (throne) and *Hekhalot* (palaces) mysticism were influenced by Hellenistic, Iranian and Gnostic thought, although scholars disagree about the extent and importance of these external influences. *Merkabah* and *Hekhalot* mysticism was devoted to descriptions of the dangerous ascent through various worlds and palaces that culminated in the vision of the divine throne described by Ezekiel. The *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Formation), a major source of later Kabbalistic speculation, belongs to the same period (2nd to 6th century). It describes the creative power of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the *Sefirot* (numbers or manifestations of God) through whom the world came into being.

1.3.2. Synergetic Evolution of the Kabbalah

Kabbalistic literature was evolved through a mystical tradition inherent in Judaism from antiquity, as part of rabbinic literature. In Judaism, after the prophetic experiences, the first schools of mysticism were found in the 1st-2nd centuries, which are described in the *Hekhalot* (supernal palaces) texts and the earliest book on Jewish esotericism is *Sefer Yetzirah* (“Book of Formation” or “Book of Creation”). According to *Merkabah* (contemplation of the ‘Divine Chariot’), mysticism lasted until the tenth century, where it was subsumed by the medieval doctrine of the Kabbalah in south-western Europe in the 12th-13th centuries. Its teachings were
incorporated in the *Zohar*, which became the foundational text of later Jewish mysticism, and was re-interpreted in the early-modern developments of sixteenth century *Safed*, through the new system of Isaac Luria. Lurianic Kabbalah became popular as a social mysticism for the whole Jewish community through eighteenth century *Hasidism* in Eastern Europe, and its new notions of mystical leadership. Here, we can see the evolution of Judaic mysticism with syncretism getting incorporated into it, resultant in the mystical texts as well.

Modern study of Jewish mysticism designates the term ‘Kabbalah’ to the distinctive doctrines emerged in the Middle Ages, distinct from the earlier *Merkabah* concepts and methods. As per this descriptive categorisation, both versions of the Kabbalistic theory, i.e. medieval-Zoharic and early-modern Lurianic, together comprise the theosophical tradition in Kabbalah, while the meditative-ecstatic Kabbalah embodies a parallel inter-related medieval tradition. A third tradition, related but more shunned, comprises the magical aims of Practical Kabbalah. Moshe Idel says that these three models are operating throughout the history of Jewish mysticism, which are found reflected in Jewish mystical literature in general and Kabbalah literature in particular.

**1.3.3. Syncretic History of the Kabbalah**

Gershom Scholem places the practical beginnings of the Kabbalah in the Second Temple period (530 B.C.E.-70 C.E.), posterior to the Babylonian exile. According to him, the development of the Kabbalah was coeval with Hellenistic syncretic religion and Gnosticism, with the descending spiritual hypostasis of the Gnostics corresponding to the *Merkabah* mysticism of the rabbis. Both Hellenistic Gnosis and Rabbinical Gnosis were based on the theory that there are spiritual emanations of God (*Aeons* and *Archons* for the Greek, *Sephiroth* for the Hebrew)
which fill a monistic universe (*Pleroma* for the Greek, *Zimzum* for the Hebrew) which, if properly understood and harnessed lead back to the deity. In this vein, Philo of Alexandria’s *De Vita Contemplativa*, which laid out the path for ecstatic union with the divine essence according to a mystical exegesis of scripture, was an early (first century) attempt at the fusion of Hebrew law with Neo-Platonism and theosophical Gnosis.

Historically, Kabbalah emerged sometime in twelfth to thirteenth century Southern France and Spain, i.e. after earlier forms of Jewish mysticism, becoming reinterpreted in the Jewish mystical renaissance of sixteenth century Ottoman Palestine and was popularised in the form of Hasidic Judaism from the eighteenth century onwards. In the twentieth century, interest in the Kabbalah inspired cross-denominational Jewish renewal and contributed to wider non-Jewish contemporary spirituality.

The Kabbalah esoteric literature passed from the Essenes¹ or Qumran apocalyptics through the diaspora to the Medieval Provencal and Spanish thinkers who produced *Sepher Yetzira* (“Book of Creation”) and *Zohar* (“Book of Splendour”), which further developed in the sixteenth century by Jacob Cordovero and Isaac Luria, whose writings led to Messianism in *Shabbetai Zevi* (1666). Ever since, in Judaism, the Kabbalah lay in fermentation among the Hasidim (Pious ones) of Eastern Europe and the Doenme (a strange group of followers which became false converts to other religions in order to seek redemption through apostasy and sin).

### 1.3.4. Zoroastrian Influence on Kabbalah Literature

All religions, especially in their formative stages, borrow from others and adapt into their own like ‘old wine in new wineskins’, and Judaism is no exception.

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¹ Essenes were one of the three leading Jewish sects in the second century B.C.E., the others being the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Essenes were a Qumran settlement, who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls.
The post-exilic Judaism\textsuperscript{15} influenced by Zoroastrianism (founded by Zarathustra, a Persian, ‘Zoroaster’ in Greek, in seventh century B.C.E.) incorporated a plethora of Persian, specifically Zoroastrian elements. The Iranian (other word for ‘Persian’) world of angels and demons, light and darkness, God and adversary, stories about God, creation, a sacred time-line, duality, i.e. ethical and cosmic conflict of good and evil, end of the world, divine judgment, eschatology, along with the symbolism of fire, light and darkness, as well as stories and prayers about the yazatas\textsuperscript{16} or intermediate spiritual beings enter into the Jewish universe of apocalypse. These are all elements of classical Zoroastrianism developed from the primal Zoroastrianism of the Gathas (foundational text of Zoroastrianism), and the Yashts (hymns of praise to various intermediate deities and guardian spirit), adapted from pre-Zarathushtrian mythology practised among the people, existed in oral tradition. Many of these apocalyptic writings survive from the ‘inter-testamental’ period, i.e. after the last canonical book of the Old Testament and before Christianity and the composition of the New Testament (150 B.C.E. to 100 C.E.). For example, the Biblical Book of Enoch is a compilation of spectacular visions about angels, demons, and the Last Judgment. The Jewish apocalyptic idea of the end time, as well as the Final Judgment, owes a great deal to Zoroastrian apocalypse. Moreover, Zoroastrianism offered a world view that both explained and mollified tragedies like the exile, which the Jews adopted in the face of the profound disasters they had weathered.

\textsuperscript{15} The Babylonian exile was the Jewish exilic period between 587-538 B.C.E. during which the Jews of the ancient kingdom of Judah were captives in Babylon by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar. The period after 538 B.C.E. when King Cyrus the Persian conquered Chaldeans and sent the Jews back to Jerusalem is the post-exilic period.

\textsuperscript{16} Yazata is the Avestan language word for a Zoroastrian concept signifying (or is an epithet of) a divinity. The term literally means ‘worthy of worship’ or ‘worthy of veneration.’ The yazatas collectively represent ‘the good powers under Ohrmuzd’, where the latter is ‘the Greatest of the yazatas.’
In the fourth century B.C.E., the conquests of Alexander of Macedon created the first ‘global’ culture, especially in the Western world, in which people, goods, and ideas were circulated from southern Europe, through the Middle East, all the way to Iran and India, and vice versa. It was with this cosmopolitan, Hellenistic world that Jews and Persians had further contact, and the Zoroastrian influence on Judaism became much stronger. This influence is clearly visible in the later Jewish writings, such as, the Book of Daniel and the Book of Maccabees, written in the second century B.C.E. Let us have a glance at some of the Zoroastrian elements syncretically adapted into Jewish mystical life, philosophy and literature.

1.3.4.1. Monotheism and Universalism

Zoroastrian spell on Judaism was pervasive, profound, and continues its effects to this day. The traditional claim that the Jews imbibed monotheism from the Zoroastrians during the Babylonian exile can be disputed by the fact that, by that time Zoroaster’s strict monotheism had been compromised by polytheistic practices. The famous inscriptions of Darius, although mention the supreme God Ahura Mazda on almost every line, nonetheless refer other gods. Therefore I would not say that contact with Zoroastrianism influenced Jewish monotheism in toto. The philosophical minds of the two cultures may indeed have recognized each other as fellow monotheists, but this central Jewish doctrine is one which was not learned from the Zoroastrians. It grew from the original monotheistic revelation of Moses (Ref. the Biblical book of Exodus) just as Zoroastrian monotheism grew from the revelation of Zarathushtra, who may have been a contemporary, though completely unconnected, with Moses. These were two parallel journeys towards the understanding of one God.
It was not so much monotheism that the exilic Jews learned from the Persians as it was universalism - the belief that one God rules universally and will save not only the Jews but all those who turn to Him. This universalism does not appear until the Babylonian exile in any of the Jewish writings, which by all scholarly accounts, except some fundamentalists, was written during and after the Babylonian exile. The Babylonian captivity was a big blow to the Jews, because they were expatriated out of Yahweh’s divine rule and jurisdiction. The Jews presumed that their prayers could not be answered in an alien land. For, they said:

By the rivers of Babylon - there we sat down,
and there we wept, when we remembered Zion…

How could we sing the Lord's song, in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1).

1.3.4.2. Angels or Subordinate Deities

The *Gathas* describe God in universalist, abstract cum monotheistic terms. However, it is not the Achaemenid kings of the Persian Empire, who incorporated the veneration of subordinate divinities into their worship, who were recognized as creations of the one God and not gods in their own right. Judaism recognizes angels as semi-divine intermediaries, but would not go so far as the Zoroastrians in venerating those intermediaries with hymns of praise such as the *Yashts*, which is also present in Christianity and Islam, the Semitic offshoots of Judaism. The angelology in the Book of Daniel of the Jewish Bible has its source in Zoroastrianism. The angels in the early Jewish literature were disguises of Yahweh or one of His subordinate deities. The idea of separate angels emerges only after their contact with Zoroastrianism.

1.3.4.3. Spirits

*Gematria* or *Gimatria* (i.e. a system of assigning numerical value to a word or phrase) was used for the concordance of Biblical texts and messianic prophecy as well
as in calling up spirits, both for good and for evil. The manipulator of spirits (good or evil) was called a ‘Ba’al Shem’ or master of divine names. This is yet another syncretic practice adapted by the Kabbalah from the Zoroastrian religious practices.

**1.3.4.4. Dualism in the Kabbalah**

At the outset, there are two primary models of Gnostic-dualistic cosmology: the first, which goes back to Zoroastrianism, believes creation is ontologically divided between good and evil forces; the second, found largely in Greco-Roman metaphysics like Neo-Platonism, argues that the universe knew a primordial harmony, but that a cosmic disruption yielded a second, evil, dimension to reality. This second model influenced the cosmology of the Kabbalah.

By the Hellenistic era (323 B.C.E. to 146 or 31 B.C.E.), Zoroastrianism had already developed its doctrine of cosmic dualism, according to which, the universe is divided into two distinct spheres. One, which is light and good is ruled by *Ahura Mazda*, the principle of light and good; the other, dark and evil is ruled by *Ahriman*, the principle of dark and evil. The whole of human and cosmic history is an epic struggle between these two deities. At the end of time, there will be a final battle between these two deities and all those ranged on one side or the other would permanently decide the outcome of this struggle. The good deity, *Ahura Mazda*, would win this final, apocalyptic battle, and all the gods and humans on the side of good would enjoy eternal bliss. This dualistic view is symbolic and more of a psychologically based teaching of Zarathustra, that good and evil are ethical choices and states of mind. After the exile, due to Zoroastrian influence, Judaism invents the concept of a dualistic universe, in which all good comes from Yahweh, while all evil arises from the evil principle. Such a dualistic view of the universe served them to explain tragedies like the exile. This view is reflected in the Jewish Bible as well. For
example, in the Book of Daniel “conflict of nations and heavenly powers” (Daniel 10:1-21); “the time of the end” (Daniel 11:40-45) and so on.

1.3.4.5. Divine Dualism

According to the Kabbalah, the Jewish race is the representative of the Shekhinah, the feminine principle, split off from God. The Shekhinah is not a Biblical word but derived from the Kabbalistic writings, especially the eleventh century Zohar. The Hasidic tradition says that just because of this split, God needs man, whose task it is to reunite the riven opposites within the divine personality itself. From this viewpoint, the Jewish exile receives a special meaning. For, this exile of the people in the celestial world corresponds to an exile of the Shekinah (feminine half of God) who went into exile with them. Therefore, in Jewish mysticism, the return of the Jews from exile means, their redemption. Above all, it is an earthly image and likeness of an inner-divine drama of redemption, of the homecoming of the Shekhinah to God. So while human person needing redemption strives to restore the disturbed world order, he/she is at the same time working towards the redemption of God and His reunion with the Shekhinah, and thus towards the ‘restoration and realization of the wholeness of God.’ A tradition also holds that the final Messiah, who will achieve Tikkun Olam or ‘world harmony’ will be a manifestation of the Shekinah.

The word ‘Shekinah’ does not appear in the Jewish Bible. The term MiShKaN, from which the word Shekinah is derived, refers to the Sanctuary in the wilderness - not He or She - who dwells therein. The term ‘Shekinah’ entered into common usage among Jewish thinkers in Medieval Spain where Gnostic-Kabbalistic mysticism took root from the writings of Moses de Leon in the Sefer ha-Zohar or “Book of Splendour” (c. 1280 C.E.). A feminist Hebrew scholar cum Rabbi, Lynn Gottlieb in her book, She Who Dwells Within points out:
The word *Shekinah* first appears in the Mishnah and Talmud (ca. 200 C.E.), where it is used interchangeably with Yahweh and *Elohim* as names of God.... By 1000 C.E., the very mythologies so suppressed in the Bible erupted in the heart of Jewish mysticism, known as the ‘Kabul,’ and *Shekinah* became Yahweh’s wife, lover and daughter.

As explained by Daniel Matt in his *Essential Kabbalah*, “In Kabbalah, *Shekinah* becomes full-fledged She...the feminine half of God.” This doctrine spread through Southern Europe to Palestine and Turkey and then upward to Poland and Russia after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. More recently, Joseph Dan of the University of Jerusalem in an interview with *Jewish Book News* (9 May 1996 issue) states, “The Kabbalah insists that there is a feminine aspect within the divinity itself, the *Shekinah*, and therefore...sexual life is applicable to the divine world.”

In the divine realm, the state of redemption is expressed as ‘the end of the exile of the *Shekinah’*, the restoration of the divine unity throughout all areas of existence: “In that day the Lord shall be One, and His name One.” Hence the view that the true unity of God will be revealed only in the time to come, while during the years of exile it is as if sin had rendered His unity imperfect. At the time of redemption there will be a continuous union of king and queen, or of the *Sefirot Tiferet* and *Shekinah*. That is, there will be an unceasing stream of divine influence through all worlds, and this will bind them eternally together. The hidden secrets of the Torah will be revealed and the Kabbalah will be the literal sense of the Torah.

In terms of eschatology, the immanentist theology of the Kabbalah must inevitably lead to the doctrine of *Apokatastasis*, the reintegration of all spiritual emanations, active and passive, good and evil into the divinity at the end of time. If God is all, then God cannot leave part of Himself outside of Himself forever. This is
precisely what the Kabbalah predicts, ‘after myriad reincarnations, the souls of all
human beings as well as of angels and demons will form once again the unity of
God.’ All these ideas were incorporated from Persian and other neighbourhood
religions, (we will be discussing on reincarnation in the later part of this chapter)
which are also present in the eastern religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and
Buddhism, which are totally foreign and strange to Judaism. As the forces of creative
light expand in man and dark judgement is absorbed, so also shall it be with God. It is
even said that the Arch Devil Samael will be transformed at time’s end to Sa’el, one
of the 72 holy names of God.

This concept is totally alien cum contemptuous, scornful, disdainful and
despising to the very monotheism of Jewish Orthodoxy. Further, reincarnation of the
souls of all human beings, angels and demons (on which we will deal with later) is a
concept incorporated into the Kabbalah. However, without this expanded
interpretation, mysticism in Judaism would have been far from reality. For, Judaism
believes that personal union with an impersonal God is never a possibility.

1.3.4.6. Cosmic and Ethical Dualism

Both types of dualism - cosmic and ethical - coexist in Zoroastrian thought,
and both are found reflected in Jewish religio-philosophical thought as well. For
instance, the Book of Deuteronomy in the Torah, like the other early books of the
Jewish Bible, was re-edited and possibly even re-written during and after the exile.
An important passage in Deuteronomy 30:15-19 shows a Jewish version of ethical
dualism:

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I
command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to
keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest
live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.

