THE AFFORDANCES OF MIND:
Contemplation, Ecology, and Jewish Thought

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Keywords: *Jewish mysticism, environmental humanities, contemplative ecology*

Abstract: *The present essay outlines some possible frameworks for developing and articulating a Jewish contemplative ecology. The resources for this work within Jewish literary and theological activity are many and vast, stretching from the Hebrew Bible to rabbinic literature and into medieval and modern Jewish thought and philosophy; here I pay special attention to the writings of Jewish mystics, to the works the Kabbalists and Hasidic thinkers who have guided so much of my own intellectual and spiritual journey. In drawing upon their writings, I explore a series of interlocking themes. First, I consider contemplative teachings that grapple with the meaning of communal and individual life in the face of devastation, fracture, and cataclysm. Second, I explore texts and practices that speak to the cultivation of an awareness that the world shimmers with divinity, including a vision of the animals around us as teachers, mentors, and friends. Here I argue that a strong Jewish contemplative ecology hinges upon the serious, reflective consideration of our spiritual, physical, and moral entanglements with the physical world. Finally, I turn to Jewish contemplative traditions and techniques that train our eyes upon local specificity, allowing us to develop a strong sense of place that is manifest in both aesthetic and spiritual commitments as well as ethical obligations.*

For Rabbi Ellen Bernstein, of blessed memory—scholar, teacher, activist, and friend.

> This is an essential teaching of Hasidism: Do not be satisfied with fashioning the mind alone in worship. Enduring connection cannot be forged with the intellect alone. . . . The entire soul, and the fullness of one's physical vitality, must become connected. Penetrate to the soul and raise it up, arousing it like a flame—in every action, in study, and in all our sacred service.
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> —Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira[1]

INTRODUCTION

The work of focusing the mind, of coming to attention, can be an act of rebellion and an expression of political and spiritual dissent. Most of us who live in contemporary industrialized societies are surrounded by the ubiquitous machinery of irritants and triggers that fracture our awareness. From continuous news tickers to endless social media feeds, we are overloaded with information and accosted by a slew of pings, lights, and other technological goads clamoring for us to pay them mind.[2] Digital developers often refer, with a cynical twinkle in their eye, to "the race to the bottom

Published by the *Journal of Contemplative Studies*

March 19, 2026, Issue #03, pp. 149–193.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.57010/VZGW9607
Website: https://contemplativejournal.org/

Journal of Contemplative Studies

of the brain stem"—intentional jousting matches between companies and app producers who vie for the lion's share of our continuous attention and engagement. The bycatch of this effort is our perpetual distraction, compounded by a creeping separation from the physical phenomena—plants, animals, and landscapes—that surround us. Contemplative activity is both deeply nurturing and radically subversive precisely because it jolts us beyond the values and structures that dominate our lives, inviting us to reconnect our minds and bodies to the fullness of the world and to the spiritual infinities it can express.

In our present time of ecological calamity, we are also being bombarded with bleak environmental data and with countless calls to take action. Scientists and community organizers agree that we must work quickly and resolutely before the climate crisis reaches its tipping point; we must act now, dramatically and decisively, lest the time on our ecological doomsday clock expire. In what is sometimes called "activist capitalism," we articulate a need for progressively bigger modes of resistance, for an ever-expanding network of interruptive gestures that ironically mirrors the unhealthy economic yearning for a perennially growing GDP. But the sheer magnitude of this task, and the wicked complexity of the environmental problems we face, can easily lead us into frustration, powerlessness, and apathy rather than empowerment. These feelings are the toxic ingredients of personal and communal burnout; this precarious emotional situation is aptly described by a term forged in the industrialized carbon economy and the social acceleration that has accompanied it.[3] They yield a mindset of reactive measures grounded in defensiveness, hastiness, and fear, such that our attempted solutions actually embody the intellectual and social myopia that have led us into the trouble.

The work of contemplation is so valuable in moments of instability and change precisely because it nourishes us, affording us space of mind and expanding our moral and communal imagination.[4] Such reflection allows us to remember that, in dramatic times of turmoil or fear, we ought to be slowing down rather than speeding up.[5] The noted scholar Kyle Whyte has argued for the inadequacy of "epistemologies of crisis" for confronting climate change.[6] When faced with seismic environmental shifts that threaten our way of life, Whyte points out that societies and their laws often revert to the very structures and patterns of thought or governance that have brought them to the brink. Their activities are often hasty, impetuous, and ill-considered, the result of reacting under the overstory of emergency.[7] He presents an alternative in what he describes as "epistemologies of coordination"—namely, "ways of knowing the world that emphasize the importance of moral bonds—or kinship relationships—for generating the (responsible) capacity to respond to constant change in the world."[8] A mindset of coordination, in other words, affords the breadth needed for thoughtful response, for seeking out answers rooted in connection and justice rather than hurriedly trying to abate—or sequester—the symptoms of climate change through feats of engineering.

These twin forces—metastatic distraction and a cramped, rushed approach to action—stand like Scylla and Charybdis, preventing us from seeing that the qualities of responsiveness, moral entanglement, and coordination may be rooted in the wide variety of practices and techniques collectively described as "contemplation." I find this term to be interesting and useful precisely because its semantic field is so marshy and complicated; like an ecotone, it is both opaque and capacious, defined variously by different religious and spiritual traditions and with enormous internal variety, range, and inconsistency. I tend to approach contemplation as the act or process

of coming to attention, a particular type of reflective consideration that encompasses practices or skills trained upon some type of prompt or focal point. In some cases, these gestures of mind and awareness may be focused upon a text or some other type of cultural artifact, from visual art and spoken words to melodies or dance. The foci of contemplation include one's self—an exploration of those inexhaustible interior castles and mansions, but also their links to the physical body—or one's place in the world around us, whether it be in the cosmos as a whole or as specific beings or parts of a particular landscape. Rituals themselves also function as subjects of attention, guiding the flow of affect and shaping the mind and body of a worshipper or practitioner while serving as a focal point for higher-order reflection.

These practices and theories—what Anna Tsing has called "the arts of noticing"—can train our eyes, and all our senses, to perceive that which lies beyond an array of binaries (e.g., mind/body, human/animal, nature/culture, self/world, activism/reflection).[9] These methods of thinking and acting can expand our minds and hearts, helping us identify portals through which we can perceive the world around us and cultivating within us the reflective awareness, longing, and sensitivity needed for climate and cultural transformation. The work of contemplation is stretching moral imagination, developing atrophied capabilities for connection, and expanding the threshold of personal and collective possibility. Both the study of contemplation and the practices of contemplation itself can sensitize us to ecological travesty while offering us new integrative patterns of mind and action.[10] Examining the contemplative techniques described in early Christian sources, Douglas Christie has described their aspirations for such spiritual expansiveness in a way that speaks directly to our contemporary climate problems:

> The primary work of contemplative practice is to become more aware of this web of relationships, to learn to live within it fully and responsibly and to give expression to it in one's life. . . . To retrieve a vision of the world as whole—through sustained attention to the underlying unity that connects all beings to one another and to the root causes in our thought and practice that contribute to the deepening fragmentation of self, community, and world—is necessary to the work of healing that is at the heart of any sustained ecological renewal.[11]

Contemplative ecological work alerts us to fields of connection, helping us rethink our place within the world by moving beyond the false dichotomy of human beings and nature. It is a project of both historical scholarship and constructive thinking that allows us to perceive ourselves as part of the "house," the *oikos* of ecology, and the network of interrelation, reciprocity, and obligation demanded by this deep and enduring connection. As the late Ellen Bernstein wrote,

> Hurrying about, focused on the daily tasks before us, we often overlook the beauty of the living world in our midst. We need to slow down long enough so that our senses can attune to the verdant world around us. . . . If we are open to it, beauty can stop us in our tracks; it can draw us into a state of contemplation. . . . The experience of beauty can strengthen our inner resources and our resolve to act on behalf of that which we love.[12]

Contemplative reflection reminds us of the arresting power of wonder, beauty, and connection. Our capacity to slow down is, in part, what prevents us from slipping into mentalities of crisis, when we should be working actively for coordinated traction.