Despite these Jewish reflections on ethical dualism, it is the doctrine of ‘cosmic dualism’ with its mythological and symbolic content, that most influenced the later Jewish thinkers. Even before the exile, under the threat of destruction by foreign empires, Jewish prophets were moving towards a vision of not only political, but cosmic war and catastrophe. For example, Conflict of nations and heavenly powers (Daniel 10:1-21) in the Jewish Bible. This genre of prophetic literature, after the exile, evolved into apocalyptic (from the Greek word apokalypsis means revelation) belles-lettres. That is, a form of religious storytelling, poetry, and preaching which uses a high level of mythological symbolism to describe not only a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, but also a schedule for the coming end of time. For example, the passages in the Jewish Bible, such as, Four young Israelites at the Babylonian court; God reveals Nebuchadnezzar’s dream: The writing on the wall interpreted; Visions of the four beasts; Judgement before the ancient one; Daniel’s visions interpreted; Visions of a ram and a goat (Daniel 1-8), are apocalyptic pieces of literature by their very form and nature.
1.3.4.7. Satan - the Divine Adversary

Satan as the Divine Adversary or the Evil One does not appear in the pre-exilic Jewish literature. In Judaism, the figure of Satan, the prince of evil, was an influence of Zoroastrian Ahriman, the adversary of Ahura Mazda. However, the Jewish idea of the adversary (i.e. Satan) is quite unlike the Zoroastrian Ahriman. In the post-exilic Book of Job of the Jewish Bible, one of the oldest books in Jewish religious literature, Satan is not only an adversary and one of the subordinate deities in God’s pantheon, but also God’s loyal servant, doing God’s work by testing a just man. Here Satan is God’s agent, and God gives him permission to persecute Job. In fact, it is the Zoroastrian Angra Mainyu i.e. the Evil One, the eternal enemy of God, is the prototype for late Jewish and Christian ideas of Satan. One scholar claims that the Jews acquired their aversion to homosexuality, not present in pre-exilic times, to the Iranian definition of the devil as a Sodomite.

In 1 Chronicles 21:1 (a book with heavy Persian influences), the Hebrew word Satan appears for the first time as a proper name without an article. Before the exile, Satan was not a separate entity per se, but a divine function performed by Yahweh’s subordinate deities (sons of God) or by Yahweh Himself. For example, in the Book of Numbers 22:22, Yahweh in the guise of mal’ak Yahweh, is ‘a Satan’ for Balaam and his donkey. The switching over from God inciting David to take a census in 2 Samuel 24:1, and a separate evil entity with the name ‘Satan’ doing the same deed in 1 Chronicles 21:1 is the strongest evidence that there was a radical transformation in Jewish thought. Something must have caused this change, and religious syncretism with Persia is the probable cause. G. Von Rad calls it a “correction due to religious scruples” and further states that “this correction would hardly have been carried out in this way if the concept of Satan had not undergone a rather decisive transformation.”
The Persian religious influence on Judaism is not only due to the generation spent in Babylonian exile, but also the following four hundred years in which the resurrected nation of Israel lived under strong Persian dominion and influence. The Chronicler made his crucial correction to 2 Samuel 24:1 about 400 B.C.E. In the later Jewish works like Daniel, and especially the inter-testamental books, Persian influence was on an increase. For instance, the concept of Satan as a separate evil force in direct opposition to God was not consistent with pre-exilic Jewish beliefs. In fact, the idea of a separate evil principle was fully developed in Zoroastrian Gathas (c. 1000 B.C.E.). The principal demon Druj (the Lie) is mentioned 66 times in the Gathas. Moreover, the Jewish priests were exposed to Zend Avesta where there is a repeated mention of Angra Mainyu, whose most prominent symbol is the serpent. Hence, along with the idea of ‘the Lie’, we have the prototype for the serpent / tempter, in the priestly account of the Garden of Eden, in the Book of Genesis (3:1). All these concepts were incorporated into Judaism from the Zoroastrian beliefs.

1.3.4.8. Problem of Evil

Zoroastrianism may have been the first to discover ethical individualism. The supreme God Ahura Mazda gives all humans free-will so that they may choose between good and evil. The first Jewish prophet to speak unequivocally on individual moral responsibility was Ezekiel, a prophet of the Babylonian exile. Till then, Jewish ethics had been guided by the idea of the corporate personality, i.e. the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons (Exodus 20:1-2).

Kabbalistic texts, including the Zohar, affirm dualism, for, they attribute all evil to the separation from holiness known as Sitra Achra or the other side, which is opposed to Sitra D’Kedushah or the side of holiness. The ‘left side’ of divine emanation is a negative mirror image of the ‘side of holiness’ with which it was
locked in combat (Encyclopaedia Judaica, Volume 6, “Dualism”, p. 244). While this evil aspect exists within the divine realm of the Sefirot, the Zohar indicates that the Sitra Achra has no power over Ein Sof, but exists only as a necessary aspect of God’s creation to render humans free choice, and that evil is the consequence of this choice. Hence, evil is not a supernatural force opposed to God, but a reflection of the inner moral combat within the humans between the dictates of morality and the surrender to one’s basic instincts. Rabbi David Gottlieb says that great many Kabbalists hold that the concepts, such as heavenly court or the Sitra Achra are only given to humanity by God as a working model to understand His ways within our own epistemological limits. They reject the notion that Satan or angels actually exist. Others hold that non-divine spiritual entities were indeed created by God as a means for exacting His will.

1.3.4.9. Two Impulses: Good and Evil

Zoroastrian influence on Judaism is evident in the evolution of Jewish ideas about good, evil, and the end time. For instance, the time of the end (Daniel 11:40-45). The original statement of the Zoroastrian dualism of good and evil is found in the Gathas, where Zarathushtra describes the two conflicting principles of good and evil in what might be called psychological, or ethical terms. Human beings are faced with the existence of good and evil within themselves. Zoroaster describes these principles as the ‘beneficent’ and the ‘hostile’ spirits. He advises that everyone must make the choice for good in order to follow God’s will.

Even though the original text of the Gathas was most probably inaccessible to the Jews, the teachings of Zarathushtra were part of the religious culture of the Persians among whom the exilic Jews lived. A notion in Jewish moral thought which was inspired by Zoroastrian ethical dualism is the idea of ‘evil impulse’ (yetzer hara in Hebrew) and ‘good impulse’ (yetzer tov in Hebrew). This idea arose in the rabbinic
thought of the inter-testamental period in which Jews encountered both Greek and Zoroastrian ideas. In this Jewish moral treatise, God gives humans both a ‘good impulse’ and an ‘evil impulse’, who must learn to choose from the promptings of these two impulses.

What gives the above idea a Jewish ‘twist’ quite different from the original Zoroastrian teaching is that the ‘evil impulse’ in Jewish thought is not entirely evil. It is not like the Zarathustrian ‘hostile spirit’ completely inimical to goodness. The Jewish ‘evil impulse’ is only evil when it is obeyed and yielded to without restraint. The ‘evil impulse’ is sinful lust in excess, but in moderation it is necessary in order to prompt people to procreate; it is sinful greed in excess, but in right order, it is the drive behind trade and the pursuit of lawful profit. The Jewish ‘evil impulse’ thus resembles Freud’s concept of the ‘id’, the amoral motive power behind human actions either for good or evil - and indeed, Freud being a Jew, was prompted by Jewish moral philosophy in his own thinking.

Some of the early Talmudic rabbis identified ‘evil impulse’ with Satan, which was not completely accepted by others. Indeed, the concepts of Judaism that are borrowed from Zoroastrianism, such as angels, devils, heaven and hell, and eschatology, tended to fade among Jews in later centuries, and they are no longer emphasized in mainstream Judaism, though they continue to hold sway among Jewish sects such as Hasidim.

One of the major differences of monotheism between Jews and Zoroastrians is that the Jews recognize the one God as the source of both good and evil, light and darkness, while Zoroastrians think of God only as the source of good, with evil as a separate principle. The passage in Isaiah composed during or after the exile is often cited as a Jewish rebuke to the Zoroastrian idea of a dualistic God:
I am Yahweh, unrivalled:

I form the light and create the dark.

I make good fortune and create calamity.

It is I, Yahweh, who do all this. (Isaiah 45:7)

This passage, which is a major source for Jewish speculation on the source of good and evil in the world, denies the Zoroastrian idea of a God who is the source only of good.

1.3.4.10. Eschatology in the Kabbalah

The Jewish Bible has no word for eschatology. In the post-exilic era (after 538 B.C.E.), a new term with eschatological meaning makes inroads into Jewish religious literature. This term, kez (qeZ) ha-yamim, literally means ‘the term of the days’ (Daniel 12:13b; cf. the similar term, et qez ‘the time of the term’, Daniel 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9) is a Persian adaptation.

Some scholars have sought to derive Jewish eschatological ideas from similar concepts of its ancient neighbours, Egypt and Babylonia. No doubt, the prophets have borrowed from these sources in the secondary details of their descriptions regarding the horrendous conditions of the eschatological times. However, most likely, the features with extra-Jewish parallels were concepts common to the entire ancient Near East. Essentially, eschatology in Judaism is an inner-Jewish development. Only in the later period, i.e. in Daniel and the inter-testamental Jewish literature, can some amount of borrowing from Persian sources be shown as probable.

It is hard to date the innumerable eschatological oracles. For, there are references in the pre-exilic prophetic literature, where Jerusalem is already destroyed and Jews are in exile. No doubt, such passages are post-exilic insertions into the pre-exilic prophetic literature. Post-exilic Judaism emerged with an elaborate eschatology,
wherein a deliverer would defeat once and for all the evil forces. For instance, in the
prophetic literature of Daniel, the time of the end (Daniel 11:40-45); the resurrection
of the dead (Daniel 12:1-13), etc. During the exile in Babylon (587-538 B.C.E.) and
in the centuries that followed, the gradual return of the exiled Jews to Israel until the
latest writings in the Jewish Bible, prodigious changes arose in Jewish eschatological
thought due to their liaison with the Persian religious traditions. This can be witnessed
especially in the writings of Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40:1-55:13), Trito-Isaiah
(Isaiah 56:1-66:24), Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Joel, Deutero-Zechariah (Zechariah
9:1-14:21), the Apocalypse of Isaiah (Isaiah 24:1-27:13), and finally in the Book of
Daniel. Apocalyptic concepts, such as the eschatological banquet (Isaiah 25:6) and the
resurrection of the dead (Isaiah 26:19), were understood literally rather than the
symbolic resurrection of the dead, signifying national resurrection in Ezekiel 37:1-14
appear for the first time in Isaiah. The Book of Daniel (12:1-2) contains the first
unequivocal affirmation of a belief in the eschatological resurrection of the dead in his
prophecy of the end time:

At that time Michael shall stand up.
The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;
And there shall be a time of trouble,
Such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time.
And at that time your people shall be delivered,
Everyone who is found written in the book.
And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame and everlasting contempt.
Belief in the resurrection of the dead may have been adumbrated in the Apocalypse of Isaiah (Isaiah 26:19) and in the pious hope of the Psalmist (Psalm 73:23-26). Perhaps this is the influence from the Zoroastrian religion of the Persians, which had such a belief.

A further eschatological trait in the Book of Daniel (Chapter 9) is the apocalyptic author’s attempt to show that ‘the end’ was to come in the imminent future, by interpreting the 70 years of exile that had been foretold by Jeremiah (25:11; 29:10) to mean 70 weeks of years or 490 years, and to argue from this by his own strange chronology that only three and a half years still remained before the end would come. Here, the references to the remaining three and a half years before ‘the end’ in the other apocalypses (7:25b; 8:14; 12:7) seem to be the insertion by the author. Later on, when the earlier predictions were not fulfilled, additions were made to the book in 12:11 and 12:12, in order to lengthen the period of waiting.

A special concept of a ‘future life’ soon after death is found in the Wisdom of Solomon, a Greek composition (75 B.C.E.) by an Alexandrian Jew, who was influenced by the Greek philosophical concept of the immortality of the human soul (Wisdom 3:1-9). In the post-exilic period, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, whereas the Sadducees did not (Jos Ant 18:14; Wars 2:14; Mark 12:18; Acts 23:8). Until then, the Jews retained the ancient Israelite concept of Sheol - the dark abode in the nether world for all the dead, good and bad alike (Ben Sira / Ecclesiasticus 14:16; 28:21; 51:6. 9). However, when the concept of individual retribution after death evolved in Judaism, the earlier concept of Sheol underwent various changes in the different inter-testamental writings. Some writings of this period describe various levels in Sheol (e.g. IV Ezra 7:36-37), so that even before the resurrection of the dead the wicked are tormented in various degrees in Sheol’s lower
levels, whereas the good enjoy bliss in the highest level. As per other writings, Sheol is replaced by Gehenna, the place where the damned are in torment. Whereas the just, either immediately after death or only at the resurrection, have the delights of an eschatological Garden of Eden or Paradise.

1.3.4.11. Concept of Heaven and Hell

One of the most visible changes after the exile is the emergence of a Jewish idea of heaven, hell, and the afterlife. Before the exile and Persian contact, Jews believed that the souls of the dead went to a dull, Hades-like place called Sheol. However, after the exile, the idea of a moralized afterlife with heavenly rewards for the good and hellish punishment for the evil, appear in Judaism. This moral view of the afterlife is characteristic of Zarathushtrian teaching from its very beginning in the Gathas.

The central ideas of heaven and a fiery hell have been transported directly from the Iranian religion into Judaism - fruit of exilic Jews’ contact. Pre-exilic Jewish literature is explicit in its notions about after life. For, the early Jewish concept is that all humans are made of dust and all return to dust. There is a shadowy existence in Sheol, but the beings there are so insignificant that Yahweh does not know them. The evangelical writer John Pelt reminds us that ‘the inhabitants of Sheol are never called souls’ (nephesh).

17 The English ‘Gehenna’ represents the Greek Ge’enna found in the New Testament, a phonetic transcription of Aramaic Gehanna, equivalent to the Hebrew Ge Hinnom, literally ‘Valley of Hinnom’, which was known in the Hebrew Bible as Gai Ben-Hinnom, literally ‘Valley of the son of Hinnom’, and in the Talmud as Gehinnom, one of the two principal valleys surrounding the old city in Jerusalem. In the Hebrew Bible, the site was initially where apostate Israelites and followers of various Ba’als and Canaanite gods, including Moloch sacrificed their children by fire (2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31, 19:2-6). In Jewish, Christian and Islamic scriptures, Gehenna is a destination of the wicked. This is different from the more neutral Sheol / Hades, the abode of the dead, though the King James version of the Bible translates both with the Anglo-Saxon word hell. In the Qur’an, Jahannam is a place of torment for sinners and non-believers, or the Islamic equivalent of hell.
The word *paradise* is from the ancient Iranian words 'pairi-daeza' meaning 'enclosed garden', is one of the definite Persian loan-words in the Jewish Bible. This concept was in popular use in all Near Eastern religions. ‘Eden’ not ‘Paradise’ is mentioned in Genesis, and paradise as an abode of light does not appear in Jewish literature until late books such as Enoch and the Psalm of Solomon. On the other hand, the Hebrew *ge-hinnom* is fiery hell independent of Persian influences. All references to *ge-hinnom* explicitly mean a definite geographic place, the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. The only eschatological implications we can find are in Jeremiah 7:31ff, where Jeremiah predicts that the Lord will destroy the place and it will be used for the disposal of dead bodies. This is obviously not the place of fiery torment of the New Testament *gehenna*, which was definitely influenced by Zoroastrian eschatology. Even an evangelical scholar admits that *gehenna*, a place of eternal torment is a late concept, probably first century B.C.E.

The Iranian influence continues to be evident in Jewish writings from the inter-testamental period. These Jewish inter-testamental writings describe a complicated hierarchy of angelic beings in an echo of the Zoroastrian concept of the holy court of the *Yazatas*. Similarly, post-exilic Judaism emerged with the idea of a ‘heavenly court’, wherein God is the head with angels and archangels attending on Him. Further, the Jewish idea of seven chief archangels probably has its inspiration in the seven *Amesha Spentas*, the highest guardian spirits of Zoroastrian belief. Jews had their own ideas of angels long before they encountered Zoroastrianism; angels were nameless, impersonal representatives of God’s message and action. But after the exile, Jewish angels gain names and personalities, and also are spoken of as guardians of various natural phenomena, just like the Zoroastrian *Yazatas*. For example, Archangel Gabriel interprets the vision of Daniel (Daniel 8:15-27); Archangel Michael, one of
the chief princes, in “Conflict of nations and heavenly powers” (Daniel 10:13,21). The Jewish and Christian idea of a personal ‘guardian angel’ may also have been inspired by the Zoroastrian figure of the *fravashi*, the divine guardian-spirit of each individual human being.

In the Book of Psalms of the Jewish Bible, the judgment of the wicked in Psalm 1 is due to Persian influences, as most scholars date the writing of this psalm after the exile. Even if it is pre-exilic - Mitchell Dahood has established enough Ugaritic parallels to make this a possibility - there is no explicit mention of a Last Judgment or an end of the world. The punishment of the wicked could just as well be worldly as other-worldly. Given the context of early Jewish thought, this is a probable interpretation. Similarly, the fiery judgment and immortality mentioned in Psalm 21:9-10 has been used to support the idea of an advanced eschatology in the psalms. According to Mitchell Dahood, the Canaanite parallels show that God makes the king, not any man; those who’re burned are the king’s foes, not all the wicked; and the burning furnace is probably the mouth of Yahweh and not any burning hell.