Contemplative ecology also argues that, in the case of global environmental change, answers and solutions may lie in doing *less* rather than in doing *more*. Instead of rushing to immediate and often ill-conceived solutions meant to prop up our own ways of life, contemplative reflection engenders a capacity to sit with the specific brokenness of our systems—social, economic, and political as well as ethical—and, eventually, to collaborate to address the heart of the matter. Likewise, contemplative work recalls our attention to the specific formations of particular landscapes and the actual communities of life sustained by them. These practices and modes of thought encourage our capacity to become "apprenticed," in the words of Barry Lopez, to our immediate surroundings.[13] Contemplation is thus a crucial element of what Bruno Latour has described as "coming down to earth," remembering that we are terrestrial beings linked to distinct places even as we exist within a broader planetary ecosystem. We must, as Wendell Berry argued, rediscover our place and embrace the limitations it entails: "like other species, we will have to submit to the necessity of local adaptation."[14]

Both within and beyond the academy, the work of contemplation is often approached as a competing alternative to action—a tension visible in the writings of figures like Aristotle, Augustine, and Hannah Arendt, to name but a few. Yet an enormous number of texts, both medieval and modern, reveal that action and contemplation can be interwoven, even co-constitutive, an understanding articulated by the contemporary Joanna Macy:

> Action is not something you do, it's something you *are*. . . . So action isn't a burden to be hoisted up and lugged around on our shoulders. It is something we are. The work we have to do can be seen as a kind of coming alive. More than a moral imperative, it's an awakening to our true nature, a releasing of our gifts. This flow-through of energy and ideas is at every moment directed by our choice. That's our role in it. We're like a lens that can focus, or a gate that can direct this flowing by schooling our intention. In each moment we can give it direction.[15]

Systematic, global, transformative change begins with local, personal shifts in attention that can—and must—then be translated into positive efforts. At the same time, action and movement are modes of learning that have a significant impact on our ways of thinking and knowing—actions that cultivate our awareness of the worlds around us, and within us, while reflecting and broadcasting that knowledge in a complicated two-way process.

In what follows, I will present some possible frameworks for thinking about Jewish contemplative ecology and suggest a set of sources that may be helpful in this work. These texts are a selection from thousands of years of Jewish literary and theological activity; they are offered with the admission that many others could, and perhaps should, be discussed. The resources for Jewish contemplative ecology are many and vast, stretching from the Hebrew Bible to rabbinic literature and into medieval and modern Jewish thought and philosophy. The present essay pays special attention to the writings of Jewish mystics, to the works of the Kabbalists and Hasidic thinkers who have guided so much of my own intellectual and spiritual journey. While the Jewish

meditative and contemplative traditions have been increasingly subject to scholarly analysis in recent years, rarely are they read in light of ecological catastrophe and global environmental change.[16]

These teachings cohere around a series of interlocking themes, places in which the map of Jewish intellectual history meets our current environmental moment. First, I consider contemplative teachings that grapple with life in the face of devastation, fracture, and cataclysm. Tragedy, collapse, and even apocalypse are no strangers to religious and Indigenous thinkers, and for many of whom the world has already ended. Key to meeting our present moment is not to rush to solutions, but to recognize the situation for what it is: confronting the current ecological travesty, and the tragedies of mind, action, and systems that have led us to this situation. Jewish contemplative literature and techniques have deep resources for thinking through, and existing with, the intertwined processes of destruction and rebirth. Second, I explore texts and practices that speak to the cultivation of an awareness that the world shimmers with divinity, including a vision of the animals around us as teachers, mentors, and friends. To my mind, a strong Jewish contemplative ecology hinges upon the serious, reflective consideration of our spiritual, physical, and moral entanglements with the physical world.

Finally, I turn to Jewish contemplative traditions and techniques that train our perception upon local specificity, allowing us to develop a strong sense of place that is manifest in both aesthetic and spiritual commitments as well as ethical obligations. Rather than abstraction or sameness, such practices surface our appreciation for the world around us. Together, Jewish sources can offer new ways of thinking, seeing, acting, and breathing, inspiring behavioral restraint and providing patterns of mind that highlight the importance of kinship, connection, and resilience. Inner transformation is needed to bring us beyond our current moment, and, in my estimation, these sources demonstrate how religious practices of mind and body can be disruptive, transformative, and positively interruptive.

LEARNING TO READ

Such reflections are rarely discovered ready-made in some tractate of rabbinic lore; contemplative traditions, especially those that speak to the present, must often be elicited from ancient texts through interpretation. Contemplative ecology thus asks us to develop a mode of reading sacred texts, a participatory hermeneutical paradigm that highlights elements of tradition that might otherwise go unnoticed. Rather than attempting to mine the tradition or to extract something useful out of the text, contemplative ecology reminds us to pay attention to the imaginative possibilities afforded by our sources of study. As we sit with them, sometimes for decades, we come to see that these texts and practices can offer spiritual direction and guidance to contemporary problems.[17]

Hasidic sources have, since the waning years of the eighteenth century, described a mode of textual interpretation called *'al derekh ha-avodah*—"the path" or "method of sacred service"—a mode of interpretation that combines vulnerable closeness and allegiance to the text with the search for its contemporary personal, intellectual, and spiritual implications.[18] This mode of reading reminds us that, in the craft of interpretation, we bind world to text. All things are said to have a "spark of divine wisdom" (*remiza de-hokhmata*)—a shimmering aspect of divinity manifest in the physical world and in *all* of one's experiences—that must be gleaned, summoned up rather than extracted. Rather than simply mining biblical or rabbinic sources, Hasidic homilists read earlier

Jewish texts with a careful balance of commitment, suppleness, attention, and creativity. Hasidic sources raise questions by applying ancient sources to present-day concerns and, in doing so, offer a wonderful model for how texts may themselves be read as speaking to issues beyond the author's original intention. This method differs from the usual mores of homiletics or theosophical reflection in that it is not about allegory or allusion or about recondite, but a belief that books have the capacity to open us—dilating our spiritual pupils, expanding the moral imagination, prompting us to ethical attention and reflection.[19]

The cultivation of this type of reading was a frequent theme in the works of Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira (d. 1943), a twentieth-century Jewish mystic who developed one of the most robust and fully articulated visions of Jewish contemplative practice. Shapira describes the realizations and spiritual awakening that transpires within the heart of the reader as a type of divine revelation, an envisioning "not of things to come or future events, which has been impossible since the Temple was destroyed, but of a prophecy as instruction, intimacy, and sanctification."[20] This demands a relational mode of reading, one that is deeply participatory and geared toward building empathy and connection. As one reads the Hebrew Bible, says Shapira, one must take part in the suffering of the Israelis and feel the terror of their physical and spiritual afflictions.[21] He explains that this paradigm of interpretation can, and should, expand to include all sacred texts:

> When you study the stories of the Bible, strive to take part in all those sacred events that took place, as if you yourself lived at that time. Join in the wanderings of Abraham, in Isaac going up to be bound [upon the altar], in the suffering of Jacob when he prayed to God. . . . So, too, when you study Midrash . . . which reveals the events of the Torah in greater depth . . . make a single subject out of it all, for, in truth, everything is one. Let it be one in your mind.[22]

Every element of the sacred canon is seen as pointing toward the same unity, without effacing the specific dimensions of the different sources—the local textures or flavors of every text. "When you open a book, even though you gaze upon the whole, something or else will spark before your eyes and stir your soul. You feel that which is connected to you."[23] One must never forget that these sources, indeed, part of a bigger creative network—represent a forest of ideas and texts that are connected by a mycelial-like network. Here, the *oikos* of ecology refers to the house of the canon, a fabric of texts, traditions, and interpretative layers that is more expansive and integrated than we might ever imagine. Engagement with each source embeds the reader within a trophic cascade of theological concern because such reading also trains us to look upon the world around us. The same sacred vitality that undergirds Torah fills the world; the text, like the cosmos, is filled with infinite spiritual possibilities and interconnectivity.

Following earlier Jewish mystical sources, Shapira describes exile as a state of mind, a deadened mental bewilderment that compounds temporal dislocation. A lack of awareness and feeling, then, is one of the great stumbling blocks of religious living. Reading sacred texts and interpreting them reminds us of the need to emphasize the values of empathy, humility, sensitivity, and embodiment. Critical to this work is becoming what Shapira calls "a person of emotional depth and attunement" (*ish ha-mitragesh*)—not because of emotional solipsism or self-absorbed passion are independent goals, but because "feeling is the beginning of the soul's revelation."[24] The soul,

the inner domain of one's spirit, is far from a static object; the heart can be expanded, transformed, and enlarged through a kind of careful and spiritual alchemy that is catalyzed by reading.[25] Cultivating the mind alone is insufficient, because, through reading and religious practice, one's inner spiritual world and capacity for affect and emotion are stretched and empowered—Shapira felicitously called this training "expanding" (*hitravahut*) or "strengthening" (*hitzhaskut*),[26] a capacity for attunement sparked through commitment to study:

> The beginning of spiritual ascent is deepening one's thought in Torah, not thinking about it in an offhand way, but truly plumbing the depths such that one's entire capacity for thought is trained upon and held within it. This is the [true] spiritual work of Torah and its reasons. Not only in Torah, but in prayer also, one should set aside times for thought and depth for fear and love of God . . . this world, too, has wisdom and potential, and was created by God's world. . . . The deeper one journeys in the mind, the greater spiritual inspiration and connection and ascent . . . the thought works to raise him up, truly, in soul . . . the soul ascends on high and sees what it sees.[27]

The word translated above as "reasons" (*ta'am*) has a complex semantic field in Hebrew: It can refer to "reason" or "rationale," but also to "taste,"[28] and Hasidic teachings on proper modes of study are much easier to understand if intuition and experiential resonance (that is, taste) are at stake rather than cognitive or intellectual reasoning. One who remains trapped within the intellect alone will forever lack the self-transcendence, and the cultivation of connection, that is the core of religious service.[29] This is because the work of prayer and of engagement with Torah is to expand the capaciousness of our moral imagination and build up a source of resilience within us. Worship and study are interwoven in the Jewish imagination; they need one another because they are different ways of engaging with the world. Only when combined do study and reflection, worship and learning, elicit change in the world.[30] Action without reflection is meaningless, but deeds without contemplative focus are like bodies without soul.[31]

Shapira himself advises his readers to come up with methods, tools, and techniques for translating ideas into practice.[32] In a way, he builds upon a central teaching of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav: "It is good indeed to make prayer out of Torah."[33] In reading the Jewish library with an eye toward our contemporary environmental situation, I consider how these teachings might sensitize us to immense suffering—in our immediate vicinity, and across the world—while also opening our eyes to the beauty, radiance, and abundance of this remarkable planet. I also give thought to how various sources might be developed or adapted into a contemplative exercise, from passages in the Talmud and rulings of Jewish law to poems or theological excurses. All of these can, with a bit of creativity, be turned into contemplative techniques through sensitive and engaged reading; the mind and heart direct the body, but the work of the hands can expand the inner realm.[34]

For this reason, another important feature of Jewish contemplative ecology is locating the commandments (*mitsvot*) as sites of reflection. The commandments are rituals of attention; they guide the flow of affect and shape the mind and body of the worshipper or practitioner. Scholars of Ritual Studies or Contemplative Studies often struggle to make sense of the transcendent authority and normative social, theological, and personal significance that the commandments carry in Jewish life. Medieval philosophers and mystics developed an extensive network of ideas

to explain the "reasons" or "rationales" of the commandments (*ta'amei ha-mitsvot*). For such thinkers, "the domain of ritual," claimed Charles Mopsik, "was an extraordinary laboratory of ideas."[35] In many cases, the physical practice of the commandments served as an embodied prompt for sustained contemplative reflection.[36] While Paul Ricoeur suggested that a hermeneutical approach to ritual is available "to anybody who *can read*,"[37] we might go farther: the ritual *qua* text, a gestural site of embodied interpretation, is available to anyone who *can do*.

Some of the traditional commandments may reflect implicit ecological values, but many—perhaps most—will require formulating a new set of rationales and reasons to assist in this work of developing our moral imaginations. Still other commandments may need to be rewritten such that their grammar and choreography, the stipulations and laws, reach toward the demands of our hour. An ancient rabbinic tradition suggests that all commandments were given solely "*le-tsaref bahen et ha-beriyot*,"[38] to "ennoble," "refine" or "transform" those who perform them—at least, they *should*, as we remember that the forms and their highest ideals of the rituals ought to be aligned. But the phrase *le-tsaref bahen et ha-beriyot* can also be read as suggesting that the grand aim of the commandments is to establish bonds of connectivity between all forms of life, another possible translation of that Hebrew phrase. Our day, and the ecological catastrophe it carries, requires a theology of embodiment grounded not just in mind, text, and history, but in our many faceted experiences, and moral struggles in this world, in our perspective within the vital ecosystem of interactive zones of knowledge. Contemplative work is a source of theology, as is the deep inner well of interior experience and contemplative journeying, but we ought to pursue a theology of the hands, a type of somatic wisdom cultivated through the practice of ritual and expressed through the craft of interpretation. Contemplative ecology teaches us new ways of seeing the beauty of this world, but also how to work with and experience the spiritual and physical brokenness that has become a defining feature of our age.

STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE

A contemplative approach to ecology raises the possibility that equitable, thoughtful, and systematic responses to climate change can only emerge from acknowledging the profound brokenness of our current moment. Communities of activists and environmental scientists often assert that we are "running out of time" or the necessity of acting swiftly "before it is too late." It is much harder, but more honest, to admit that in many respects it is already too late. Dramatic environmental processes have been set in motion that will not abate for centuries and millennia, even if industrialized nations were to become carbon-neutral instantaneously. In reflecting on the implications of denying our place in this story, it is worth revisiting Vaclav Havel's searing indictment of the Soviet repression: "The profound crisis of human identity brought on by living within a lie, a crisis which in turn makes such a life possible, certainly possesses a moral dimension as well; it appears, among other things, as a deep moral crisis in society."[39] Emphasizing fracture—what the poet Adrienne Rich called "diving into the wreck," or what the environmental scientist and philosopher Donna Haraway calls "staying with the trouble"—reminds us that the devastation of climate change is already eminently and painfully visible, even if it is unevenly distributed.[40]

A first step in meeting the present moment is not to rush to solutions, but to recognize the situation for what it is by carefully examining the current ecological travesty. Technological solutions may yet have a role, but they cannot change the fact that we, and an enormous number

of the species that have co-evolved with us across the past millennia, cannot live upon the planet we are creating. Renewal can happen only if, as Douglas Christie has argued, "the experience of loss and the sense of being bound to the natural world can be fully acknowledged, taken into our consciousness, brought into the center of our moral and spiritual awareness."[41] Species have been lost, ecosystems have been fractured, and both carbon emissions and persistent environmental pollution have entered stages of extreme gravity and complexity. Climate science across the past decades has helped us understand the mechanics of these issues in ever-greater detail, but we have not yet begun to deal with the profound social, economic, and spiritual problems that have led us to this point.

But tragedy and apocalypse are no strangers to the religious imagination. Anna Gade has shown that, in classical Islam, the transformation and destruction of this world are seen as a moral and spiritual extension of human activity.[42] "The ethical and affective dispositions of people in the life of this world," she writes, ". . . will naturally carry on into future environments."[43] Catherine Keller has argued that the Christian apocalyptic tradition offers ways of thinking about the social and theological havoc of climate change. Rather than an inscrutable ending of all things, Keller reminds her readers that Christian sources express a "symbolically charged spiral of catastrophes, vividly amping up the destruction of a *particular* world."[44] Yet contemplating the inescapable "singularity" of our time does not, she argues, lead inevitably to nihilism or panic. The concept of *apokalypsis* lends us a tradition of revelation, of "removing the veil," a movement of opening and transformation that allows for the constructive possibility of alternative futures.

For many religious and Indigenous thinkers, in fact, the world has already ended. As Kyle Whyte has noted, many Indigenous peoples already live in worlds that could reasonably be described as their ancestors' worst fears, a fact that is compounded further by catastrophic climate change.[45] For Black theologians writing in America, the enslavement of Africans was the end of a world, but that happened more than once again during the century and a half of oppression and murder that came in the wake of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. Facing the unimaginable devastation of his community, the Crow chief Plenty Coup is said to have remarked: "But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened."[46] This is not the end of history that characterizes the neoliberal dream, but the end of all meaningful cultural and spiritual activity as it had been known. "The Anthropocene is the Apocalypse," claim Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Danowski Viveiros de Castro, and therefore "indigenous people have something to teach us when it comes to apocalypses . . . for the native people of the Americas, *the end of the world already happened*—five centuries ago."[47] To build upon the clever words of William Gibson, we might say that the world has already ended, but that the ending has not been evenly distributed. We might follow, rather, the title of Franny Choi's recent poem, "The World Keeps Ending, and The World Goes On"—apocalypse follows apocalypse, in a cascade of decimation and devastation that is ongoing, multifactorial, and, in terms of climate change, ultimately inescapable.[48]