1.3.4.12. Messianism in the Kabbalah

Zarathushtra, in his *Gathas*, describes *Saoshyant* (Saviour) as “a benefactor of the people.” According to Zoroastrian philosophy, *Saoshyant*, a Saviour born from Zoroaster’s seed will come and the dead shall be resurrected, body and soul. As the final judgement is made, husband is set against wife and brother against brother as the righteous and the damned are separated by the divine judge *Saoshyant*. Personal and individual immortality is given to the righteous; and, as a final fire melts away the world and the damned, a Kingdom of God is established for a thousand years.
Concurrent with the new eschatology, in the exile, the Jews hoped for a divine deliverer whom they called ‘Messiah’, meaning ‘the Anointed One.’ The Jewish idea of Messiah or Saviour was an influence of Zoroastrian Messianism. In the Jewish Bible, the Book of Isaiah, possibly written during the exile, speaks of a Saviour who would come to rescue the Jewish people: a benefactor anointed by God to fulfil His role. The growth of Messianic ideas is parallel both in Jewish and Iranian thought. Both Persian and Jewish Messiah-mythology takes on a special person, almost a divine quality, which will be very important in the birth of Christianity.

1.3.4.13. Resurrection of Body and Soul cum Resurrection at the End of the World

With regard to resurrection of the dead - body and soul - Jewish Bible has two references, which Biblical scholars hold to be of late date, and it has been conjectured that the doctrine owes a great deal to Persian influence. The first is from Isaiah 26:19:

Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.

Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust:

for thy dew is as the dew of herbs,

and the earth shall cast out the dead.

The second is from Daniel 12:2:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,

Some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The nineteenth century Reform Judaism rejected the doctrine of resurrection in favour of the immortality of the soul. The traditional passages on resurrection in the Reform Jewish prayer books have either been deleted or interpreted as referring to immortality of the soul.
The Kabbalah believes in the physical resurrection of the dead, which, according to it, would take place at the end of the days of redemption, i.e. ‘on the day of judgment.’ Nahmanides\(^\text{18}\) taught that after a normal physical life, the resurrected body would be purified and be clothed in *malakhut* (garments of angels), thereby pass into the future spiritual world, which would come into being after the destruction of this world. This new world would emerge after the resurrection, wherein the souls and their ‘spiritualized’ bodies would be gathered together in the ranks of the *Sefirot*, in the true bond of life. According to Nahmanides, even in this state, the souls would preserve their individual identity. However, later other views emerged.

The Zohar speaks of ‘holy bodies’ after the resurrection, but does not state the specific view of their future except by allusion. According to *Sefirah Binah* (“The Kabbalah Tree of Life”) and its manifestations, after experiencing a life of pleasure by the resurrected in the new world, this world would be destroyed and it would return to chaos (‘waste and void’) in order to be re-created in a new form. According to *Sefer ha-Temunah* (“Book of the Figure”), a 13\(^{\text{th}}\)-14\(^{\text{th}}\) century Kabbalistic text, the world to come would be the creation of another link in the chain of ‘creations’ or *Shemitot*, or even the creation of a spiritual existence through which everything that exists ascends to the world of the *Sefirot*, and thus return to their primeval being, or their ‘higher source.’ In the Great Jubilee, after 50,000 years, everything will return to the bosom of the *Sefirah Binah*, which is also called the ‘mother of the world.’ Even the other *Sefirot*, through which God guides creation, will be destroyed with the destruction of creation. In contrast to the teaching of *Sefer ha-Temunah* concerning the creation of worlds according to a fixed cycle (Baḥya ben Asher speaks of 18,000

\(^{18}\) Nahmanides, also known as Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi, Bonastruc ça (de) Porta and by his acronym Ramban (1194-1270), was a leading medieval Jewish scholar, Catalan rabbi, philosopher, physician, Kabbalist, and Biblical commentator. He was raised, studied, and lived for most of his life in Girona.
jubilees). However, most of the kabbalists believe that there would be only one creation, and correspondingly only one eternal ‘world to come.’ The contradiction of having two judgments - one, soon after death, and the other, after resurrection - one of which appears to be superfluous, prompted some kabbalists to restrict the Day of Judgment to the nations of the world, while the souls of Jews, would be judged soon after death. All these ideas are an influence of Persian, Egyptian and other neighbourhood religions, which is totally foreign and strange to Jewish orthodoxy. Absolutely none of these elements was present in Judaism before the exile. The world was governed solely by Yahweh; evil in the world was solely the product of human actions. There was no principle of evil among pre-exilic Jews. The afterlife was simply a ‘House of Dust’ called Sheol wherein the soul lasted for only a brief time. There was no concept of an end of time or history, or of a world beyond this one. However, post-exilic Jews of the diaspora include several innovations - a syncretic adaptation from Zoroastrianism - due to their contact with them during the exile followed by its post-factum effect.

1.3.4.14. Transmigration of souls or Metempsychosis

*Book of Brightness,* a major twelfth century Kabbalah text, for the first time introduced the doctrine of transmigration of souls or reincarnation into Judaism, i.e. the passing of souls into successive bodily forms, or the belief that the souls of the deceased return to this world reincarnating in different forms - in human body, in animals, or in inanimate objects. Hence, Kosher\(^{19}\) slaughter and eating in accordance with Jewish law (i.e. ritual washing of hands and recitation of blessings) acquired an

\(^{19}\)Kosher is a Yiddish word, from Hebrew *kasher* meaning ‘proper’ or ‘fit.’ The laws of *kashrut* (dietary laws) define foods fit for use. Kosher slaughter is a ritual killing of mammals and birds which are bled to death (*halal*).
additional notion of reincarnation. Thus, if an animal were slaughtered according to kashrut laws, then the soul that had been reincarnated in that beast was set free and able to improve its spiritual level. Further, they added a chain of intermediary states between Jews and idol worshippers, or spiritualized the very definition of Jews and non-Jews, and argued that a soul can be re-incarnated in different communities (whether Jewish or not) as much as within a single one. In his book Emunot v’ Deot, Rabbi Saadia Gaon says that Jews who believe in reincarnation have adopted a non-Jewish belief.

According to the Kabbalah, souls pre-exist in the world of emanations, and are all destined to inhabit human bodies. Like the Sephiroth from which it emanates, every soul has ten potencies, consisting of a trinity of triads - spirit, soul and elemental soul or neptesh. Each soul, before its entrance into the world, consists of male and female united into one being, but when it descends to earth, the two parts are separated and animate different bodies. The destiny of the soul upon earth is to develop from the perfect germ implanted in it, which must ultimately return to Ein Sof. If the soul does not succeed in acquiring the experience for which it has been sent to earth, it must re-inhabit the body three times so that it becomes duly purified. When all the souls in the world of the Sephiroth have passed through this period of probation and returned to the bosom of Ein Sof, the jubilee will begin. Even Satan will be restored to his original angelic nature, and existence will be a Sabbath without end.

The idea of punishment in Gehinnom (which was envisaged as a subtle spiritual fire that burned and purified the souls) conflicted to no uncertain way with the idea of atonement through transmigration (Gilgul). There was no settled opinion on the question of which sin was punished by Gehinnom, and which by transmigration. One can only say that with the development of the Kabbalah,
transmigration took an ever more distinct role in this context. Both the Garden of Eden and Gehinnom were beyond this world, or on the borders of it, whereas the doctrine of transmigration ensured reward and punishment in large measure in this world. Kabbalists sought various compromises between these two paths, but they came to no agreed solution. Attempts were also made to remove the whole subject of Gehinnom from its literal sense and to interpret it, either according to the view of Maimonides, or referring to transmigration metaphorically. The eschatology of the Kabbalah, and particularly that of the Zohar, was greatly influenced by the idea of the pre-existence of souls. The existence of the soul in ‘the world of souls’ is nothing more than its return to its original existence before its descent into the body. The works of Abraham Cohen de Herrera (1570-1635 C.E.) are full of references to gentile mystical philosophers. Such approach was particularly common among the Renaissance and post-Renaissance Italian Jews. Late medieval and Renaissance Italian Kabbalists, such as, Yohanan Alemanno, David Messer Leon and Abraham Yagel, adhered to humanistic ideals and incorporated teachings of various Christian and pagan mystics.

A prime representative of this humanist stream in the Kabbalah was Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh, who openly praised Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, as well as a whole range of ancient pagan mystical systems. He believed that the Kabbalah can reconcile the differences between the world religions, which represent different facets and stages of the universal human spirituality. In his writings, Benamozegh interprets the New Testament, Hadith, Vedas, Avesta and pagan mysteries according to the Kabbalistic theosophy.
1.3.4.15. Kabbalah Syncretic Roots of the Transmigration of souls

According to Pythagoras, who probably imbibed the doctrine of metempsychosis from Egypt, the rational mind, after being freed from the chains of the body, assumes an ethereal vehicle, and passes into the region of the dead, where it remains till it is sent back to this world to inhabit some other body - human or animal. When it is adequately purified after undergoing successive purgations, it is received among the gods, and returns to the eternal source from which it proceeded first. Till about eighth century, this doctrine was foreign to Judaism, when, under the influence of the Sufi mystics, it was adapted by the Karaites\textsuperscript{20} and other Jewish dissenters. Rabbi Saadia Gaon cited it first in Jewish literature as a protest against the belief, which was shared by the Yudghanites\textsuperscript{21} or whomsoever he contemptuously designated as 'so-called Jews.' In Saadia's words, the raison d’être by the adherents of metempsychosis for their belief is partly intellectual and partly scriptural. They are:

1. Human beings possess attributes of animals, like, the gentleness of a lamb, the rage of a wild beast, the gluttony of a dog, the lightness of a bird, etc. They assert that these features prove that their possessors have in part the souls of the respective animals.

2. On the contrary, it would be against divine justice to inflict pain upon children as punishment for the sins committed by their souls in a previous state. The

\textsuperscript{20} Karaite Judaism or Karaism, meaning 'Readers of the Hebrew Scriptures' is a Jewish movement arisen in the 7\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} centuries C.E. in Baghdad and possibly in Egypt, characterized by the recognition of the Hebrew / Jewish Bible alone as its supreme legal authority in Halakah (Jewish religious law) and theology. It is distinct from Rabbinism, which considers the Oral Torah, the legal decisions of the Sanhedrin as codified in the Talmud, and subsequent works to be authoritative interpretations of the Torah.

\textsuperscript{21} Yudghann (Yehuda, 8\textsuperscript{th} century C.E.), sectarian of Hamadan (Iran), a pupil of Abu Isa al-Isfahan, claimed to be a prophet of his followers, the Yudghanites, who believed him to be the Messiah. The Karaite historian Jacob al-Kirkisani writes in his book Gardens and Parks (938) that the Yudghanites prohibit meat and intoxicating drinks, observe many prayers and fasts, etc.
scriptural reasons stated are conclusions drawn from certain Biblical verses, such as:

Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath;

but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God,

and also with him that is not here with us this day. (Deuteronomy 29:14-15);

and,

Blessed be the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. (Psalms 1:1)

Saadia refutes both reasons saying that it is not worthwhile to show the foolishness and the low-mindedness of the believers in metempsychosis. He says that he is afraid, for, they might exercise a pernicious influence upon others (Emunot be-De’ot 6).

The doctrine had few adherents among Jews. Only with the spread of the Kabbalah, it began taking roots in Judaism, and then it gained believers even among those who were little inclined towards mysticism. The Kabbalists eagerly adopted the doctrine, for, it offered vast field to mystic speculations, and it was almost a necessary corollary of their psychological system. According to them, the absolute condition of the soul is its return after developing all those perfections the germs of which are eternally implanted in it, to the Infinite Source from which it emanated. Therefore, another term of life must be given to those souls which have not fulfilled their destiny here below and have not been purified enough for the state of reunion with the Primordial Cause. Hence if the soul, on its first assumption of a human body and sojourn on earth, doesn’t acquire that state for which it descended, but gets contaminated by the pollutants, it must re-inhabit a body till it is able to ascend in a purified state through repeated trials. This is the theory of the Zohar, which says:
All souls are subject to transmigration; and men do not know the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He! They do not know that they are brought before the tribunal both before they enter into this world and after they leave it; they are ignorant of the many transmigrations and secret probations which they have to undergo, and of the number of souls and spirits which enter into this world and which do not return to the palace of the Heavenly King. Men do not know how the souls revolve like a stone which is thrown from a sling. But the time is at hand when these mysteries will be disclosed. (Zohar 2. 99b)

According to Patristics like Origen, Kabbalists used metempsychosis as their main argument in favour of the doctrine of divine justice. But the question, why the wicked prosper while the righteous are miserable, remains unanswerable. Still, inflicting pain upon the innocent would be an act of cruelty, unless it is a nemesis for sins committed by the soul in the previous state.

Although, the Kabbalah elevated the doctrine of metempsychosis to the rank of a dogma, still it meted out stringent opposition from Jewish leaders in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who attacked the belief on philosophical grounds, alleging it to be a heathen superstition, opposed to the very spirit of Judaism. But, the opposition gradually ceased and the belief came to be shared even by those who were imbued with Aristotelian philosophy. Thus Isaac Abravanel sees in the commandment of the levirate\(^2\) a proof of the doctrine of metempsychosis giving the following reasons:

1. God in His mercy willed to give another trial to the soul, which had yielded to the sanguine temperament of the flesh, thus committing capital sin like murder, adultery...

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\(^2\) The term ‘Levirate’ comes from the Latin levir, meaning husband’s brother. It is a Jewish lawful custom by which a man had to marry his childless brother’s widow (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).
2. It is just when a man dies young a chance should be given to his soul to execute in another body the good deeds which it had no time to perform in the first one.

3. Sometimes, the soul of the wicked passes into another body in order to receive its deserved punishment here below instead of in the other world, where it would be much more severe (commentary on Deuteronomy 25:5).

Leon of Modena refuted these points against metempsychosis in his pamphlet Ben Dawid:

It is not God, but the planets, that determine the temperament of the body; why then subject the soul to the risk of entering into a body with a temperament as bad as, if not worse than, that of the one it has left? Would it not be more in keeping with God’s mercy to take into consideration the weakness of the body and to pardon the soul at once? To send the soul of a man who died young into another body would be to make it run the risk of losing the advantages it had acquired in its former body. Why send the soul of the wicked to another body in order to punish it here below? Was there anything to prevent?

Some modern Jews are attracted to the occult and believe in reincarnation. Otherwise the doctrine has had its day, and is believed in by very few modern Jews, although hardly any Orthodox Jew today will positively denounce the doctrine. This doctrine of reincarnation shows how precarious it is to attempt to see Judaism in monolithic terms. Here is a doctrine rejected as a foreign importation by a notable thinker such as Saadia, and upon which other thinkers, including Maimonides, are silent, and yet, for the Kabbalists, it is revealed truth.
1.3.16. *Pardes*: The Kabbalah Exegetical Tools

The Zohar is the Kabbalah foundational text written during the Middle Ages and published in early fourteenth century Spain by Moses de Leon, who attributed it to Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, who lived in the second century C.E. It is believed to be a compilation of various streams of thought and teaching, and not the work of one man. It is a mystical commentary on the Torah, and it is thought by Kabbalists to be equal in holiness to the Bible and the Talmud. It deals with the topics, such as the nature of God, the creation of the universe, the destiny of humanity, the nature of evil, and the meaning of the Bible. According to the Zohar, the study of Torah has four levels of exegetical interpretation. They are called *Pardes* (also spelled PaRDeS) from their initial letters (PRDS in Hebrew means ‘orchard.’)

- **Peshat** (‘simple’ in Hebrew): the direct interpretations of meaning.
- **Remez** (‘hint[s]’ in Hebrew): the allegoric meanings (through allusion).
- **Derash** or **darash** (‘inquire’ or ‘seek’ in Hebrew): Midrashic meanings, often with imaginative comparisons with similar words or verses.
- **Sod** (‘secret’ or ‘mystery’ in Hebrew): the inner, esoteric (metaphysical) meanings, expressed in the Kabbalah.

*The Encyclopedia Mikrait* notes *Pardes* as one of the Persian terms that entered into Biblical Hebrew. It appears three times in the Tanakh - *Shir HaShirim*.

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23 The Talmud (in Hebrew means instruction, learning, teach, study) is the central text of mainstream Judaism, considered second to the Torah. It is also traditionally referred to as *Shas* the ‘six orders’ of the oral law of Judaism. It has two components: The Mishnah (c. 200 C.E.), the first written compendium of Judaism’s oral law, and the Gemara (c. 500 C.E.), an elucidation of the Mishnah and related Tannaitic Hebrew writings. It contains the opinions of thousands of rabbis on a variety of subjects, including law, ethics, philosophy, customs, history, theology, lore and many other topics.

24 The Hebrew term **Midrash** (plural midrashim), meaning ‘story’ from ‘to investigate’ or ‘study’ also ‘interpretation’ or ‘exposition’ is a homiletic method of Biblical exegesis.

25 Biblical Hebrew (also called Classical Hebrew) is the archaic form of the Hebrew language, a Canaanite Semitic language spoken in Canaan between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea,
4:13; Koheleth or Ecclesiastes 2:5; and Nehemiah 2:8 - with the meaning ‘orchard’, compared to the Greek sense, ‘fenced off areas belonging to the king.’ According to Ben Yehuda, the term Pardesu was borrowed from Persian to Late Babylonian (Menachem Zevi Kaddari also mentions Akkadian), and perhaps it is from here Pardes entered Biblical Hebrew. All this substantiates the syncretic element of the Zohar, the very foundational testament of the Kabbalah faith, which deploys Persian exegetical tools to interpret the Torah - a syncretic element of the Kabbalah.

1.3.4.17. Zoroastrian Influence on Jewish Sects

The Zoroastrian connection becomes even more evident in the writings of Jewish sects like Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots. Due to archaeological findings, such as “the Dead Sea Scrolls” and the “Nag Hammadi Library” the modern world can know what these ancient devotees believed - and some of these beliefs show direct Zoroastrian influence. This is especially true in the text, “Essene Manual of Discipline” which, like the apocalyptic texts, describes a war between the Spirit of Light and the Spirit of Darkness, as well as the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error, and an ultimate end-time when the battle will be won. This, more than a millennium older Essene text sounds almost exactly like the Gathas, which could be a free translation of the dualistic verses of the Gathas:

For God has established the two spirits in equal measure until the last period, and has put eternal enmity between their divisions. An abomination to truth are deeds of error, and an abomination to error are all ways of truth... (“Essene Manual of Discipline” from “The Dead Sea Scrolls,” Millar Burrows ed.).

According to Zoroastrian philosophy, time and creation has a beginning, a middle, and an end, wherein all will be judged. These Zarathushtrian teachings were

and was attested from the 10th century B.C.E. to 70 C.E., which eventually developed into Mishnaic Hebrew, and was spoken until the second century C.E.
elaborated and illustrated with myths. Many of them were borrowed from the pre-
Zoroastrian Indo-Iranian gods and goddesses, as well as myths of cosmic conflict
from ancient Mesopotamia. Later Zoroastrianism also started teaching of a specific
sacred time-line, a historical structure for the created world. The Zoroastrians are
often credited with introducing eschatology, or the knowledge of the ‘end of time’ and
its events into the religious world of both East and West. All these are found reflected
in Judaism in general and Jewish sects in particular.

1.3.4.18. Division of Jewish History on Persian Parlance

Persian influence on Judaism can be seen not only in Jewish life, philosophy
and literature, but in their division of history into various distinct eras or monarchies
as well. The Persians divided their history of the world into three monarchies: the
Assyrian, the Median, and the Persian. In the Hellenistic period a fourth monarchy
was added, i.e. their own Greek kingdom, which as far as Palestine was concerned,
consisted of the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt and the Seleucid dynasty in Syria, with
the capital at Antioch. The Jews adapted this four-monarchy theory of history to their
own situation by substituting the Babylonian empire (as better known to them) for the
Assyrian empire, and by adding a fifth kingdom - the universal reign of God on earth,
based on His chosen people, Israelites or the Jews. This last kingdom would be an
everlasting kingdom - an eschatological concept.

1.3.5. The Kabbalah and Eastern Religions

There is a parallel between the Kabbalah and Eastern Religions. According to
Tao, it is the resolution in harmony of the passive *Yin* and the active *Yang* which
produces the enlightened state where all duality merges into oneness, a noble path
leading to peace and contentment. Further, there is some dispute among Kabbalists as
to whether all are sons of Adam or only Jews have within them the *Neshama* or
‘divine spark’ which would allow re-incorporation to the Ein Sof. According to the Zohar, only Jews come from the Sitra di-Kedusha or ‘holy side’ from which the divine spark proceeds. Non-Jews are products of the Sitra Achra or ‘other side’ and so do not have the Neshama or ‘divine’ but only the animal soul called Nefesh and a spirit of cognitive ability called the Ruah. This idea is not from any of the Orthodox Jewish texts, but a syncretic adaptation by the Kabbalah from the Eastern religious philosophies. According to Gershom Scholem, the techniques of prophetic Kabbalah that were used to aid the ascent of the soul, such as breathing exercises, the repetition of the divine names, and meditation on colours, bear a marked resemblance to both Indian Yoga and Islamic Sufism.

1.4. Hasidism

Hasidic Judaism or Hasidism is derived from the Hebrew root Hasi’dut, and in Sephardi Hebrew, Ashkenazi Hebrew and Yiddish, Chasidus, meaning ‘piety’ (hasid) or ‘loving kindness’ (hesed or chesed). It is a mystical branch of Orthodox Judaism that promotes spirituality through mysticism as the essential aspect of Jewish faith.

During the Middle Ages, the early Jewish mystical traditions were fused with Christian and Islamic mysticism (or Sufism), and Neo-Platonism, producing the German Hasidic movement (Ashkenazi Hasidism), which peaked between 11th to 13th centuries. Its leading figures were Judah he-Hasid (d. 1217) and his pupil Eleazar of Worms (d. 1238), who produced syncretic literary works combining elements of Merkabah and theurgy26 with tarot cards - mystical speculations about letters and numbers. All the more. Hasidism per se was founded in eighteenth century Eastern

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26 Theurgy is the ritualistic practice, magical in nature, performed with the intention of invoking the action or evoking the presence of god(s), in order to unite with the divine, achieve henosis, thus perfect oneself. It was a magic performed with the aid of beneficent spirits, as formerly practised by the Neo-Platonists.
Europe by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (who came to be called as Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov) as a reaction against Rabbinism, who led European Jewry away from overly legalistic Judaism towards Hasidic mysticism. It comprised part of contemporary Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, alongside Talmudic Lithuanian-Yeshiva approach and the Oriental Sephardi tradition. ‘Hasidim’, so are its followers called, venerate leadership as the embodiment and intercessor of divinity. On the other hand, it cherishes the sincerity and concealed holiness of the common folk and their equality with the scholarly elite leaders. Hasidism emphasizes pan-entheism, i.e. the immanent divine presence in everything.

Hasidic Judaism is not one movement, but a collection of separate individual groups with some commonality. Thus, each Hasidic dynasty follows its own principles. Approximately there are 30 major Hasidic groups and several hundred minor groups. Though, *prima facie* there isn’t one version of Hasidism, individual Hasidic groups often share with each other underlying philosophy, worship practices, dress, and songs, borrowed from local cultures.

1.4.1. Hasidic Doctrine of *Tzadik*

Hasidic doctrine of *tzadik* (righteous one) was not constituted by Hasidism, for, it predates Hasidic theology and so it is conjectured to be non-Hasidic. All the more, Hasidism presented this doctrine in a different form, which turned the *tzadik* into a quasi-messianic figure. Further, instead of the *tzadik* being a national messianic figure, as he was previously believed to be, now he lived within each

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27 Talmudic Lithuanian-Yeshiva approach is an organized Torah study in the eighteenth century, which initiated mystical study of Hasidism. For, the traditional approach did not cater to those who were looking for more intensive study.

28 Oriental Sephardi tradition refers specifically to the tradition of Jews of the African or Asian origin. While the Ashkenazi-Sephardi Jewish division is a very old one, the Ashkenazi-Oriental division is new to Israel.
community and became the messianic figure in each community, and accordingly there believed to have had many of them.

The tzadik was a man without evil, but he assumed the evils of those within his community upon himself as ransom. He was considered to be a ‘righteous man’ and the intermediary between his community and God. According to Hasidic doctrine, the power of the tzadik was limited to the boundaries of the community in which he lived. His chief aim was the redemption of every soul within his community. However, his community also sought his help in securing earthly favours as well, such as earning a livelihood, prevention and cure of illnesses, to have children, and so on. In return for his help, the people provided the tzadik and his family with the daily requirements for their life and sustenance.

Concerning the doctrine of the tzadik, Hasidic literature has composed the hagiographical literature that describes religious heroes. One example of such epics was the legends of the Besht that was collected in the nineteenth century and entitled Shivhei ha-Besht (“In Praise of the Besht”), following an earlier version Shivhei ha-Ari, which was about Isaac Luria. Other such stories concern heroes fighting for Sufi principles against those opposing them.

1.4.2. Hasidic Messianism

According to Hasidic theory, the messianic role of the tzadik is limited to the confines of one’s own community, and only during his lifetime. These jurisdictional confines are in force so long as the various tzadikim acknowledge that there are other such leaders administering similar powers. However, these cease when a tzadik claims to be the only tzadik, or the true tzadik (tzadik ha-emet). This situation occurred with Nahman of Bratslav, who viewed himself as the only true tzadik. Therefore, he did not establish a dynasty, and his adherents believed in his messianic role, that he will
return as a redeemer after his death in 1811. A similar phenomenon has been happening now in Ḥabad Lubavitch since the last leader, Menāḥem Mendel Shneerson, died in Brooklyn in 1995 without leaving an heir. Those Ḥabad adherents, who believed in his messianic mission before his death, now expect him to return to the world as a redeemer.

The issue of messianism in Hasidism hasn’t been resolved as yet. Most scholars affirm that Hasidism neutralized messianism in Lurianism and Sabbatianism, emphasizing individual worship and devotion instead. Hasidism, more than any other Jewish segment, rejected all the proposed solutions to Jewish problems, such as Zionism, emancipation, emigration to new lands across the ocean, and socialism. The court of the tzadik was regarded as the safest, most protected place on earth. The belief in the redeeming powers of the tzadik was paramount. Hasidic messianic concept was a syncretic adaptation from Zoroastrianism via Kabbalism. However, tzadik - the unique Hasidic flavour to messainism - was a Hasidic contribution.

1.4.3. Hasidism and Magical Interpretation

Magic is the power of apparently influencing the course of events and exercising control over nature with the assistance of mysterious or supernatural forces. Belief in magic was integral to life in Eastern Europe, among Jews and non-Jews alike. Magical interpretations in Hasidism were much more conspicuous than the speculative interpretations of the Kabbalah. Some books of magic were available to East European Hasidic authors, especially Sefer Razi’el ha-malakh. An affinity for magic is evident not only from a variety of Hasidic discussions that emphasize the extraordinary powers of the tzadik, but also from the very profession of the founder of Hasidism, Ba’al Shem Tov, an itinerant magician who was designated ‘master of the
good name.’ The recurrence of various versions of the Golem legend\(^{29}\) in Eastern Europe from the end of the sixteenth century, which followed techniques and stories of Haside Ashkenaz, likewise reflects a special interest in this topic, unparalleled in other parts of the Jewish diaspora. Magic in Hasidic life was practised in a number of ways:

1. **Ba’ale Shem** (masters of the [Holy] Name) were experts in the use of magic.
2. Objects infused with magical powers (amulets).
3. Magical entities (demons), and,
4. Literature devoted to magic, such as folk-remedy and charm literature.

There was almost no facet of Hasidic life that did not include some aspect of magic or the other, and in matters of health, magic was essential. Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism was an active magician par excellence and also a practitioner of folk medicine. The Hasidic tzadik was believed to have possessed magical talismanic powers, who could enhance the spiritual and material welfare of his disciples by bringing abundance to this world from the upper one. Often times, the rabbis wrote amulets and their followers turned to them for protection, for problem solving, and for *informationes* from celestial sources with regard to trouble-some issues cum practical wisdom. Besides being a socio-spiritual centre, the Hasidic court was often the site of magical doings. Magic is looming large in Hasidic tales about the wondrous deeds of *tsadikim*, in *Shivhe ha-Besht* (1814) or “In Praise of Ba’al Shem Tov” through the whole of Hasidic hagiographic literature. The genre was to provide people with hundreds of collections of Hasidic stories, most of which revolve round the Hasidic tzaddik, who performs miracles, usually on behalf of a specific individual but at times on behalf of the community as a whole. For Hasidic thinkers, the telling

\(^{29}\) In Jewish folklore, a golem (disambiguation) is an animated anthropomorphic being, created entirely from inanimate matter. It was used to mean an amorphous, unformed material in Psalm 139:16 and medieval writing.
of a story is a religious act, of no less import than the observance of the commandments, the study of Torah, or prayer.

Magic and magicians were always part and parcel of Hasidic society, having its roots in almost the entire Jewish, especially Hasidic literary tradition - Bible, Talmud, halakhic and kabbalistic literature, ethical works, folk literature, Hasidic philosophical tradition. (cf. The categorical rejection of magic by Maimonides school was quite unusual in Jewish tradition). Elements of magical practices, including types of soothsaying, were prevalent from the time of the Talmudic sages until modern times, and at times the local magical lore also had its influence on ancient traditions.

On the whole, magic is more multicultural than ethnic, with numerous practices common to people of a certain region. Hence, there are umpteen similarities between Jewish magic in Eastern Europe and analogous manifestations in Christian society. For example, magical knowledge in healing and traditional herbal medicine was found both among Jewish and Christian women who were familiar with the traditions of healing powers of local flora, who combined this knowledge with incantations. Their neighbours and Jews feared the evil eye (eyn hore in Yiddish; ayin ha-ra in Hebrew). Moreover, belief in the special magical powers of Jews flourished among some Christians as well.

In Eastern Europe, belief in magic was widespread among the populace and the enlightened elite. The halakhic scholars were popular practitioners of magic. The Jewish intellectual elite not only did not object to magic, but it was they who preserved and passed it down to the succeeding generations.

By the end of sixteenth century, the percolation of Kabbalah into East European pan-Jewish religio-cultural aspects of life was accompanied by an intense desire in magic. No distinction was drawn between ‘esoteric knowledge’ and
‘knowledge of magic.’ For, magic was one of the dimensions of esoterica - of Kabbalah. In fact, the magic practitioners were often called kabbalists. At the same time, there were competing norms that arose from the belief that magical manipulation of divine names was dangerous and thus to be avoided. Moreover, the attaching of taboos and making it a cult of such praxis was characteristic of folk magic. Nevertheless, the desperation of those who were felt to be assailed by demons frequently pressed them to overcome these prohibitions. And the integral quality of magic which attracted them most was its dangerous quality.

In pre-eighteenth century East European Jewish communities, the practitioners of magic were very often certain reputed rabbis who were believed to have possessed shaman-like qualities. They were called Ba’ale Shem, a-centuries-old term. In the eighteenth century, Ba’ale Shem underwent transformation and professionalization, and was called Ba’ale Shem or Ba’ale Shem Tov (master of the good name) - the two terms were used interchangeably - who possessed the knowledge of the secret names of God and could manipulate them to serve his purposes and intentions - good or evil. He was also familiar with the ‘other side,’ and possessed the art of combating the demons and other evil forces. He could also see into the future and visualize distant happenings. Often times, he was a healer, possessing the knowledge of herbs and plants; he knew the magical arts of metoposcopy (i.e. the study of physiognomy - a form of divination in which the diviner predicts personality, character, and destiny, based on the pattern of lines on the subject’s forehead. It was developed by the sixteenth century astrologer and physician Jerome Cardan) and chiromancy (reading the forehead or the palm to determine the state of a person’s soul). He would prepare amulets and charms that made a person invisible, ensure that a barren woman would conceive, protect a woman in childbirth, cure the sick, or safeguard a traveller on a
journey. Particularly, the vulnerable new-borns were in need of protection from 
female demons such as Lilith, who might steal the infant and substitute it with a clay-
and-straw doll.

*Ba’ale Shem* often brought out esoteric literature based on their own traditions, 
guiding the followers in the recitation of incantations, folk medicine recipes, charms, 
and the preparation of talismans and amulets, to deal with a variety of problems, 
dangers and difficulties. Thus, *Sefer ha-ḥayim* by Shim’on Frankfurt (1703), is a 
Hebrew-Yiddish book of prayers to be recited during times of illness and death, 
includes in the Yiddish section certain remedies that are effective in improving a 
man’s sex life. For, impotence, like barrenness, was considered to be the result of 
demonic activity. An impotent man was called “one who is prevented from having 
tercourse”; and witchcraft believed to have prevented him from being so. Often 
times, the victim was a newly married groom, who was considered particularly 
vulnerable to demons. The innumerable magical solutions propounded in the literature 
of this period to solve the problem of impotence suggest that it was quite common.