Jewish traditions can, I believe, help us do the difficult work of staying with the trouble—of opening ourselves to the unhurried but unmistakable losses of climactic tragedy and making sense of a world that is becoming radically transformed. While modern thinking has taught us to see our planet as stable (following a scientific translation of that Aristotelian trope), rabbinic and Jewish

medieval thinkers were quite frank about the ongoing possibility that God might "return the world to chaos and emptiness."[49] Classical Jewish sources refer to God creating worlds and destroying them long before ours, perhaps even using the broken fragments of one as the foundations of the next.[50] If not by flood, rabbinic sources frequently refer to the fact that God may well destroy the world through fire or through some other type of elemental activity.[51] In fact, only positive human activity is said to have the power to stave off this constant spiritual entropy. Only consistent gestures of compassion, connection, and truthful action allow heaven and earth to endure.[52]

Change and catastrophe, both real and imagined, are an essential part of the intellectual landscape of Jewish mystical thought.[53] The medieval Kabbalists developed a teaching of *Shemittot*, a doctrine of "cosmic cycles" that speaks of the world as shifting and changing in enormous, even unthinkable ways; it has collapsed and been reborn, recreated as something new, and will continue to do so until the messianic age. Rather than the permanent destruction of the world, their story of the world is one of permanent beginnings and different becomings that are nonetheless terrifying and destabilizing.[54] The sixteenth-century mystic and scholar Rabbi Moshe Isserles thought through the implications of a world that might come to an end. He contemplated the various cosmic cycles in mystical terms and attempted to grapple with the nature of religious living on the edge of catastrophe, as the destruction of the world is not only possible but a given.[55] His work provides us with a penetrating reflection on the meaning of spiritual work in light of the world's demolition. One ought to read about this feature of history, claims Isserles, in order to internalize the fact of future destruction and to carve out a contemplative space that is less dependent on the material world.[56]

The Zohar, the crown jewel of Jewish mystical literature, builds a mighty myth on the shadowy biblical account of the kings of Edom who ruled before the kings of Israel (Gen. 36:31 and 1 Chron. 1:43), describing these figures as mystical rulers whose inharmonious immaturity and self-interest led to their downfall and death. For the authors of the Zohar, these kings became a way of describing the prehistory of the world itself, an allusion to the instability of God's own self.[57] In the hands of later Jewish mystics, this story was woven into a new myth called "the breaking of the vessels" (*shevirat ha-kelim*), as the vessels of divine creation shattered and sparks of God's light were scattered throughout the world. The broken forms of these vessels are the "husks" (*kelippot*) that obscure the sparks and must be broken by acts of devotion. In some accounts, this myth is described as a cosmic and divine tragedy, whereas for many other Kabbalists, this breaking of the vessels allows for the possibility of dynamic creativity and transformation:

> The supernal vacuum is like a field, in which are sown ten points of light. Just as each grain of seed grows according to its fertile power, so does each of these points. And just as a seed cannot grow to perfection as long as it maintains its original form—growth coming only through decomposition—so these points could not become perfect configurations as long as they maintained their original form but only by shattering.[58]

Our world can end, claim the Kabbalists, and our current reality is but one of the many possibilities.[59] Whereas the notion of *gilgul* or "reincarnation" refers to souls from human bodies migrating into non-human creatures,[60] the concept of *benei halof*—of epochs or eons in which

hierarchies are utterly transformed—offers an even more radical vision of upending.[61] The world can indeed be totally otherwise, and, claims Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, splendidly so:

> Know that, in fact, the world is a rotating wheel. It is like a dreidel, where everything goes in cycles. A person may become an angel, and an angel can become a person. Head becomes foot, and foot becomes head. Everything goes in cycles, revolving and alternating. All things interchange, one from another and one to another, elevating the low and lowering the high.
>
> This is because all things have one root.
>
> All creation is like a rotating wheel, revolving and oscillating. At one time, something can be on top, a head, with another on the bottom, a foot. Then the situation is reversed. Head becomes foot, and foot becomes head. A human changes to an angel, and an angel becomes a human.[62]

Future worlds may look very different indeed and, rather than averting our eyes and pretending change can be prevented or searching immediately for solutions, we must acknowledge that the vessels have begun to shatter once more. Jewish sources urge us to lean into that which is broken, to live with that "sense of an ending" because that is where the origins of change, transformation, and rebirth are to be found.

Many Jewish reflections on destruction and devastation are linked to the razing of the Temple in Jerusalem, a cataclysmic event that, like the suffering of enslavement in Egypt, is relived in a participatory manner through rituals of mourning enshrined in the liturgical calendar and developed into contemplative practices by later authors.[63] In the words of Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose: "Mourning is about dwelling with a loss and so coming to appreciate what it means, how the world has changed, and how we must *ourselves* change and renew our relationships if we are to move forward from here."[64] Such practices are meant to penetrate the worshipper's heart, instilling a sense of the fragility of our lives and of the surrounding world, while reminding us that our actions have dramatic consequences that we may only begin to understand. Other techniques evolved in response to local ecological calamity: drought, famine, pandemic, and plague. These sources, such as those highlighted in the Talmudic tractate called Ta'anit ("Fast Days"), suggest that only social connection, communal action, and individual response can address these issues.

> What is the order of fast days? The ark is removed to the city square and burnt ashes are placed upon it, and upon the head of the leader, and upon the head of the vice-leader, and each and every person places them upon their head.
>
> The elder recites teachings of reproof: "My friends, it is not stated with regard to the people of Nineveh: And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting. Rather: 'And God saw their deeds, that they had turned from their evil way' (Jonah 3:10). In the Prophets it says: 'Rend your hearts and not your garments [and return to the Lord your God]' (Joel 2:13)."

> They stand for prayer. An elder, experienced in prayer, descends before the ark. This person must have children and an empty house, so that their heart will be full in the prayer.[65]

The ritual outlined in this ancient source affords a grammar for public mourning in the face of precariousness and, perhaps, tragedy. This practice brings a new taxonomy of fear to the town square, to the urban seats of economic and social power, involving the leadership as well as the rest of the community. It emphasizes the values of reciprocity, solidarity, and interconnection rather than escapism or scapegoating, with the choreography (placing ashes upon the Torah!) serving as a jarring physical reminder of the need for accounting and change. The script here is essentially communal, reminding us of the need to think beyond our own smallness. "In that global warming poses a powerful challenge to the idea that the free pursuit of individual interests always leads to the general good," Amitav Ghosh has written, "it also challenges a set of beliefs that underlies a deeply rooted cultural identity, one that has enjoyed unparalleled success over the last two centuries."[66] Rituals can do this work of jolting us into community, shifting our modes of thinking and attention as well as shaping our actions and being in the world.

Here I turn to the great medieval jurist and philosopher Maimonides, who highlights the values of responsibility when we are confronted with difficult and even seemingly imponderable situations. His words here represent a kind of condensation of an ethos found within Ta'anit, and Maimonides demands accounting for one's actions, collective and personal, as the only ethical response to tragedy:

> [Fasting] is one of the paths of repentance. As the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when overtaken by trouble, everyone realizes that misfortune has come upon them because of their misdeeds. . . .
>
> If, on the other hand, people do not cry out in prayer and do not sound an alarm, but merely say that it is the way of the world for such a thing to happen to them, and that their trouble is a matter of pure chance, they have chosen a cruel path which will cause them to persevere in their evil deeds and thus bring additional troubles upon them.[67]

To explain environmental change by claiming that such things just happen is, claims Maimonides, a total evacuation of moral responsibility. Some versions of this theology might presume a naïve cause and effect—my car was crushed under a tree, so I must have sinned—but, on the other hand, Maimonides is calling us to remember that the world around us is very much shaped by our actions, and that non-attention has devastating consequences. We should note that his words are based on Jeremiah 5:24–27, a withering indictment of the shallow religiosity and insipid immorality—Bruno Latour might call the vertiginous inequality of our own day—that leads to a breakdown of bountiful natural systems.

Recalling Whyte's arguments on the importance of mindsets of coordination rather than crisis, we might say that the rituals described above give us the space to search for answers and responses. These patterns of mind and prayer also remind us of the importance of grounding our response in mutuality, receptivity, and shared obligation. Like the matsutake mushroom described so eloquently in the work of Anna Tsing, that humble but sturdy fungus that grows amid the ruined

remains of devastated pine forests, we need to develop pathways of resilience rooted in connection. Rather than averting our eyes, such work allows that which is difficult to come into focus.