Here is one Hasidic literary piece for the combating of impotence:

If a person is prevented from having intercourse, he should take a sword with 
which a man has been killed in that very year and a red apple. He should cut 
the apple in two with the sword, giving half to her and half to himself. This 
should be done at dawn on a Tuesday or a Friday. (*Toldot adam*, no. 38)

Going out at night, the time when demons are most active, is seen as an act of 
danger:

If a man is out on the road at night and he sees an image of candlelight 
skipping from place to place, called in Yiddish *parfir likhter*, these are spirits. 
It is their way to mislead a person, causing him to go the wrong way. [To
overcome this] he should say, three times: ‘And God said to Satan.’ (Ya’akov ben Mosheh, Minḥat Ya’akov solet, 1731)

Magical means were also deployed to combat dangers posed by other mortals, such as thieves and robbers:

Here is a great secret for travel, to see and not be seen by any person who is an enemy, a thief, or a violent man. It is tested and checked. I have myself tried it, with the help of God, in dangerous places several times, and it worked and is a great thing. (Shem tov katan, 24a)

The integration of magic into Jewish life is reflected in Hasidic ethical literature as well. The popular work in this genre was Kav ha-yashar by Tsevi Hirsh Koidanover, which vividly describes a demonic world in an attempt to warn the Hasidim of the rigorous consequences of sin. Further, in the ethical will Yesh nohalin (1701) there is an instruction that Psalm 91 of the Jewish Bible - considered particularly effective in keeping demons away - be recited seven times by seven pious and learned men as the body is being lowered into the grave.

*Halakhic* literature too speaks about demons. Shabetai ha-Kohen’s Sifte Kohen says, “And it is known... that there is one angel called Shed (literally ‘demon’, but also a Hebrew acronym for a guard of book pages), and he harms whoever leaves a book open” (Yoreh de’ah, 277, paragraph A). Few *halakhic* practices may have self-acquired magical meaning, as in the case of the ceremony performed after one gets a bad dream, in order to prevent its coming to pass. As per the age-old Jewish tradition, in Eastern Europe, dreams were regarded as a means to communicate with spiritual entities and with powers in the upper worlds, as well as with the dead.

Magic or sorcery was forbidden by Jewish law. The Torah states: “You shall not suffer a sorceress to live” (Exodus 22:17). However, sorcery was prevalent in
different periods, and it could not be fought frontally. It is possible that the opposition to sorcery on one hand, and the realization that the masses needed it on the other, led to its restriction and to its attribution to a certain type of people. The Jew was no different from the non-Jew in the need for people possessing supernatural powers. In the non-Jewish world, these individuals were called sorcerers, while among the Jewish people they were known as Ba’ale Shem. The Jews evaded the prohibition against sorcery by determining that there were powers of sanctity - the use of which was permitted - and powers of impurity, and only these constituted sorcery and therefore were prohibited.

1.4.4. Transmigration or Reincarnation and Exorcism in Hasidism

One more magical trait emerged in Hasidism was dybbuk (dibuk in Hebrew), i.e. connection between two worlds - present and hereafter. In dybbuk, the evil spirit of a deceased person is believed to have taken possession of another human body and communicate through it. In such cases, a professional entrusted with halakhic authority (i.e. exorcist) was summoned in order to cast out the dybbuk, who would use means from the sphere between the mystic and the magical - generally using oaths, incantations, and ritual ceremonial objects such as a shofar, candles, prayer shawls, or a Torah scroll. On a general parlance, the world of the dead was one of the most important sources of the presence of magic in Jewish daily life.

In fact, it was essential to follow the customs intended to guard the space between the living and the dead. These topics also are of great importance in the Hasidic story, but they predate it. The first extant stories about transmigration, and those about the exorcism of dybbuks, come from sixteenth century Safed. Since then, there is a quite extensive literature comprising transmigration and dybbuk stories. Although dybbuk stories have decreased in recent generations, such stories are still to
be found occasionally. The belief in transmigration is deeply rooted among Hasidim and Kabbalists.

But magic suffered venomous criticism by followers of the Enlightenment. Manifestations of magic and demonology were mocked in the writings of *Maskilim* (i.e. leaders of the *Haskalah* movement), who propagated magical beliefs as a clear sign of the cultural backwardness of traditional Jews. On the other hand, Jewish ethnography was highly interested in magic, and the An-ski Ethnographic Expedition - Saint Petersburg, uncovered magical practices as well as magical objects among Jews of the Russian Pale.

An intent observation on Judaism would reveal that religion as dogma and religion as praxis is a contradiction in terms. For the believing community, religion is not only a preparation for the life to come, but also to face the storms of life on earth. For this, one’s own religion need not serve as a panacea for all life’s problems, thus be a magical-master-key for all enigmatic life situations. Practically speaking, religion is also a matter of convenience, wherein people adapt whatever they consider good to lead and face life, including things from other religio-cultural, especially mystical elements. Hence, there are syncretic theosophical and religio-cultural practices, which mirror in the literature of the time.

**1.5. Canaanite Influences in the Psalms**

Canaanites were an indigenous tribe (the others were Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebuzites) in old Palestine (present Israel) when the Jews had returned to Canaan in Palestine from the bondage of King Herod in Egypt, under the leadership of Moses. The effects of Canaanite and Persian culture on the evolution of Jewish faith are pervasive. Mitchell Dahood’s ingenious interpretation of the psalms
is based on his virtuoso of the Ugaritic texts unearthed at Ras Shamrah in 1929, which led to a real knowledge explosion about Canaanite mythology and religion.

Speaking on the Biblical Psalms, Dahood opines, “Israelite poetry continues the poetic tradition of the Canaanites, borrowing Canaanite poetic techniques, parallelism, vocabulary, imagery, mythology, etc.” Admitting Dahood’s views Phillips espies an essential element in the principle of religious syncretism: the dominant culture prevails in the exchange. Phillips states:

Undoubtedly on entry into Canaan, Israel did take over much of the indigenous religion and absorb it into her own. This was inevitable when a simpler culture encountered a much wealthier and more sophisticated environment.

Cooke, Gaster, Dahood, and others have concluded that the religious synthesis with Canaanite hymnology was so pervasive that the Jewish poets ‘Yahwinized’ pre-existing Canaanite hymns. At least Psalm 29 (but perhaps more) is a Yahwist adaptation of an older Canaanite hymn to the storm god Baal. Dahood says, “Virtually every word in the psalm can now be duplicated in older Canaanite texts.”

1.6. Influence of Jewish Mystical Literature on Litterateurs

Jewish mysticism has influenced the thought of some major Jewish theologians in the twentieth century, outside of Kabbalistic or Hasidic traditions. The first Chief Rabbi of Mandate Palestine, Abraham Isaac Kook was a mystical thinker who drew heavily on Kabbalistic notions through his own poetic terminology. His writings are concerned with fusing the false divisions between sacred and secular, rational and mystical, legal and imaginative. Students of Joseph B. Soloveitchik,
figurehead of American Modern Orthodox Judaism have read the influence of Kabbalistic symbols in his philosophical works. Neo-Hasidism, rather than Kabbalah, shaped Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Conservative Judaism. Lurianic symbols of *Tzimtzum* and *Shevirah* have informed Holocaust theologians.

All the above clearly prove that Judaism has adapted concepts, ideas and even literary genres from other religions and cultures, which shows the syncretic characteristic of the religion. For, religion as dogma is rational and ideal; whereas, religion as praxis is by and large real and syncretic. Judaism, being a monotheistic faith is a-mystical by nature. All the more, syncretism has made inroads into Judaism, thus assimilating mysticism into its very corpus.

### 2. Christian Syncretic Mystical Literature

Among the world religions, Christianity seems to be the most syncretistic. Though rooted in Judaism, it incorporated elements of Zoroastrianism, some aspects of Pharaonic Egyptian religion, the religions of ancient Mesopotamia, and a number of Greco-Roman cults, which in themselves were syncretistic. Let’s have a glance at these syncretic mystical elements in Christianity.

#### 2.1. Greek Influence on Christian Mystical Literature

The influences of Greek philosophical thought are apparent in the earliest Christian mystics and their writings during the first four centuries and its effect continues to this day. Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) is considered the most important of ancient philosophers and his philosophical system provides the basis for many later mystical forms. Plotinus (205-270 C.E.) provided the non-Christian, Neo-Platonic basis for Christian, Jewish and Islamic mysticism.
2.1.1. Platonism in Christian thought and Literature

Platonism is the philosophy of Plato (427-347 B.C.E.), which asserts ideal forms as an absolute and eternal reality of which the phenomena of the world are an imperfect and transitory reflection. Platonism influenced Christianity through patristic litterateurs such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers, among whom, Origen (185-254 C.E.) was the main who Platonised Christian thinking. To quote Alister McGrath, “Origen was a highly creative theologian with a strongly Platonist bent.” Further McGrath observes, “Ambrose of Milan (339-397 C.E.) drew upon the ideas of the Jewish Platonist writer, Philo of Alexandria in promoting a Platonic world of ideas and values, rather than a physical or geographical entity.”

Platonism cast its spell on Augustine, the disciple of Ambrose, through his encounter with the Latin translations of Marius Victorinus, of the works of Porphyry and Plotinus. In his Confessions he acknowledges the help he received from the Platonists. Allen refers to Augustine as “one of the great Christian Platonists.” In the words of Viviano, “Augustine’s view would dominate and become the normal Roman Catholic view down to our own times.”

Christian thought also came under the influence of Platonism, as scholars of the third century such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen mixed this Greek philosophy with their theology. In particular, Augustine’s interpretation of

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34 Ibid., p. 51.
36 Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., The Kingdom of God in History. Good News Studies 27; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988, p. 54. Daley points out that near the turn of the sixth century Aeneas of Gaza wrote the “first Christian work to challenge long-accepted Platonic assumptions…” Brian E. Daley, S. J. The Hope of the Early Church (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 191. The Platonist doctrines that were challenged included reincarnation, the eternity of creation, and the pre-existence of souls before their bodily existence. Daley points out that these views were “considered favourably as possibilities by Origen and Evagrius.”
Plato dominated Christian thought for the next thousand years after his death in the fifth century.\textsuperscript{37}

In the Middle Ages, Platonism was deemed to be authoritative, resultantly, a plethora of Platonic concepts of Ideas are permanent elements of Christianity to this day. Hence, we cannot deny Platonic philosophy in Christian theology. Gary R. Habermas says, “Plato has exercised an enormous influence on Western thought and must therefore be dealt with by those of all philosophical persuasions.”\textsuperscript{38}

Christianity emerged from the Judeo-Hellenistic background having its roots in Platonism. Christianity visited Platonism primarily at the level of mysticism. By the second century, Platonism was characterized by its predominantly religious cum theocentric world-view, known as ‘Middle Platonism’, which was mystical, theological and otherworldly. Its concern was the soul’s search for intimacy with God, which was intensified by Plotinus and Neo-Platonism. Here Christian mystical literature was so much influenced by Platonism that one of the great authorities on Hellenistic religion, Pere A.J. Festugiere said, “When the Fathers think their mysticism they Platonize. There is nothing original in the edifice” (\textit{Contemplation, 5}). For him, the mysticism of the Fathers was pure Platonism.

Platonism influenced Christian leaders like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine. The fifth century patristic period marks the origin, formation and development of Christian mystical literature. One general characteristic trend of this period was its constant contact with the contemporary Hellenistic culture, which had its roots in Platonism, through which Christian mystical literature found its intellectual expression. Endre von Ivanka says:


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
The phenomenon which characterizes the first millennium of Christian theological thought...is the use of Platonism as the form for [its] philosophical expression and the framework of the world-picture in terms of which the proclamation of revealed truths was made - in other words, Christian Platonism.^^

Clement of Alexandria (2-3 C.E.) enunciated Greek thought in Christian writing as he said:

Philosophy has been given to the Greeks as their own kind of Covenant, their foundation for the philosophy of Christ... the philosophy of the Greeks... contains the basic elements of that genuine and perfect knowledge which is higher than human... even upon those spiritual objects. (Miscellanies 6.8)

The Church historian Eusebius said that Greek philosophy had been supplied providentially as a preparation for the Gospel. Augustine (4-5 C.E.), who ultimately systematized Christian philosophy said:

But when I read those books of the Platonists I was taught by them to seek incorporeal truth, so I saw your ‘invisible things, understood by the things that are made.’ (Confessions 7. 20)

In an interview with Time, N. T. Wright blamed Platonic influence on Christianity for a distortion of the doctrine of Heaven:

Greek-speaking Christians influenced by Plato saw our cosmos as shabby and misshapen and full of lies, and the idea was not to make it right, but to escape it and leave behind our material bodies.**

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2.1.2. Platonism in Christian Eschatology

Ever since the early Christian era, it held two models of eternal life, says Craig Blaising in his “Premillennialism.” They are, spiritual vision model and new creation model. The spiritual vision model was a Platonic influence, which views heaven as a spiritual entity, the highest level of ontological reality - the realm of spirit as opposed to base matter. “This is the destiny of the saved, who will exist in that non-earthly, spiritual place as spiritual beings engaged eternally in spiritual activity.”* Blaising says that the spiritual vision model is a combination of Bible and Greek cultural concepts that were common to the classical philosophical tradition. The Greek cultural concepts were: a basic contrast between spirit and matter, an identification of spirit with mind or intellect, and a belief that eternal perfection entails the absence of change. As per Blaising, “Central to all three of these is the classical tradition’s notion of an ontological hierarchy in which spirit is located at the top of a descending order of being. Elemental matter occupies the lowest place.”* The spiritual vision model led Christians to view eternal life as the beatific vision of God - an unbroken, unchanging contemplation of the infinite reality of God. “The long term practice of reading scripture in this way so conditioned the Christian mind that by the late Middle Ages, the spiritual vision model had become an accepted fact of the Christian worldview.”* Howard A. Snyder, in his work Models of the Kingdom calls this model ‘the kingdom as inner spiritual experience model’, wherein he traces Greek philosophical roots in Christian thinking, specifically Platonist and Neo-Platonist

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* Ibid.
* Ibid. p. 165.
elements, saying, “One can sense the Platonism lying behind this model.” Further he says:

Historically this model has often been tainted with a sort of Platonic disdain for things material, perhaps seeing the body or matter as evil or at least imperfect and imperfectible. It is thus dualistic, viewing the ‘higher’ spiritual world as essentially separate from the material world.

Contrary to Platonism and spiritual vision model is new creation model, which emphasizes the geographical, physical and socio-political aspects of eternal life, such as a coming new earth with renewal of life, bodily resurrection, and socio-political interactions among the redeemed. Speaking of this model Blaising states, “The new creation model expects that the ontological order and scope of eternal life is essentially continuous with that of present earthly life except for the absence of sin and death.” Thus, eternal life is similar (embodied) but different (spiritualized) life. This model reflects the biblical citations in Isaiah 25, 65, 66; Romans 8; and Revelation 21; which portray a regenerated earth. In brief, new creation model operates on the assumption that ‘life after life’ is similar to creation before the Fall of Adam. Thus, the ‘new heaven and a new earth’ (Revelation 21) is not an ethereal spiritual presence somewhere in the firmament, but life in its fullness (John 10:10). The new creation model appears to have been the primary Christian approach in the late first and early second centuries. It was found in apocalyptic and rabbinic Judaism and in second century Christian writers like Irenaeus of Lyons. However, as Blaising

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45 Ibid., p.54.
asserts, the spiritual vision model would take over and become “the dominant view of eternal life from roughly the third century to the early modern period.”

As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, owing to Platonic influence, its eschatology too underwent change, and so is the new creation model of early Christianity. Benedict T. Viviano said:

The main loss was of the apocalyptic dimension of Christian hope. The dual hope of the Christian, the Kingdom of God and resurrection of the dead, (or at least of the saints), was reduced to the resurrection of the individual to eternal life in heaven. The social and the worldly historical dimensions of hope were lost. This was largely due to the Hellenistic philosophical mind that was primarily interested in the universal, the necessary, the eternal and Plato’s mathematical bias.

Platonism had its spell both on Eastern and Western Christian mystical literature. In the thirteenth century, though Aristotelianism was more powerful than Platonism, St Thomas Aquinas’s philosophy was still intrinsically Platonic. Jeffrey Burton Russell states, “The great Greek fathers of Alexandria, Clement and Origen, firmly grounded in Scripture, were also influenced by Platonism and Stoicism.”

2.1.3. Christoplatonism

Christoplatonism is a term used to refer to Platonic dualism, which holds that spirit is good but matter is evil, and that influenced Christian thinking. Randy Alcorn, addressing Platonic impact on Christian eschatology, coined the term Christoplatonism. As the title suggests, Christoplatonism is a philosophy that has blended elements of Platonism with Christianity. However, Alcorn is of the opinion

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47 Ibid.
that such a merger is unhealthy, for, this mixture of Platonism with Christianity “has poisoned Christianity and blunted its distinct differences from Eastern religions.”

The Methodists say that Christoplatonism directly contradicts the Bible, wherein God calls everything He created good.

2.1.3.1. Basic Beliefs of Christoplatonism

1. Our eternal home is a spiritual dimension, a state of mind, and not on earth.
2. Material world is basically evil and is beyond restoration.
3. Heaven is beyond human comprehension.
4. Our experience in eternity is mostly spiritual contemplation and inactivity.
5. Time is eternal, i.e. there is no time or linear progression of history.
6. There will be no nations or governments.

2.1.4. Neo-Platonism in Christian Mystical Literature

In the first five centuries of Christianity, Neo-Platonic philosophy had the major impact on the development of the Christian mystical literature. The most significant element of this synthesis was the assimilation of Greek humanism by Justin Martyr followed by Thomas Aquinas and Erasmus. Throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages Neo-Platonism had great influence on Western Christian literature, mainly due to Augustine, who was influenced by the early Neo-Platonists Plotinus and Porphyry, and Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, who was influenced by later Neo-Platonists Proclus and Damascius, whose writings had a major influence on all Christian mystical cum apophatic literature. The Cardinal tenets of Neo-Platonism, such as absence of good being the source of evil, and that this absence of good comes from sin, served as a philosophical interim for Augustine on his journey from dualistic Manichaeism to Christianity. Perhaps more importantly, the emphasis on mystical

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contemplation as a means to encounter God or the One directly, found in the writings of Plotinus and Porphyry, deeply stirred Augustine’s spirits. A couple of mystical experiences in his *Confessions* are based on the Neo-Platonic model. According to his own account in *Confessions* Book 7, his important discovery in the books of the Platonists, Augustine owes his conception of ‘God and the human soul as incorporeal substance’ to Neo-Platonism. Viviano summarizes the impact of Augustine’s Platonic thinking on the kingdom of God thus:

We need only note that Augustine was strongly influenced by Neo-Platonic philosophy and has even read Plotinus and Porphyry…. This philosophy was highly spiritual and other-worldly, centered on the one and the eternal, treating the material and the historically contingent as inferior stages in the ascent of the soul to union with the one. Thus Augustine was attracted to the spiritual interpretation of the kingdom we have already seen in Origen. Indeed, ultimately for Augustine, the Kingdom of God consists in eternal life with God in heaven. That is the *civitas dei*, the city of God, as opposed to the *civitas terrena*.  

In subsequent centuries, especially as Christian apologetics began to use Greek philosophy to explain Christian ideas, Neo-Platonism became an influence on Christian mystical thought and praxis via such authors as Augustine and Origen.

2.1.5. Influence of Hellenistic Religions on Christianity

We find umpteen similarities between the Christian Saviour and the saviours of the Hellenistic mystery religions. Early Christianity, as preached by St Paul, was deemed as a mystery religion, which Samuel Angus defined as “a sacramental drama, a personal religion to which membership was open only by a religious rebirth. It

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appealed primarily to the emotions and aimed at producing psychic and mystic effects by which the neophyte might experience the exaltation of a new life.\textsuperscript{52} This seems to be more socio-psychological than historical. Commenting on some of these aspects G. J. Frazer says:

\begin{quote}
...Whether he be called Tammuz, Attis, or Adonis, the main lines of the story are fixed and invariable. Always he is young and beautiful, always the beloved of a great goddess; always he is the victim of a tragic and untimely death, a death which entails bitter loss and misfortune upon a mourning world, and which, for the salvation of that world, is followed by a resurrection.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

The saviours in the mystery religions were not historical personages like Jesus. However, His life, passion, death and resurrection conveniently blend with the conventional Hellenistic models of the mystery religion. Further, the early three centuries Christian art depicts intimate religio-cultural affinity with the Hellenistic world. In early Christian art ‘Jesus the Good Shepherd’ was distinctly a Greco-Roman symbol, not Semitic, which was apparently adapted from the models of Apollo Nomius or Hermes the Ram-Bearer.\textsuperscript{54}

In the early Christian era, influenced by Greek thought, some Church fathers abjured cross as the symbol of Christianity. For, as St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:23, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks, foolishness,” the Greeks abnegated cross as the symbol of folly on which only big criminals were hanged. The first known artistic portrayal of the cross was 400 years after Jesus’ crucifixion. wherein, when the crucifixion was portrayed, Jesus was usually depicted alive, without any signs of suffering, who has a royal crown

\textsuperscript{52} Samuel Angus, \textit{The Mystery Religions and Christianity}, Murray, London, 1925.
rather than a crown of thorns.\textsuperscript{55} Here we may trace the evolution of the Buddha in Northwest India as he was transformed into a Hellenistic Lord due to the contact with Greek culture.

\textbf{2.2. Jewish Influence on Christian Mystical Literature}

It is from Jewish sects, as well as from mainstream Judaism, that Christianity emerged. Christianity in its initial stages was a part of Judaism, and/or was considered a Jewish sect. It observed the Jewish Bible and like Jews was unfriendly to heathenism. Many a halakic and haggadic discussion between Christians and rabbis, is recorded in the Talmud. The Christian mystical literature and practices have their roots in the experiences of the Jewish patriarchs, prophets and other encounters found in the Jewish scriptural canons, such as visions, dreams, angelic messengers, divine inspiration, miraculous events and wisdom. Just as Old Testament prophets had the direct experience of the divine (e.g. Ezekiel), the less profound can be found in the psalms (e.g. Psalm 73:23-26), nonetheless suggests a similar mystical awareness. The Gospels were written and coloured under the impression of important Jewish events. Both, Jews and Christians have had the common idea of God as Father, the Messiah, creation, the original sin, angels, arch-angels, demons, the Last Judgement, life after death, heaven or paradise and hell or gehena. No doubt, these concepts were a Christian borrowing from Judaism - a syncretic element in Christianity.

Philo, a Greek speaking Alexandrian Jew and a Judeo-Hellenistic philosopher, connected the Bible with Greek thought. Further, he linked the ‘contemplative lives’ of the Stoics and the Essenes\textsuperscript{56} with the ‘active lives’ of virtue and community


\textsuperscript{56} Essenes were one of the three Jewish sects in the second century B.C.E., the others being Pharisees and Sadducees.
worship prevalent in Platonism and the Therapeutae.\footnote{Therapeutae were a Jewish sect in Alexandria and in the Diaspora of Hellenistic Judaism. The primary source of Therapeutae is De vita contemplativa ("The Contemplative Life") by Philo, who was acquainted with them. The pseudepigraphic Testament of Job is also thought to be a Therapeutae text.} Using Platonic terms, Philo described the intellectual component of faith as a spiritual ecstasy in which \textit{nous} (mind) is suspended and God's Spirit takes its place. Philo's fine blend of Judaism, Platonism, and Stoicism immensely influenced Christian writers such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria and Ambrose of Milan, and through them, which resulted into a paradigm shift from classical Greek to the Roman world. As an elder contemporary of the evangelists, i.e. New Testament writers, his influence was pervasive, especially his writings on Greek patristic literature, that too on two areas.

(a) Use of vocabulary from mystery religions - initiation, greater mysteries, lesser mysteries - which are frequently found in the Christian mystical literature. Although the language goes back to the Eleusinian mysteries, it doesn’t indicate any direct influence of mystery cults. Plato did use such language of the soul’s ascent to contemplation, but by Philo's time it had become a literary tradition.

(b) Aposteriori knowledge of the ‘Existent One’ (greater mystery), in itself. The soul passes into the inner sanctuary of divine wisdom, and goes beyond knowing God through His deeds.

The Jewish concepts, such as \textit{da`at} (knowledge) and \textit{chokhmah} (wisdom) are the fruit of years of reading, praying and meditating the scriptures; \textit{shekhinah}, the presence of God in human life, which surpasses all material wealth, and the agony and ecstasy when God is absent. Many of the Christian literary texts are built on Jewish spiritual foundations, such as \textit{chokhmah} and \textit{shekhinah}. Further, desert in the synoptic gospels (Ref. Mathew, Mark and Luke) is used as a metaphor for the place where humans meet God in the poverty of the spirit. In Christian mystical literature, \textit{da`at}
became *gnosis*. *shekhinah* became mystery and poverty became a vow for monasticism.

According to Timo Eskola, early Christian literature was influenced by the Jewish *Merkabah* tradition. Similarly, Alan Segal and Daniel Boyarin view Paul’s narration of his conversion experience cum his ascent to the heavens in the first person narration, belong to the genre of a *Merkabah* mystic in Jewish or Christian literature. Conversely, Timothy Churchill has argued that Paul’s Damascus road encounter does not fit in the *Merkabah* pattern.

### 2.3. Zoroastrian influence on Christian Mystical Literature

Zoroastrianism, which had its impact on postexilic Judaism, cast its spell on Christianity too. For instance, dualism, i.e. a constant struggle between good and evil was an attribute of Zoroastrianism. Satan is a classic example of syncretism, which is a fusion of the Hebrew Lucifer, ‘the fallen angel’ and the Zoroastrian *Angra Mainyu* (*Ahriman*), the evil opponent of *Ahura Mazda* (*Ormazd*), the ‘wise Lord’ and the embodiment of light, truth and goodness. Further, some later Zoroastrian texts speak of a final battle between *Ahura Mazda* and *Angra Mainyu*, during which a Messiah-like figure will emerge and lead the forces of good. This is found reflected in a number of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic texts, from the Book of Daniel to the Book of Revelation. The interesting fact here is that neither Lucifer nor *Angra Mainyu* is identical to Satan. Hence, the Judeo-Christian Satan is a syncretism of the two otherwise distinct evil entities.

Resurrection is the quintessence and the very edifice of the Christian credo. The resurrected Egyptian god Osiris, as well as the Mesopotamian deity Dummuizi, who was rescued from the land of the dead by his divine lover Inanna were the precursors to the resurrection of Jesus. Further, the Egyptian cult of the goddess Isis,
sister-wife of Osiris and mother of the god Horus, who, together with Astarte and other Near Eastern goddesses, effected the rise of the medieval cult of the Virgin Mary. Moreover, the *sistrum*, a tinkling rattle that was shaken during ceremonies honouring the goddess is the source of the bell rung in a Roman Catholic mass, is the influence of the cult of Isis. Similarly, several Greco-Roman religious cults also impacted the new religion. For example, the dove, a widespread symbol of the goddess, Aphrodite and her Roman counterpart, Venus, became a symbol of the Holy Ghost, and the god Apollo was sometimes equated with Christ.

“It pleased the Divine Power to reveal some of the most important articles of our Catholic creed first to the Zoroastrians, and through their literature to the Jews and ourselves.” This interesting Biblical account of Zoroastrian-Jewish contact, as well as an early attestation of Middle Eastern petroleum, appears in 2 Maccabees (which is not found in Jewish Bibles, only in Catholic Christian ones). This document dates from about 124 B.C.E., which places it among the latest books of the Old Testament - so late that the Jewish canon does not recognize it. The first chapter narrates how the Jewish altar fire was restored to the Temple after the Babylonian captivity. Jewish Temple practice required a continuously burning flame at the altar (Exodus 27:20) though this flame did not have the special iconic quality of the Zoroastrian sacred fire. Nevertheless, during the restoration of the Jewish temple, this practice arose, which was recorded in the Book of Maccabees, four hundred years later:

When the matter (restoring the fire) became known and the king of the Persians heard that in the place where the exiled priests had hidden the fire, a

liquid had appeared with which Nehemiah and his people had purified the materials of the sacrifice, the king, after verifying the facts, had the place enclosed and pronounced sacred. (2 Maccabees 1:33-34)

This shows that during the composition of 2 Maccabees, the Jewish writers were aware of the Zoroastrian reverence for fire, and also that the Zoroastrians saw with respect similarities in practice between their religion and that of the Jews. The fiery liquid cited here is petroleum, called ‘naphtha’, a word arises from the combination of Persian and Hebrew words.

The concept of Jesus as the awaited Messiah was a response to Jewish hopes, thus to usher in the End Time, much as the Zoroastrians expected of their Saoshyant. It is in the context of the coming Saoshyant that the story (it is a story, not a historical event!) of the ‘Three Magi’ in Matthew’s gospel (2:1-12) should be read. These astrologers - thought to be Zoroastrians - were pursuing the Saviour-signs of their own religion when they sought out baby Jesus. The Prologue in the gospel of John (“In the beginning was the Word...”) has many elements suggestive of Zoroastrian influence, including philosophical and ethical dualism, and the light/darkness metaphor, a characteristic of Zoroastrianism. “And that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower.” (John 1:4-5)

It is in Christianity that the doctrine of the devil is almost identical to the Zoroastrian concept. The devil or Satan is a being, who due to pride, chose to do evil just as Zarathushtra’s evil spirit did. And as Christians believe, this devil roams about corrupting people and has already corrupted the physical world, just as Ahriman does in the later Zoroastrian teachings. Further, Christianity incorporated Jewish and Zoroastrian apocalyptic myths about cosmic battles and the upcoming end of the world into its own doctrine. The Biblical Book of Revelation, the last book in the
New Testament canon, is a later example of a form that goes back all the way through its Jewish sources to the distant ancient worlds of Iran and Mesopotamia. There are many devoted Jews and Christians who deny any Zoroastrian influence on their religions. For they posit that this would compromise the unique divine revelations which characterize these religions. But there are others who follow a more universalist path, to whom, the seeds of wisdom are found in every religion, including paganism. Every religion has its grains of truth and seeds of wisdom which can be sown and grown in the garden of a new revelation, whether that is Jewish, Christian or other. In this view, it is not only not wrong to adapt what went before into the new faith, but it is essential. Thus nothing that is true will be lost.

Zoroastrian duality is clearly spelt in St Paul, who was one of the main pillars of Christianity, when he said in his First letter to the Corinthians 15:42-49.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Here Paul assumes a dual-creation theory which seems to follow the outlines of Philo and the Iranians. There is only one man (Christ) who is created in the image
of God, i.e. according to the ‘intellectual creation’ of Genesis 1:26. All the rest of us are created in the image of the ‘dust man’, following the material creation of Adam from the dust in Genesis 2:7. Hence, de facto it is evident that Christianity has incorporated various Zoroastrian elements into its fold.

2.4. Gnosticism in Christian Mystical Literature

Neo-Platonism had links with Gnosticism, which Plotinus rebuked in his ninth tractate of the second Enneads: “Against those that affirm the Creator of the cosmos and the cosmos itself to be evil” (generally known as “Against the Gnostics”). As their belief was grounded in Platonic thought, the Neo-Platonists rejected Gnosticism’s vilification of Plato’s demiurge, the creator of the material world or cosmos discussed in the Timaeus. Neo-Platonism has been referred to as the orthodox Platonic philosophy by John D. Turner and others, due to Plotinus’ attempt to refute certain interpretations of Platonic philosophy through his Enneads, for, he believed the Gnostic followers had corrupted the original teachings of Plato.

The term ‘Gnosticism’ is derived from the Greek gnostikos means ‘learned’ or ‘intellectual’; hence gnosis means ‘knowledge.’ The Encyclopaedia defines Gnosticism as a “dualistic religious and philosophical movement of the late Hellenistic and early Christian eras.” It is a thought and belief system of various cults, developed in ancient Syria and Persia during fifth century B.C.E., and was popular in late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries, which believed matter to be intrinsically evil, and emancipation could be attained through a deep, mystic, and divine gnosis. The Gnostics were a sect of philosophers, who believed to have possessed the true and occult gnosis of Christianity, and formed a theology based on Pythagorean and Platonic philosophical line, accommodating their unique scriptural interpretations therein. They held that all natures, intelligible, intellectual and material
are successive *oeons* or emanations from the infinite fountain of deity. These
doctrines were a syncretic amalgam of oriental philosophy and mysticism with Greek
philosophy, and Christian ideas were quickly incorporated into these syncretistic
systems.

Let us see how Gnosticism has made inroads into Christian mystical literature.
In Genesis, the serpent as the tempter appears in the guise of a liberator, who exalts
man beyond good and evil. Hegel, with his dialectic of the negative, gave a rich
theoretical aura to this idea. Man must sin, must come out of natural innocence to
become God. He must realize the promise of the serpent: must know like God, good
and evil. This knowledge ‘is the origin of sickness, but also the fountainhead of
health, it is the poisoned chalice from which man drinks death and putrefaction, and at
the same time the wellspring of reconciliation, since to posit oneself as wicked is in
itself the overcoming of evil.’ According to Hegel, Jakob Bohme ‘struggled to
understand in God and from God the negative, evil, the devil.’ God is the unity of
contraries, of anger and love, of evil and good, of the devil and his contrary, the Son.
On this view Christ and Satan become in some way brothers, sons of the one Father,
parts of him, moments in his polar nature. This is an idea set down by Carl Gustav
Jung in his esoteric *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* (1916), circulated as a monograph
among his friends but never published. The text, which borrows conceptually from the
Gnostic Basilides, affirms the ‘pleroma’ nature of God, composed from pairs of
opposites of which, God and devil are the prime manifestations. ‘In everywhere at
work - wrote Romano Gurdini in 1964 - there is the fundamental Gnostic idea that
contraries are polarities: Goethe, Gide, and C.G. Jung. Thomas Mann, Herman
Hesse... All see evil, the negative, as dialectical elements in the totality of life, of
nature.’ This attitude for Guardini ‘manifests itself already in everything that is called
Gnosticism, in alchemy, in theosophy. It presents itself in programmatic form in Goethe, for whom the satanic enters even into God; evil is the original power of the universe necessary as good, death only another element in that everything, the pole opposite is called life. This opinion has been proclaimed in all forms and made concrete in the field of therapy by C.G. Jung.