We should remember that, if approached correctly, decay, change, and collapse can lead to growth and transformation. In the words of an eighteenth-century Jewish mystic: "It is known that anything that exists cannot become a different thing unless it first becomes nothing. Then something new can come into existence with greater bounty than before. This may be compared to a seed planted in the ground. It has to decompose to bring forth a plant that will carry many seeds."[68] We are called to look at that which is broken, that which is filled with shattered vessels, because those are the places of sacred work:

> "And the people stood far away, and Moses approached the darkness, for God was there" (Ex. 20:14). . . . One who is aware will gaze upon an obstacle and find the blessed Creator there. . . . One who is unaware will see the obstacle and immediately flee. . . . This is the meaning of the verse "And the people stood far away." When they saw the darkness—the obstacle—they stood far away. "And Moses," who represents the awareness of all Israel, "approached the darkness, for God was there"—in the obstacle, within which God is hidden.[69]

The obstacles and forces that stand in our way—including what Isabelle Stengers has called "the intrusion of Gaia"—are terrifying, but they are also indications of opportunities for change.[70] Rather than turning away from that which is difficult, we are invited to contemplate it. This does not mean resigning ourselves to the inevitability of tragedy and inequality, but remembering that *apokalypsis* is about the disclosure of alternatives—actively stretching the imagination and looking for what is sometimes called the "Adjacent Possible."[71]

Rabbinic teachings argued that, just as the Temple was destroyed by fire, it shall someday be rebuilt through fire. The poet Maya Khosla draws our eyes to the truth of this myth on the biological level:

> The burned and crackling world not in shambles. Not gone to ash and ash alone. Sapsucker, pileated, black-backed woodpeckers, all join in the jig of genetic diversity. All build from scratch. What do they crave? Riches. Riches hidden in the wide-open arches rising from gray.[72]

So, too, she writes:

> Once we have looked away, once we have mourned
> and banished all smoldering thoughts about the tribe
> of blackened trees replacing the known world—
> for now and another season—and the last long fingers
> of smoke have been ushered out by wind, a ticking begins.
> No one has seen them arriving in such numbers, but the birds
> are neither lost nor passing through. They are simply linked
> tight to the newborn scents of ash and rain, to the promise
> of white fruits, the riches concealed by bark.[73]

When we look at burned-out forests, we see a mortuary, but forest scientists—along with a vast array of flora and fauna—see something different: they see a nursery. Ash gives rise to ascent, burning to blossoming. That which has been destroyed can yet become the foundation of something new.

Broken vessels hold traces of the infinity that they once held. The pieces of the tablets shattered by Moses are placed in the holy ark alongside the complete ones. A synagogue that has been destroyed must be treated with sanctity and reverence, and the remains of God's house—the Temple—remain holy even once it has been laid waste. [74] Working with that which is broken, in fact, is an act of *imitatio dei*: "Rabbi Alexandri said: 'If an ordinary person makes use of a broken vessel, it is a shameful thing. But the blessed Holy One only makes use of broken vessels, as it is written, "God is close to the broken-hearted"' (Ps 34:19)."[75] His dictum recalls Michel de Certeau's magnificent claim about the mystics: "The mystics do not reject the ruins that surround them. They remain there. They go there . . . these disorderly, quasi-disinherited places—places of abjection, of trial . . . and not places guaranteeing an identity or salvation—represented the actual situation of contemporary Christianity. They were the theaters of the present struggles."[76] Ruins are, in the landscape of Jewish imagination, reflections of the past that remain forever "resonant with power."[77] They are also places of revelation where the voice of God may be heard, often reminding us that we need to change our behavior.[78] They are also places fraught with danger, and we are warned in a Talmudic tale against going into them alone: in venturing into the past, or into the slow-burning ruins of the present, we need company and kin.

WEAVING INTERCONNECTIVITY

A second core theme, another affordance of Jewish contemplative ecology, is coming to see our relationship to the world and its inhabitants in a profoundly new way. Jewish mystical sources commonly refer to the importance of transforming our vision, expanding our sensitivity in an attempt to grasp something of the deeper awareness of this world.[79] The commandments in particular are said to train one's eyes to see more deeply, transforming them from "eyes of flesh" (*'einei basar*) into "eyes of spirit" or "soul" (*'einei ru'ah*, *sekhel*, or *neshamah*).[80] Rather than ignoring the physical sensorium, the soul is said to grow through the work of attuning the senses. As the twentieth-century Rabbi Shapira claims:

> By means of the five senses, one comes to know about the world. Once you grasp something of it, you can act or speak of the world, about things they want or need. Without the senses to awaken us first . . . we would know nothing at all of the things in this world and cannot work with them. Not only do those things become known to us by this awakening, but a spark of the soul hidden deep within becomes known to us through this as well.[81]

We are accustomed to thinking about what happens in the landscapes around us as set back or removed from what transpires within our hearts, minds, and bodies.[82] Yet Jewish sources invite us to reconsider the porous boundaries between soul, self, body, and world, remembering that these interwoven fields are mutually supportive and constructive. There can be no human being without our inter-inclusion within them.

The Zohar describes King Solomon as plucking a walnut from a tree, and, after contemplating the fruit and its many layers of shell and nutmeat, coming to see that all forms of life are infinitely interrelated as bodies and souls:

> When King Solomon descended to the depth of the nut, as is written: "I descended to the nut garden" (Song of Songs 6:11), he took the shell of a nut, contemplated all those shells and knew . . . [that] the blessed Holy One had to create everything in the world, arraying the world. All consists of a kernel within, with several shells covering the kernel. The entire world is like this, above and below, from the head of the mystery of the primordial point to the end of all rungs: all is this within that, that within this, so that one is the shell of another, which itself is the shell of another. . . . This, the kernel; this, the shell. Although a garment, it becomes the kernel of another layer.
>
> Everything is fashioned the same way below, so that a human in this world manifests this image: kernel and shell, spirit and body. All for the arrayal of the world, and so the world is.[83]

Wandering into the garden and paying close attention to the intricacies of its vegetative life, Solomon achieved a new way of seeing the world. The legendary king of Israel noticed the majestic simplicity and interactivity of the fruits and nuts that surrounded him in this garden by gazing intently upon their physical forms, coming to understand that the world is filled with an inexhaustible number of intertwined dimensions. Much as an edible kernel of nutmeat is bound to its shell, the many levels of cosmos and reality are inherently connected with one another. Likewise, the human soul—or spirit—and the body are part of a single indivisible entity rather than two distinct or discrete forms. Contemplating this endless progression of interconnected forms, Solomon discovered that things appearing to be an exterior shell of materiality at first blush are actually filled with sweet divinity.

This process of emanation is elsewhere likened in the Zohar to the work of a silkworm or a snail.[84] Much as these creatures generate an external "home" to which they remain essentially connected, the cosmos is described as an endless series of interconnected garments that are layered upon one another. Without overturning the singularity of human beings, a move that would have been impossible for this anthropocentric medieval text, the Zohar argues that nothing is disconnected from the endless font of God's energy. Within this strikingly nonhierarchical version of the "great chain of being,"[85] all creatures and layers of the physical world are interconnected by their ultimate divine source.

This example about Solomon is surely meant to be more than a retrospective bit of exegesis about the mythic history of Israel. The text's rich portrait of Solomon's imaginative efforts to conceive of the "inescapable network of mutuality"[86] could serve, I believe, as the "kernel" of the reader's own contemplative practice.[87] This depiction of the garden as the place in which knowledge of God and the world grows, expanding upon both vertical and horizontal axes, also provides an interesting pre-modern correlate to the "rhizomatic" theory of knowledge described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[88] Rather than linear advancement, Deleuze and Guattari write, the development of ideas and our patterns of thought mirror or "imitate" the nonbinary aspects of nature; new growth erupts in expansive multiplicity and multi-dimensionality from

originary roots. This same Zoharic teaching continues with a description of how the entire cosmos unfolds from a single fleck of divinity: "The expansion of that point became a palace, in which the point was clothed—a radiance unknowable, so intense its lucency. This palace, a garment for that concealed point, is a radiance beyond measure, yet not as gossamer or translucent as the primordial point, hidden and treasured."[89] This inestimably bright point spins itself into gossamer of ever-inclusive garments that together form material and spiritual existence—what Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio has called "the nets of intimacy" that guide, stabilize, and enrich our lives.[90]

Such teachings call the readers of this evocative, affective book of medieval Jewish mysticism to realize that they, too, are embedded within a polychromatic universe filled with divine radiance. The experience of life in this world is described as a veritable sensorium of raw data for theological reflection. These moments spark reflective interiority, but, as physical beings, our modes of reflection and knowledge building are also deeply situated within and constructed by the variegated phenomena of our life-realm. "The living world," scholar and activist David Abram writes, ". . . is both the soil in which all our sciences are rooted and the rich humus into which their results ultimately return, whether as nutrients or as poisons."[91] Rather than diminishing the importance of this-worldly experience in developing knowledge, a common tactic in post-Cartesian science and philosophy, medieval Jewish sources anticipate the importance attributed to intersubjectivity in the works of later phenomenologists.[92]

The Zohar asks its readers to conceive of the universe as an infinite array of kernels, of garments layered upon some garments and concealed within others. In mythic terms, this expresses a conviction that the interconnected universe and its biodiversity are the very ground of our own intellectual and religious awakening. "Besides that which I directly see of a particular oak tree or building," Abram writes, "I know or intuit that there are also those facets of the oak or building that are visible to the other perceivers that I see."[93] This demands that we train our eyes upon the "world that we count on without necessarily paying it much attention . . . [which] is always there when we begin to reflect or philosophize."[94] We ought to do this with a heightened sensitivity to the claims of connection and obligation made upon us by those to whom we are fundamentally linked.[95] "The universe," Thomas Berry wrote, "is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. The devastation of the planet can be seen as a direct consequence of the loss of this capacity for human presence to and reciprocity with the nonhuman world."[96]

This vision of the blending of self and world, of a porous landscape that vibrates with power and shimmers with divinity, is made even more obvious in later Jewish mystical teachings. The writings of the sixteenth-century Moshe Cordovero, for example, state: "The essence of divinity is found in every single thing. Nothing but it exists. Since it causes every thing to be, no thing can live by anything else. It enlivens them; its existence exists in each existent."[97] This theological reflection was, for Cordovero, embedded within a contemplative exercise in which individuals imagine their place in the infinite sweep of divinity, considering their smallness while understanding the profound interconnectivity of all forms of life.[98] Such descriptions of the linkage of life and land, of radical divine immanence, were a cornerstone of Hasidic theology. Sources in the eighteenth century dared to speak words that would have been abhorrent to those involved in the "Pantheism controversy" that had embroiled German-speaking philosophers at that same time:

> The blessed Creator made everything and is everything. In each moment, without ever ceasing, the Divine bestows blessing upon God's creatures and upon all the worlds above and below, onto the angels and onto all living beings. It is for this reason that we say in our morning prayers, "Who *forms* light and creates darkness" (Isa. 45:7) and not "Who *formed* light and created darkness." We use the present tense, because God is constantly forming, revitalizing all of life, moment to moment; all is from the blessed Holy One, who is perfect and all-inclusive.[99]

God's light was focused into delimited structures so that the otherwise incomprehensible divine majesty could enter the threshold of human experience. The finite or material realm is illusory to the extent that its every element remains a garment for the Divine, but this world is decidedly real, and the work of ritual involves learning to pay attention to specific aspects of that world in particular and highly scripted ways. Each individual dimension, a translation of the infinite Divine, has its own significance and importance.[100] Hasidic sources confer human action with the power to guide the movement of vitality—called, among other things, divine "abundance" (*shefa'*), "light" (*or*), "holiness" (*kedushah*), or "life force" (*hiyut*)—coursing through world and self.

Shneur Zalman of Liady offered a powerful description of God's presence and enduring love for the world, suggesting that the ideal time for meditating on this truth is while the worshiper recites the first two sentences of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) and the brief liturgical phrase "blessed be the name of the presence of God's majesty, forever and ever" (*barukh shem kevod malkhuto leolam va'ed*), which follows it. These two connected units are, respectively, called the "upper" and "lower" unifications (*yiḥuda ilaa* and *yiḥuda tataa*) by the Zohar. The second part of Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Amarim: Tanya* outlines a sophisticated description of the relationship between the infinite God and the phenomenal world. It is one of the boldest articulations of mystical panentheism in early Hasidic literature, and, though the work is intricate and at times difficult, the heart of his message is both simple and resoundingly clear: There is nothing in the cosmos but God. All existence is Divinity. Succinctly captured in the words commonly invoked in Chabad Hasidic sources, *alts iz Got*—everything is God. The world would return to its pre-Creation state of unity and hence total nothingness without the constant influx of God's energy. This sacred vitality is immanent, dwelling within the cosmos to animate it.

This book is anchored in an interpretation of the verse "Know this day and take into your heart that Y-H-V-H is God, in the heavens above and upon the earth below; there is no other" (Deut. 4:39). Shneur Zalman takes this to mean that God literally fills the worlds with divine energy, a fact that must be contemplated long and hard to be taken to heart. He reads "there is no other" quite literally as "there is nothing other than God," suggesting that our perception of a differentiated cosmos, as well as our own individual existence, is ultimately an illusion. Like the body is filled by the soul, or as a ray of light broadcasts the luminous heat of the sun, our perception of the multiplicity of the material realm is true only from our perspective, since nothing truly exists from God's point of view. We remain fully incorporated within our divine source, and, like a ray of sunlight, our existence merges into the infinite light of the Divine. Shneur Zalman's interpretation of the liturgy thus binds reflective meditation on God's love and presence to the devotional practice of reciting the *Shema*, recasting it as a contemplative moment of unification with God. This transforms a twice-daily practice surely upheld by everyone in Shneur Zalman's

community into a search for the Divine manifest in the world. There is an ancient tradition of drawing together the ritual fringes (*tsitsit*) worn during prayer as one recites the *Shema*, holding all of them in a single hand and contemplating how the many strings point toward a linked divine unity that is both transcendent and immanent.[101] Regarding the Hebrew Bible's declaration of "they shall make themselves fringes" (Num. 15:38), Tsevi Hirsh of Nadvorna—a colleague of Shneur Zalman of Liady—explained as follows: "This hints that they should make themselves into a way to see God. . . . Make yourselves into seeing, the light coming from within you, so that you may see close up."[102] The work of this ritual, then, is to enable one to see the God that is otherwise hidden and to open our eyes to a vision in which the whole earth shimmers with divinity.

At the same time, just as a person's true essence may only be grasped when projected through his thoughts, words, and deeds, Shneur Zalman argues that the inner divine nature of the worlds can *only* be sensed through the mediating force of the cosmos in all its majestic fullness. This, then, is the secret meaning of "blessed be the name of the presence of God's majesty, forever and ever"—while unity is the axiom of God's presence, our experience of divinity through the myriad phenomena of this world is no less important or powerful. Elsewhere in *Likkutei Amarim: Tanya*, we read:

> The divine radiance manifests its power and ability in the elements of the physical earth with immensity and presence, surpassing . . . even the hosts of heaven. They lack the power and ability to bring forth constantly something out of nothing (*yesh meayin*), like the element of earth. During the seven days of creation, there shone in this world an illumination from the light of the Endless, in the mode of boundless love . . . to make herbs and trees, and fruits, sprout from nothing into being, constantly, from year to year. This is a measure of infinity, for if this world should subsist for myriads of myriads of years, they will still sprout forth from year to year.[103]

This description of the shimmering divine power within the ground itself is another fertile source for developing contemplative practice. Through attentiveness and sensory connection to the world in all its vitality, we come to understand that the life force that pulses within the landscape—and within all elements of the physical world—is the fluttering flow of divinity. Rather than grasping God in some abstract transcendence, our spiritual eyes are dilated and transformed by re-envisioning divine presence *through* engagement with the world.