2.5. Stoicism in Christian Mystical Literature

Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium in third century B.C.E., which taught that destructive emotions resulted from errors in judgment, and that a sage, or person of ‘moral and intellectual perfection’ would not suffer such emotions. The evangelist in the gospel of John focuses on God’s glory in his use of light imagery and sees the cross as the symbol of exaltation and agapeic love. In doing so, he shifts the goal of spiritual enhancement away from knowledge or gnosis, which he explains more in terms of stoic ideas, the role of reason being the underlying principle of the universe cum the spiritual principle within all humans. Although, John does not follow up on the stoic concept that this principle makes the divine-human union possible, it is this idea that later Christian writers develop further. Later generations will also shift back and forth between whether to follow the synoptics in stressing knowledge, or John in stressing love.

2.6. Pagan Influences on Christian Mystical Literature

According to George Tyrrell, Christianity is built both on Judaism and paganism. It is the completion of the supernatural religion begun in Judaism, and it is the supernatural supplement to the natural religion which lies beneath all the hideous perversions of paganism. Viewing everything from the catholic optic, he says, “That
Catholicism is Christianized paganism or world-religion and not the Christianized Judaism of the New Testament.59

In the early Christian era, during the Roman Empire, many religions were practised, which Judaism regarded as ‘paganism’ (i.e. religion of the gentiles). Paganism refers to the Greco-Roman religions of the Roman empire, including the Roman imperial cult, various mystery religions as well as philosophic monotheistic religions like Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism, since these were the religious environs in which Hellenistic Judaism found itself immersed, and to a lesser extent the savage tribal religions practised on the fringes of the Empire. From the Jewish and the Christian viewpoint of the Roman era, these religions were called ‘ethnic’ (ethnikos) or ‘gentile’ (gentilis) - a translation of goyim, later rendered as paganus - in contrast with Judaism. Christianity accepted both Jewish and pagan converts, who brought with them their own unique religious beliefs and practices, some of which got amalgamated into Christianity. For instance, the influence on Christian dogma in Late Antiquity, such as the fourth and fifth century patristic doctrines, the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds with the Trinitarian and Christological queries - are influenced by Roman imperial cult, Hellenistic philosophy, notably Neo-Platonism, and Gnosticism. Pagan influences in the Middle Ages, include Germanic paganism, Celtic paganism, Slavic paganism and Folk religions in general.

The Jews couldn’t distinguish between pagan idolatry and Christian image-worship. For, the latter was identical to relic-worship and saint-worship. And so, in the guise of saints various pagan deities made inroads into Christianity, resulting in a large pantheon of saints and angels alongside the Trinity, which facilitated the

conquest of heathen nations. Contrary to the uncompromising Jewish attitude, Christianity did the opposite to win great multitudes. It was this spirit of polytheism that led to all abuses, which was opposed by Reformation, whose purpose was to return to the New Testament with the help of a deeper study of the Old Testament at the hand of Jewish scholarship.

Further, the belief in human immortality (not present in early Jewish literature) and the idea of the man-god (Jews never accepted the Incarnation) are definitely pagan intrusions into the Judeo-Christian tradition through religious syncretism. In the early centuries, Christianity being a Jewish sect has carried over Jewish beliefs into its corpus, and also adapted elements from the pagan religions, which shows the syncretic nature of Christianity.

2.7. Christian Syncretic Mystical Literature during Patristic Period

The Christian mystical literature wasn’t a tabula rasa or even ex nihilo (creation out of nothing), but it did adapt from other religio-philosophical sources and so it is syncretic. The Christian mystical literature per se begins with patristics or fathers of the Church, who were the mortar and the alibi of its very foundation. Let us have a glance at a couple of their literary annals and the syncretic origins therein.

2.7.1. Origen

Christian mystical literature begins with Origen, whose writings are extensively Platonic, and scriptural interpretation is at the very heart of his mystical literature. According to Origen, in mystical life, the soul’s ascent to God is the unitive experience of the soul’s union with Christ effected in baptism, which is a communion of the soul with Christ. Though, this is expressed in a language drawn from Plato, in such a lingo (as it is in Origen), what these Platonic-sounding concepts mean is quite different from what Plato or Plotinus intended. Origen is speaking about the life of the
baptized Christian within the Church; Plato and Plotinus speak about the search for ultimate truth by an intelligent being, either together with other like-minded souls, or as ‘the alone to the Alone.’ Origen syncretically adapted Platonism in Christian mystical literature, and the realm of Ideas has become the divine Logos in all the diversity of its manifestations and kinship with the Idea of union with Christ the Logos. Hence, the Word becomes a person mediating between God and the realm of spiritual beings.

As an interpreter of scriptures, Origen cast tremendous spell on later litterateurs. For him, the *Song of Songs* was the sum and summit of mystical life - soul’s union with God. In his exegesis of the Song, he speaks of the three stages (later called ‘three ways’) in mystical life - purificatory, illuminative, and unitive - a Platonic model. Further, Origen assigned ethics to the biblical *Book of Proverbs*, physics to *Qoheleth* or *Ecclesiastes*, and enoptics to the *Song of Songs*.

Accordingly, the soul must progressively pass through three stages:

1. Learning virtue (*ethike*)
2. Adopting a right attitude to natural things (*physike*)
3. Ascending to contemplation of God (*enoptike*).

Origen incorporated Platonism into the three stages of Christian mysticism thus: purification as *ethike*, illumination as *physike*, and union as *enoptike*. It is obvious that this pattern is basically Platonist. For Origen, the ‘real’ world is the realm of spiritual, non-material beings. The drama of the Fall and Redemption belongs essentially to this spiritual realm. Here, it is evident how Platonism has made inroads into Christian mystical thinking and praxis. Emphasizing the successiveness of these stages, Origen speaks of Jesus going before us:

*We should speak of Him first as a beginner in Proverbs:*
then as advancing in Ecclesiastes:

and lastly as more perfect in the Song of Songs. (*Homilies on the Song of Songs*, p. 57)

These are Platonic tools, which Origen deployed into ecclesiological framework - syncretic literary tools - to explain mystical experiences, which in themselves are a-philosophical and a-linguistic. Viviano points out:

Origen wrought some bold changes in Christian eschatology... Origen dissolved the Christian expectation of the resurrection of the body into the immortality of the soul, since Christian perfection consists, on this Platonizing view, in a progressive dematerialization.  

Alister McGrath says that Origen went further than most of the early Christian theologians by asserting that the “resurrection of the body was purely spiritual.”

**2.7.2. Hippolytus**

Hippolytus’ exegetical commentary has ecclesiological interpretation - the relationship between the Bridegroom and the Bride, referring to the relationship between Christ and the Church, which is a syncretic adaptation from rabbinism, wherein the Song was used as an analogy of the relationship between God and the Jews.

**2.7.3. St Augustine**

St Augustine was influenced by Gnosticism in the development of his theory of ‘total depravity’ of humankind and the concept of God. For nine years, he adhered to Manichaeism, a Persian philosophy prevalent in southern Babylonia (Iraq) that nurtured the doctrine of ‘total depravity’, which claimed only a selected few to be the ‘elect.’ Then he turned to scepticism, after which he was attracted to Neo-Platonism.

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Augustine blended these beliefs with his later Gnostic Christian teachings, which in turn were passed on to John Calvin in his study of Augustine’s writings. We can follow the trail of John Calvin’s theology from the pagan religion of Mani in Babylonia in his writings. Augustine in his *Confessions* speaks of the soul’s ascent to God, which he owes to Neo-Platonism. Relying on the words to St Paul in his visions and revelations, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:9), Augustine says that grace is more than human dependence on God - an idea found in various forms of Platonism and Neo-Platonism. McGrath points out that Augustine’s concept of heaven “involves the restoration of the conditions of this earthly paradise.”

2.8. Religio-Cultural Syncretism in Christian Mystical Literature

Mystical experience is not merely a matter between the mystic and God, but it is shaped by culture. Carolyn Walker Bynum has explained, how in the late Middle Ages, Eucharistic miracles were not simply symbolic of the Passion of Christ, but vindicating the mystics of theological orthodoxy by proving that they had not fallen prey to heresies like Catharism, which rejected the material world as evil, contrary to the orthodox theology that God became man and was sinless. Thus, the nature of mystical experience was tailored to the cultural milieu and theological issues of the time. Anders Nygren in his *Agape and Eros* describing Christian syncretic mystical literature says that mysticism is an incursion of the *eros* motif into Christianity, which is quite alien because Christianity is based purely on the *agape* motif:

> The thought of the mystical vision of God, for instance, which is one of the more prominent features of Eros religion, has always been able to attach itself

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62 Ibid., p. 52.
63 Catharism (in Greek *katharos* means pure) was a Christian religious movement with dualistic and Gnostic elements that appeared in the Languedoc region of France and other parts of Europe in the eleventh century and flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.
to the text, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’, without any
notice being taken of the deep cleavage between the mystical and the
eschatological vision of God, of which alone the text speaks and which is only
another way of speaking about perfected fellowship with God.64

The epitome of Christian syncretism is the Unification Church in Korea. Its
founder, Sun Myung Moon openly confessed that his unique revelation, although
essentially Christian, integrates the best elements of Buddhism and Confucianism.
Unificationist metaphysics specifically shows the influence of Eastern dipolar
concepts of reality and deity. Moon boasts himself being a Korean shaman. Further,
Latin American and Filipino Catholicism is pervaded by indigenous influences. It is
amazing how American Christianity and American individualism have merged into a
unique form of religion. Very few American Christians are aware of the fact that the
strong collectivism, as seen in the idea of corporate personality, of the Bible stands in
stark contrast with the American celebration of the individual.

No doubt, Christianity like any other religion has incorporated a plethora of
elements from other religions. Even today, it is incorporating some elements from
eastern religions, christening them with syncretic names like Christian Yoga,
Christian Zen, Christian Vipasana and so on. Speaking on Christian Yoga Lois
Solomon of the Sun Sentinel states: “Christian Yoga combines the ancient exercise
with prayer and meditation.”

3. Syncretism in Asian Religious Traditions - A Bird’s Eye View

Asia has been a cradle as well as a melting pot of various religions. Even
though the Aryan invaders tried to obliterate all traces of the indigenous culture and
religion, some elements of the Hindu religious tradition - like nonviolence (ahimsa),

yoga, reincarnation, and *karma*-come from non-Aryan sources. After the Aryan
invasions, over the years the non-Aryan religions gained ascendance in the form of
Jainism and Buddhism. Although the Buddha claimed to have made a clean break
with his Hindu heritage, certain Hindu concepts with traditions are carried over to
Buddhism. In Tibet, the native Bon religion has merged with the Buddhist
philosophy, manifests fascinating religious syncretism. Chinese Buddhism also
evolved on the conventions of religious syncretism, wherein the Chinese word *dao*
replaced the Sanskrit *dharma*. Daoism generalized Buddhism and made it down to
earth. The Burmese translation of John 1:1 reads: “In the beginning was the *dharma*”,
which in the original Koine Greek translation is: “In the beginning was the Word.”
Thus religious syncretism, which is a universal phenomenon, is inherent in the pan-
Asian religious traditions cum in their philosophies as well.

4. Syncretism in Indian Mystical Literature

The source of Indian mystical tradition is in the Upanisads (600-300 B.C.E.)
and it comes to a climax in the Bhagavad Gita (200 B.C.E. - 200 / 300 C.E.). It is in
this short period that the Indian mystical traditions (which also include the Buddhist
and the Jain traditions) had its flowering, and from this source the Indian mystical
traditions has been fed ever since.

The Upanisads, of course, derive from the Vedic tradition and are, in fact,
called the Vedanta or end of the Vedas. It was in them that the mystical tradition,
which had its roots in the Vedas, came to flower. The decisive moment seems to have
been the fire-sacrifice, which had originally been an external sacrifice, came to be
interiorized and conceived symbolically. It was then the word ‘Brahman’, which had
been used as the mantra (the sacred utterance) by which the sacrifice was effected and
which therefore contained the hidden power of the sacrifice, came to be conceived as
the hidden power behind the universe. The *rishi* meditating in the forest realised the hidden power of Brahman within himself, and so Brahman came to be identified with the Atman or the inner self. Another development took place when the *Purusha* of the Rig Veda or the primeval man, from whose sacrifice the world came into being, was conceived as the source of all, and the Cosmic Person was realised as dwelling in the human person and so identified with Brahman and Atman. These three terms, Brahma, Atman and *Purusha*, which thus originate in the Vedas became in the Upanishads the names for the hidden mystery of the universe and the whole mystical literature of the Upanishads and the Gita is built round these three terms. This can be seen crystal clear in the Brihadaranyaka Upanisad at the very beginning of the Upanishadic tradition. With this origin and background of the Indian mystical tradition, let us have a glance at the Hindu syncretic mystical literature.

**4.1. Hindu Syncretic Mystical Literature**

Syncretism is universal, and so eastern religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism in ancient India have made umpteen adaptations over the years, assimilating elements of various diverse religious traditions into their spheres. For instance, Yoga Vasistha. Scholars say that while worship is universal, a religion must have literature, philosophy or theology. Worship in ancient India was broadly classified into two - Dravidian worship of the Indus Valley and Vedic worship of the Aryans. The Vedic worship was first evidenced in the Sunga Dynasty in 183 B.C.E. The Vedic worship hymns existed in oral form, which were compiled and written by a Dravidian only after second century C.E., before which Sanskrit did not exist. Now, let us glance through the syncretic elements in Hindu mystical literature.

Till the advent of the Europeans, the term ‘Hindu’ had geographical implication, referring to the people living around the Indus River (3300-1300 B.C.E.}
mature period 2600-1900 B.C.E.). A couple of centuries ago, the British coined the word ‘Hinduism’ to distinguish all religious worships in India, except Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. All the same, for those practising different religious worships under Hinduism, the word ‘Hindu’ was a misnomer. For instance, Lingayatism began as a rebel movement against Brahminic Hinduism, and so anti-Hindu. Similarly, unlike Hindus, tribals and dalits have their own distinct religions and worships, some of which are farfetched from Hinduism.

4.1.1. Zoroastrian Influence on Hinduism

While ascertaining Brahmin genealogy, we trace their religious affinity to Rg Veda, because of which they are referred to as the Vedic people. The earliest evidence of Vedic worship is espied in on a cuneiform tablet excavated at El-Amarna in Egypt, on a document from Bogazkoy in Anatolia (Asia Minor). This fourteenth century B.C.E. tablet is in Hittite cuneiform, written in the Akkadian language, which is an appendage to a treaty between the Hittite king Suppiluliuma and his son-in-law, the Mitannian king Kurtiwaza, containing a long list of the gods of the peoples who were parties to it. The gods are invoked to witness the conclusion of the treaty and guarantee its observance. The gods of the Mitanni people are named thus: Mi-it-ra, U-ru-ua-na, In-da-ra, and Na-sa-at-ti-ia-an-na. Obviously, these correspond to Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and Nasatuau of the Vedic pantheon. The very same tablet has the following curse pronounced against the Mitanni people:

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If you, Kurtiwaza, the prince, and the sons of the Hurri country do not fulfil the words of the treaty, may the gods, the lords of earth, blot you out, you and the Hurri men together with your country, your wives, and all that you have.68

In the same compendium, Mithra (also Mitra) is invoked as the god of covenant, at the time when Israel invaded Canaan and occupied it, resulting into a migratory movement in Canaan and surrounding areas. As a result, the early Vedic elements disseminated to other places. Further, Mithra worship was evolved in Iran became the god of the sun, justice, contract and war. Prior to Zoroaster (sixth century B.C.E.), the Iranians practised a polytheistic religion wherein Mithra was the chief god.69 However, Zoroastrianism being a monotheistic religion downplayed the prominence of Mithra. For Zoroaster, Ahura Mazda is the highest god, the creator of heaven and earth, who alone is to be worshipped. Zoroaster expounded the dual kingdom concept - the kingdom of Ahura Mazda and that of Ahriman, the evil one, who is the adversary of God. Each kingdom has its own adherents - righteous people with Ahura Mazda and unrighteous or evil one's with Ahriman - who had the freedom of choice. In the end, the kingdom of Ahura Mazda conquers over the kingdom of Ahriman. Here, is a syncretic literary piece effected by the Zoroastrian cultic reforms:

Zoroaster forbade all sacrifices in honour of Ahriman or of his adherents, the daevas, who from pre-Zoroastrian times had degenerated into hostile deities. In the prevailing religious tradition, Zoroaster probably found that the practice of sacrificing cattle, combined with the consumption of intoxicating drinks (haoma), led to orgiastic excess.70

70 Ibid., Vol. 19, p. 1170.
The Vedic people too had a similar potent drink called 'soma' which is same as haoma in Persia, consumed only at sacrifices, which caused the most invigorating effects. Yet another fact is that Indra to whom nearly one-quarter of the hymns are dedicated appears as a demon in Zend Avesta. Furthermore, Zoroastrians are also called 'fire worshippers.' Some early texts reveal the king praying to Ahura Mazda in front of a flaming altar. But later the king appears on coins without Ahura Mazda, adorned in a fire priest's apparel, praying directly to the fire. This change occurred around the late fifth or fourth century B.C.E. Similarly, agni or fire worship is highly prominent in the Vedic religious traditions as well.