Contemplating the world, paying mind to its majesty as well as the innumerable seemingly ordinary phenomena, thus reveals an artesian font of divine wisdom that courses through every element of physicality—so, too, the specific forms of behavior exhibited by all animal species. Embracing their mysterious capacity to act in ways that do not conform to behavioralist assumptions or human understanding:

> Within each and every creature, large and small, and within their every limb, the animate soul—a portion of divine illumination—is found. This is what does all the wondrous and wise things needed for the persistence of its species; [so vast] that the human mind cannot fathom. But we, human beings, gaze upon these lowly beings as if they lacked understanding or vitality.[104]

Rabbi Shapira's writings describe the divine interconnectivity of the world in remarkable terms. He argues the workings of the trophic web are, at every stage, part of the unfolding of divinity that is both beautiful and terrifyingly violent. The economy of sacred vitality—a divine ecology—is revealed as energy is consumed by the plants, and turned into life force, energy, and growth, then metabolized by the animals that eat the vegetation and turn it into the stuff of their own bones and bodies.[105]

Such thinking might be fruitfully contrasted with works of figures like the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who famously argued, "The pleasure in this world, it has been said, outweighs the pain. . . . If the reader wishes to see shortly whether this statement is true, let him compare the respective feelings of two animals, one of which is engaged in eating the other."[106] Seeking to disprove Leibniz's rather optimistic vision of this world as an ideal one, Schopenhauer argued that predation demonstrates that ours is a realm of pain, suffering, and devouring, a "battle-ground of tormented and agonized beings" in which the larger, stronger animals must inevitably become the "living grave of thousands of others" in a torturous process of consumption.[107] For Rabbi Shapira, by contrast, the fact that nature is "red in tooth and claw" is simply part of the complexity of the divine self-becoming to which we, as participants in that process, must become attuned.[108]

We are invited to become part of that unfolding through expanding our capacity for sensitivity. Certain places may be particularly well-suited for the work of opening mind and heart to the fullness of God and being surrounded by the Divine. The Zohar also takes the physical landscape of its imaginal world seriously. The stories about Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai and the wanderings of his mystical fellowship (called the *hevraya*, or "comrades") are more than a convenient frame for its theological teachings: their adventures, many of which take place in gardens and forests, serve to mirror and amplify the Zohar's mystical ideology.[109] Theological discussions are sparked by encountering animals, trees, mountains, and rivers, with the experience of such living and inanimate phenomena reflexively shaping the *hevraya*'s interpretation of their sacred texts:

> Rabbi Shim'on, Rabbi El'azar, Rabbi Abba, and Rabbi Yose were sitting one day beneath some trees on the plain by the Sea of Ginnosar. Rabbi Shim'on said, "How nice is the shade of these trees covering us! We must adorn this place with words of Torah!"[110]

Because trees are infused with their own kind of divine, vegetative interiority, they are both recipients and participants in the work of interpretation. Our words adorn their branches like fruit, and their inspiration seeps into our very being.

Deserts, too, have their own type of mystical power and invocation.[111] In the words of the medieval commentator Bahye ben Asher, we read about how it was that Moses came to his revelatory awareness at the burning bush:

> "And Moses was shepherding" (Ex. 3:1). Moses held fast to this craft, the custom of the early righteous ones pursued by Abel and our other forebears, including the founders of the tribes. The reason for this: one thus becomes distanced from human habitation, where sin is rampant, and also sequesters themselves at length for prophecy. It says "into the wilderness" (Ex. 3:1), teaching us that Moses took his flock far from the pastures of others so that his sheep would not take unlawfully from the grass of others. . . .

> Moses perceived three things: the fire, the angel, and the Shekhinah. First he noticed the fire that was burning the bush, although the bush was not consumed. He saw this with his fleshly-eyes (*'einei basar*), while being wide awake. When he saw the bush burning with flames, he recognized it as a sulfurous fire from down below [i.e. with earthly causes]. With his mind set in this way, he saw that the bush was not being consumed and therefore wanted to draw near. . . . Had he considered that it might be a heavenly fire, he would not have wanted to approach it.
>
> But, after witnessing the fire, his mind grew strengthened and he saw the angel. Thus it says, "and the angel of God appeared to him from in the blazing fire out of the bush" (Ex. 3:2)—meaning that first he saw the fire, and then he saw the angel amid those flames. After his [realization,] his mind grew even stronger in witnessing the angel and he saw, in a prophetic vision, the glory of Shekhinah. . . .
>
> Because this was the very start of Moses's prophecy, the blessed Holy One wanted to educate him very slowly, raising him up from rung to rung until his mind had grown strong. To what may this be compared? To a person who sits in a dark house for a long time. If such a person exits immediately and gazes upon the sun, his sight will grow dim. Therefore, he must gaze upon the light incrementally until he becomes accustomed to it. . . . Matters of the mind are like those of nature. Just as it happens to the intellect, it happens to the senses, for the capacities of the soul are linked to those of the body.[112]

Moses was lured by the wonder of something that was at once both miraculous and ordinary and had prepared for this vision by many months of shepherding his flock away from the distractions of human society. He came to witness a revelation of God's presence, the divine voice speaking from amid the world itself, in a process of progressive layers of deeper attunement. This sensitivity requires training, a type of sacred education much like Plato's famous parable of the cave.[113]

Revered places like the Temple in Jerusalem are said to be particularly good for this sort of revelation, but, in Jewish sources, these holy spaces are far from exclusive. One common Hasidic interpretation of God's words to Moses at the burning bush, "Remove your sandals from your feet (*shal ne'alekha me-'al raglekha*), for the place on which you stand is holy ground" rereads the divine words in a most striking way: "Remove the bonds (*man'ul*) of habituation (*hergel*) that occlude your eyes, and thus come to realize that this place is already sacred." The writer Barry Lopez has reminded his readers that appreciation of place doesn't demand a pristine wilderness, but can be accessed wherever you are:

> Pick a place to live and become an apprentice. Doesn't really matter where. It can be in the city, even. I don't like the idea that there's something holy to living in the city. So pick a place in the sense of a geographical locale, and start to look for the patterns. . . .
>
> Great damage has been done. We've lost languages and cultures and particular species of animals, and we've abandoned worthy projects. But we're not prisoners of time.

> The possibility to evolve in an unprecedented direction is always before us. And one of the things that the components of landscape teach you is that everything does not grow at the same rate or change at the same rate.[114]

Becoming apprenticed to place and learning from it through those precious contemplative ways of knowing carries with it a set of social obligations and ecological moral imperatives. Corrina Gould, a tribal spokesperson for the Lisjan/Ohlone people, has reminded us that developing this strong sense of place has ethical and political implications:

> When we talk about our ceremonies, when we talk about living in reciprocity, it's really about going back so that we can go forward in a good kind of, in a good way, to remember what we were originally taught, and everyone has original teaching, sometimes we forgot, because of moving around the world, because we're far from our own homelands, because we can't go back home, because there's many people that can't go back home. But it's then our responsibility to learn "What is your responsibility then on someone else's homeland?"[115]

Jewish sources task their readers with looking beyond the multiplicity and denying it, but to see all parts of the physical world—each form of life, every plant and animal, but also every stone, rock, and river—as expressions of divinity. They underscore that people are part of an economy of life, of vitality, of breath, of sacred vitality—of circulated divinity that suffuses all aspects of the cosmos. Attention to this entanglement presents us with the end of nature, not in Bill McKibben's sense of the reach of spoilage but in Timothy Morton's sense that an external project of "nature" must be overcome in order to understand how we are part of the integrated fabric of the world.[116] It helps us also to conceive of God's vulnerability, which reflects the vulnerability of the physical world. And for that sense, how might we generate a toothsome ethic grounded in this way of looking at the world? Mary-Jane Rubenstein has suggested that we must "*be* nature differently."[117] An awareness that God is everywhere, expressed in all forms of life, as well as through the physical landscape of our planet, would surely change our relationship to the non-human world. But how do we come to this knowledge, and how do we act in concert and in harmony with the many obligations it places upon us? It is through ritual, through movements and practices that mark time and action as significant, developing our sense of embodiment and connection through techniques of breath, prayer, blessings, eating, and song.

PRACTICES OF PRESENCE

The meaning of Jewish ritual is constantly changing, and, while the details and particulars have also shifted over time, the flexibility in terms of the significance—social, existential, spiritual—of the commandments has been key to the ability of Jewish thinkers to adapt to new realities.[118] The meaning of these practices is not set in stone, and therefore the Jewish mystics attributed "endless" (*ein sof*) reasons to all aspects of the ritual system.[119] "Each commandment has a great purpose," claimed the thirteenth-century Menahem Recanati, "a hidden reason revealed through that commandment and which cannot be understood by any other commandment."[120] The commandments, are often described as an interconnected fabric: "like a single knot, since one

[commandment] cannot exist without the other, like a woven garment in which each and every thread is connected to and sustained by its neighbor."[121] Kabbalistic writers attributed a wide variety of purposes to the commandments, from arousing God, uniting the fractured elements of the cosmos and the sacred realm on high, and fulfilling a "divine need" to refining the body, mind, and soul of the practitioner. "Truly no deed is inconsequential," wrote Moshe Cordovero, reflecting the importance attributed to every aspect of Jewish practice.[122]