The Brahminic race is from the Sunga Empire came through Persia to western Asia, which was basically a nomadic race, whose gods were a nature inspiration and sacrifice was essential to ritual. However, "Sacrificial ritual was beginning to be replaced by the practice of bhakti (personal devotion), positing a personal relationship between the individual and the deity." As a result, numerous Vedic deities lost significance and, "The numerous solar deities of the Vedas were merged in Hinduism into a single god, usually known as Surya (the Sun)." Innumerable sun temples were built during Gupta Age and medieval times, among which the 'Black Pagoda' of Konarak in Orissa, built in the thirteenth century C.E. is popular to this day.

4.1.2. Semitic Influence on Indian Scripts

Ancient India had two scripts - Brahmi and Kharosti. The Brahmi script was evolved around seventh century B.C.E. under Semitic influence and like any Semitic language, originally it was written from right to left. However, in India, from fifth century B.C.E. it is found written from left to right. A fourth century B.C.E. coin found in Madhya Pradesh, is inscribed with Brahmi characters running from right to left. Similarly, the Kharosti script came into being during the fifth century B.C.E. in northwest India, which was under Persian rule. Though the origin of the Brahmi script is uncertain, the Kharosti script is generally accepted to be the direct descendant of the Aramaic alphabet, and so it’s written like Aramaic, from right to left.

4.1.3. Linguistic Syncretism

The Middle Ages were distinguished for analytical study of language growth. But religious preconceptions often intercepted the appropriate comprehension of linguistic evolution. There was the wide-ranging view that Hebrew was the mother of all languages. Sir William Jones in his legendary Anniversary Discourse of 2 February 1786 published in *Asiatick Researches* 1.415-431 (1788) delineated the fundamental features of Sanskrit. According to him, Sanskrit, Greek and Latin originate from a common source, which doesn’t exist any longer. Germanic and Celtic too arise from the same source, however, blended with a different idiom. These common linguistic origins embody literary origins as well.

4.1.4. Jewish Influence on Hinduism

Literature, philosophy or theology forms the very fibre of religion. After the division of Israel and Judah around sixth century B.C.E., the dispersed Jews went all
over the diaspora and the world, including India, influencing others and also getting
influenced by them. For, as we have observed, Judaism has incorporated a plethora of
ancient philosophy - Greek and pagan - into its sphere, and sowed and/or implanted it
in the fields of other religions, thus reaping some unique but mixed variety of spiritual
fruits. Speaking on one such ancient philosophical influence, Megasthenes states:

All that has been said regarding nature by the ancients is asserted also by
philosophers out of Greece, on the one part in India by the Brachmanes, and
on the other in Syria by the people called the Jews.\textsuperscript{78}

4.1.5. Christian Elements in Hinduism

We can observe some Christian influences on Dravidian worship and vice
versa. In the Jewish Torah (i.e. Pentateuch or the first five books of the Old
Testament), the memorial stone has prominence but never worshipped.

And he (Joseph) was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none
other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up
early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set
it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. (Genesis 28:17-18)

There were largely two kinds of worship in India before the Common Era -
Dravidian and Vedic. The worship of the memorial stone in the former is prevalent
from the Indus Valley to the present day.

The memorial stone found in the Indus Valley worship is called Sivalinka. The
term Sivalinka was coined in the later period (after \textsuperscript{3rd} century A.D.) but this

\textsuperscript{78} J.W. McCrindle, \textit{Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian} (A translation of the
fragments of “The Indika of Megasthenes” collected by Dr Schwanbeck and in the first part of “The
worship is very ancient. In the term ‘Sivalinka’, Siva denotes God of love and 
linka is a Sanskrit word which means symbol.\textsuperscript{79}

The Encyclopedia Britannica (1982 edition) records cardinal reconstructions 
in the religious traditions of India. From its genesis, Vedic religion was polytheistic 
by nature. However, due to external influences from the monotheistic faiths such as 
Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and especially Christianity, it underwent a paradigm shift 
from polytheism to monotheism, causing some of the Vedic deities to fade away. It 
states:

The two major gods were Visnu and Siva, around whom there merged a 
monotheistic trend perhaps best expressed in the Bhagavad Gita... Sacrificial 
ritual was beginning to be replaced by the practice of \textit{bhakti} (personal 
devotion), positing a personal relationship between the individual and the 
deity.

Thus, anew monotheistic religion came into being, wherein God was first 
called \textit{Isa}.

The cult of Siva or Saivism emerged first, and the Vishnu-Krishna cult or 
Vaishnavism came afterwards as an imitation or duplication. The earlier 
appearance of Siva is indicated in the first instance by the fact that it is he 
alone who is called Isa or Isvara.... This peculiar character of the cult makes it 
permissible to infer that Siva was probably the first and only god of the 
monotheistic Hinduism which replaced Vedic polytheism as the highest 
expression of the religious sentiment of the Hindus. That is to say, originally

the monotheism was unitary. In fact, even in recent times the Saivas of the south maintained that Siva was the only supreme deity.**

This monotheistic faith supplanted the Vedic deities Mitra, Varuna, Indra and Agni.** In her book, *A History of India*, Romila Thapar narrates the beginning of the Christian era thus:

Another characteristic of Hinduism was a gradual shift in emphasis from ritual alone to the view that a completely personal relationship between God and the devotee was possible. The monotheistic concept of God, with either Vishnu or Shiva as its manifestation, was gaining strength. The relationship was one where God could bestow his grace (*prasada*) on the devotee, and the degree of devotion (*bhakti*) varied from person to person. This idea of personal devotion or *bhakti*, as it was commonly called, was to become the dynamic force of later Hinduism. The change in the theological attitude is perhaps best expressed in the philosophy of the Gita... Vishnu assumes various forms or incarnations and enters the world of men in order to save them from evil. The tenth and final incarnation has yet to come, and on this occasion he will come in the form of *Kalkin* riding a white horse, which suggests a connection with the idea of the Messiah and the coming of the Maitreya Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism.**

Alexander Harris in his, *The Development of Civilization and Religion in India and its Influence on the World Society* observes the change and transition occurred in the Hindu religious tradition, and questions it saying, how did this religion arise, since before Christ there was nothing in India to catalyse it? As per his findings, while the

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** Ibid., p. 88.

Dravidian worship was idolatrous and polytheistic, the Vedic worship too was polytheistic and nature inspired. Buddhism and Jainism having no room for God were termed agnostic. The only deduced logical answer to the emergence of this new religion is Christianity by the apostles of Christ, since India had excellent trade relations with the Roman Empire, both in North and South.

Many Roman coins were found in Kerala and the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu, which served as main resources of foreign trade. But most of these coins belong to the early period of Christian era (i.e.) 1-2 CAD. Roman coins were also found at one or two places in Tamil Nadu but meagre in number. Places like Alagankulam, Kulathupalayam, Mamallapuram had yielded Roman Coins of 4 CAD. Large amount of coins were collected from Madurai and Karur. They were all of copper. For the first time gold coins of 5 CAD has been found at Tamil Nadu. Scholars opined that Roman trade with Tamil Nadu almost ceased in the 2 or 3 CAD. But these new finds of gold coins had proved that the trade continued up to 5 CAD. Similar type of coins of King Theodosius II and Leo I were already unearthed in Akkiyalur hoard in Karnataka.83

Furthermore, in her book, *A History of India*, Romila Thapar confirms this saying,

The most profitable overseas trade was the Roman trade with South India. Yavana merchants (i.e. merchants from western Asia and the Mediterranean) had trading establishments both in the Satavahana kingdoms and in those of the far south. Early Tamil literature describes Yavana ships arriving with their cargoes at the city of Kaveripattinam. The Periplus Maris Erythraeae, a maritime geography of the east-west trade, written in about the first century AD, gives details of the commodities carried and the routes taken by traders and ships. The route for trade then proceeds round the tip of the peninsula and

83The Hindu, “Date of Roman Coins found near Srivilliputhur assessed,” June 20, 1998.
up the coast, whereof all the ports mentioned there we have now fairly detailed knowledge of one - Arikamedu (known to the Periplus as Padouke), where extensive excavations in 1945 uncovered a sizeable Roman settlement which was a trading station, it would seem that the Romans were using Arikamedu from the first century BC to the early second century AD. The frequency of hoards of Roman coins found in the Deccan and south India indicate the volume of this trade. Most of the urban centres of the south were ports which prospered on this trade, such as Kaverippattinam.... Although the economic impact of the Roman trade was more evident in southern India, the impact of Romano-Greek ideas and artifacts was more evident in the north. Exchange of merchandise led inevitably to an exchange of ideas.84

There is a tradition in Christianity, supported by documentary evidence that Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus, was the first one to come to India to proclaim Christianity. In The Cambridge History of Iran, A.D.H. Bivar confirms this and his Christian impact on the Indian mind:

The date of Gondophares is firmly established by the Takht-I Bahi inscription of the year 103, which is also dated to the twenty-sixth year of Gondophares’ reign. The first date must be reckoned according to the “era of Azes” (57 B.C.) and therefore corresponds to 46 A.D., while the accession year of Gondophares is consequently 20 A.D...Tradition records that Thomas set out for India immediately after the Crucifixion, i.e. in April 30 A.D. The appearance of Gondophares in the Acts of Thomas is therefore chronologically acceptable.85

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4.1.5.1. Incarnation vs *Avatar*

According to Alexander Harris, the concept of *avatar* (i.e. God taking the mortal form) in Hinduism, and Vaishnavism in particular, was a Christian influence of the incarnation. The other *avatars* were later additions into the Hindu religious corpus. For example, the various *Ramayana* versions identify Rama with Vishnu as another incarnation, which is not so in Valmiki’s *Ramayana*, its oldest form. In Kambar’s version of the *Ramayana* in Tamil, Rama is the incarnation. Following this, other versions in various languages were written with Rama as the incarnation. Many other similar doctrines of divine incarnation were identified. Y. Masih in his, *Shankara’s Universal Philosophy of Religion* notes the striking similarity between Krishna and Jesus,

The phenomenon of ‘Krṣṇajanmastame’ in which the child Krishna is represented as a suckling at the mother’s breast. Nanda, the foster-father of Krishna had gone to Mathura to pay his taxes (just as Joseph had gone to Bethlehem for census). Krishna was born in a cow-shed (Gokula exactly as Jesus was born in a manger); massacre of infants of Mathura by Kamsa (just as was the massacre of infants by Herod); Krishna (like Jesus) had raised the son of a window from the dead; Kubja anointed Krishna just as Mary had done with precious ointment.

In his *Hinduism*, Nirad C. Chaudhuri states, “the Gita is written in good classical Sanskrit, and epigraphic evidence clearly shows that the Gita could not have been written before the second century A.D.” The earliest epigraphic linguistic testimony in India is the third century B.C.E. inscriptions of Asoka, inscribed in common folk’s Prakrit. Furthermore, he translated his communique to Greek and

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Aramaic, but not Sanskrit. The first evinces of Sanskrit were witnessed around C.E.150 and classical Sanskrit was predominantly used in inscriptions from fifth century C.E. Hindu religious texts, other than the Vedas and the Upa-Vedas (which were written in archaic Sanskrit), are all in classical Sanskrit, and so, they couldn’t have been written before fourth century C.E., opines Nirad Chaudhuri. All the more, the X mandala of the Rg Veda was a later addition, having dual aspects, i.e. divine-human, of Prajapati with his sacrifice of himself for the humans. Here, the concepts such as God descending into the world by taking the human form and becoming a sacrifice for the expiation of sins wherein humans need not offer sacrifices any more since God had offered himself as sacrifice, salvation through faith, and the human response by total surrender to God as a living sacrifice. From where did all these ideas originate since there was nothing in India before the Common Era to catalyse it? The Dravidian religion was idolatrous and polytheistic, while the Vedic religion was nature inspired and also polytheistic. Buddhism and Jainism were atheistic (or euphemistically termed agnostic) with no room for God. The only answer we can logically deduce to this new concept is Christianity preached by Thomas. South India had excellent trade relations with the Roman Empire, which obviously would result into cultural and religious exchanges. The Christian doctrines have cast their spell on the author of the Bhagavad Gita and other Hindu religious writings and so, incarnational concepts like *avatar* were assimilated from Christianity into Hinduism. Similarly, syncretic elements from the surrounding got infiltrated into Indian Christianity over time, thus emerged Indian mass, Christian yoga, Yoga Vasista, Christian Vipasana, Christian Zen, and so on.
4.1.5.2. Amalgamation of Dravidian Religion in Hinduism with Christian Elements

The Dravidian religion, which was later eclipsed in Hinduism, embodied two major sects based on Siva worship - Saivism and Vaishnavism - and six sub-sects known as ‘Six-fold religion’- Saivism, Vaishnavaism, Saktham, Gowmaram, Kanapathyam and Sowram. In the eighth century C.E. Adi Sankara coalesced these Six-fold religions by using monism with karma theory (i.e. cycle of birth), which resulted into caste system. His rationale behind was to uphold Vedic Brahmin supremacy under the garb of religious unity. The pre-Christian Dravidian religions did practise some forms of worship, but only in the post-Christian era Saivism and Vaishnavism were maturated into religions having syncretic elements drawn from other religions, especially Christianity. For example, the Trinitarian doctrine, fulfilment of sacrifice, concept of avatar, etc. became the bedrock of Saivite and Vaishnavite philosophy, which were evolved in the post-Christian epoch, under Christian spell. In fact, the word ‘Siva’ itself is from the root Isa, and the religion was syncretically evolved.

In Christianity, Satan beguiled Adam and Eve to disobey and rebel against God saying, “Ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). This Satanic seduction is imperative to Advaitic monists. For, scholars assert that Adi Sankara, who was influenced by this philosophy, interpreted an early Indian writing, Aham Brahmasmi, which should have been translated as, ‘God is in me.’ But, Adi Sankara’s interpretation led to translating it as ‘I am God.’ Of course, human enslavement to Satan’s enticement never changes.

We have traced Christian elements in Hindu thought. All the more, the full proof truth is seen only in Saiva Siddhanta where Meykandar’s Siva Gnana Botham sets the standard for the truth. Many grope in the dark without even realizing that the
roots of Hinduism are in South India. Their founding saints - 63 Nayanmars of Saivism and 12 Alvars of Vaishnavism were all from the South and the evidence for early Indian Christianity has been buried all these years in Tamil Literature. However, the theistic faith of the Hindus was later corrupted by the atheistic philosophy of Monism.

All the above arguments make it quite clear that Christianity has cast its spell on Hinduism, its philosophy and literature. The Christian thought is found in Hindu scriptures, which could be traced back to the gospel preached by St Thomas the Apostle, starting with the Pahlavas. However, text corruption has occurred over time as evidenced by Alberuni, which could also be the syncretic attribute of Christianity.

5. Conclusion

Mysticism de facto is an experience of the ultimate reality, which is a pan-religious phenomenon. Though monotheistic religions do not easily lend themselves to mystical experience, yet the syncretic character of religion makes it incorporate and assimilate from others which is absent and/or lacking in one’s own. The ultimate samadhi, the higher union with the Godhead, is beyond humans to grasp and to communicate. And so, it deploys literary means such as art, literature, music, dance et al - a symbolic means to communicate the real experiences. Hence, mysticism is described as secret, closed - something is encountered which is unknown to the ordinary intellect, the confrontation of a new mind... which was innately there. It is Life within life - it is consciousness, the self that the humans experience in mysticism, and then become. However, mysticism is not only the supernal peak at once, but a journey one has to pass through many levels in order to reach it. It is not only the final gnosis, it is thousands of intermediate experiences - moments, insights, decisions, epiphanies that come to us along the way.
Life is charged everywhere with mystical possibilities... in art, music, science, literature, the world of the intellect, including ordinary experience. Consider our experience of human love at its best - how profound, how ineffable, how mystical this experience truly is. Mysticism in nature, what we call nature-mysticism, is present in all religions. For, a mystic sojourns from the natural to the supernatural, from the physical to the metaphysical, from the known to the unknown, from the actual to the real. William Blake beautifully captures the mysticism of childhood and adolescence, and the uncanny intuitions that come to us in his quatrain:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,

And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,

And Eternity in an hour...