This emphasis on the power of certain rituals is complemented, and sometimes challenged, by the Hasidic call to infuse everyday activities with religious significance. Hasidic notions that oft-repeated ordinary deeds can be turned into religious rituals through careful intention strengthen a growing consensus among scholars who argue that, in the words of Michael Puett, the effectiveness of rituals "resides entirely in their ability to aid us in our everyday, fragmented lives."[123] There is no "space outside the ritual space," since all dimensions of life may be folded into the matrix of ritual and spark spiritual awakening. Rather than attempting to enact some idealized world, ritual "works precisely out of the incongruity of the subjunctive of ritual and the actual world of lived experience."[124] Ritual is an integral part of all spheres of human life and action, and in Hasidic eyes, even simple deeds can be transformed into a theurgic opportunity for empowerment, meaning making, and ritualized construction in a *modus vivendi* that is open to, and perhaps incumbent upon, each and every worshipper. Moreover, the commandments are said to impart somatic knowledge that is otherwise unattainable,[125] a wisdom that is not stagnant and abstract but rather "embodied, intersubjective, and active."[126] These many bodily rituals are tools or "scaffolds"—means of investigating the self and techniques through which we extend our cognitive abilities and deepen our interaction with the physical world.[127]

Let us begin, then, with breath, that fundamental human activity that binds all living beings in an intimate web of chemical, physical, and spiritual interconnection.[128] Breath is a symbol of life in the Hebrew Bible, of an animating force both human and divine, and shortness of breath is said to represent a type of small-mindedness (see Ex. 6:9) that must be expanded through the work of religious education. The Lithuanian sage and Talmudist Rabbi Hayim of Volozhin (1749–1821) remarked on the connective power of breath: "Is it not wondrous that the word for 'soul' (*neshamah*) is connected to that of 'breath' (*neshima*). We see that breath is the air that comes up from the heart, and *neshamah* is called breath because it refers to the breath of God."[129] In the Jewish imagination, breath is often linked to language and speech, because of the physicality of it but also because of an ancient tradition in which the verse of Adam being called "a living being" is translated as "a speaking being" once God's breath enters him. The Talmud even suggests that the breath of children, filled with a vital energy that is both playful and pure, causes the world itself to endure.[130] The breath of prayer is said to transform into those angels who ascend into God's kingdom, emerging from the body and then returning to the body once more to fill it with an animative power that is somehow both sublimely divine and utterly terrestrial.[131] The seventeenth-century mystic Isaiah Horowitz describes the breath cycle as part of the cosmic ecosystem: much as mist or fog rises into the heavens and then condenses into life-giving rain, so, too, the breath of human beings—set aloft through the power of study and worship—moves into heaven and then returns with an influx of sacred power and vitality.[132] As a constant practice of focus that both sharpens mental attunement and connects us to the elements around us, breathwork can transform the world.[133]

Explicit techniques for harnessing the power of breath do appear sprinkled throughout Jewish sources.[134] Contemplating breath is a reminder to pause during prayer—focusing on breath enables one's mind to settle upon the spaces in between the words, the interstitial moment in which the most repercussive theological work may be done.[135] Rabbi Shapira refers to breathwork as an opportunity to contemplate our connection to all things: "Frequently, when at home or in the street, intend with a broken heart: 'All the world is divinity. The grain of sand beneath my feet, the air that I am breathing within me, and all existence is in fact God's being. Why have I separated myself from the camp of Shekhinah as a separate entity? . . . Master of the world, draw me close to You.'"[136] Indeed, meditating on one's breath is described as a practice of fostering gratitude: one thanks God for each inbreath and every moment of exhale, since our existence is *always* conditional upon divine grace.[137] Training one's inner eye and body on one's breath is also a technique for contemplating constant recreation—as with taking a new breath, new spiritual life is always available to us, and everything can be otherwise.[138] Rabbi Nahman of Bratlsav recommends attention to breath as a transformative practice:

> One who wishes to return to God must become a new creation. This can happen through a sigh. The human being never stops breathing, at every moment we breathe out, and then breathe in, and this is the essence of our vitality. This breath is rooted on high. . . . A sigh is when one extends the breath, when it comes and goes out, pausing the breath, as is, "if you take away their breath, they perish [and return to their dust]" (Ps. 104:29). It is a type of death. Just as breath is paused before one is born, and it is taken away when they die. When you sigh, the breath is held and ceases.[139]

Pausing the cycle of breath is a kind of spiritual death, but one that allows one to connect to the source of life itself. Stilling that economy of breath allows for reflection, for transformation, asserting connection to one's body but also to a horizon of possibilities that could be otherwise. Breathlessness, here, is associated with the panting pace of our spiritual and economic lives that are on autopilot—societies, communities, barreling forward toward climate change without consideration or reflection. The next step is not the held breath of fearfulness, nor the quickened breath of the fight-or-flight instinct, but the power of the pause. Holding our breath, affording room for reflection and connection, allows it to flow from us with a renewed capacity for connection and possibility.

As noted, there is a specific link between breath and language in Jewish sources. While contemplative silence is often described as the highest rung of the religious quest, Jewish mystical thinkers affirm that the realm of quiet contemplation is restricted by its silence.[140] Flashes of inspiration, human as well as divine, are but fleeting sparks until these insights are revealed through the structures of speech. Hasidic thinkers argue that the unfolding journeys of human cognition and speech are firmly intertwined with the divine processes of revelation. The language of human worship, they claim, may break the chains of silence that shackle the Divine, giving life to the word and speaking God into being.

Global climate change demands, among many other things, a renewal of our approach to language. "Words are grained into our landscapes," writes Robert Macfarlane, "and landscapes are grained into our words."[141] Our dwindling capacity for sacred speech signifies the impoverishment

of our connection to the world around us and under our feet; it is the result of our dim, and diminished, sense of place and the inexorable stripping away of our many-layered bond to non-human life. Abraham Joshua Heschel, a modern Jewish mystic who drank deeply from the wellsprings of Hasidism, argued that restoring the power and dignity of language was the key to human flourishing after the unspeakable tragedies of the twentieth century. "The renewal of man," claimed Heschel, "involves a renewal of language."[142] The noted philosopher Charles Taylor has suggested that the experience of modernity demands that we "return to, while reexamining, Aristotle's definition of the human being as *Zwon* [sic] *echon logon*."[143] Reclaiming our identity as "speaking beings," individuals for whom the word is constitutive as well as communicative, is a crucial step in reckoning with the nature of what it can mean to be human in the more-than-human world filled with animals that "speak in song . . . or in rhythm. . . . They may speak a language of movements and gestures, or articulate themselves in shifting shadows."[144] The conception of the human as the "speaking being" is commonly found in Jewish thought, but for the Hasidic thinkers, it goes beyond such definitions: God's word, with it divinity itself, was breathed into Adam and thus invested within human beings for perpetuity. Rather than a social construct or a conventional agreement, the deepest stratum of what becomes language is a capacity for sacred speech, a permanent resonance of divine breath that continuously animates body, soul, and world:

> God is concentrated right there in the spirit-breath of Torah (*ruhaniyyut hevel ha-Torah*) as it comes forth from a person's pure mouth. If one can purify both his mouth and heart, he may become a chariot for God. So, attachment to God is the innermost part [of this act of study]; the teachings one learns are the external form in which this devotion is garbed. That is a proper understanding.[145]

Intention and mindful contemplation transform the very letters and words intoned in the act of Torah study into a garment for the Divine. The elements of speech, from the unformed breath that animates language to the letters and words themselves, become vessels of an immediate manifestation of the divine Presence. As this divinity is offered back to God through acts of human devotion, this ecosystem of breath, a constant recycling of sacred energy, is made possible through the intertwining of language that is both human and divine.

This point returns our gaze to the language and embodied gestures of prayer as a focal point of contemplation. Liturgy, claim Jewish sources, affords spiritual inspiration rooted in one's experience of the world.[146] The Babylonian Talmud includes a debate over whether the three daily statutory prayers central to Jewish life were established by the biblical patriarchs or if these services are meant to correspond to the sacrifices once offered in the Temple. The Jerusalem Talmud, however, includes a different version, arguing that prayer or worship is offered to match the changing times of day:

> Whence do we learn the three daily prayers? Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmeni said: they correspond to the three times in which created beings watch the day change.
>
> At dawn, one ought to say, "I give thanks to You, my God, and God of my ancestors, for bringing me forth out of darkness to light."

> At dusk, one ought to say, "I give thanks to You, my God, and God of my ancestors, for granting me the merit to see the sun in the West just as I saw it in the East."
>
> At night, one ought to say, "I give thanks to You, my God, and God of my ancestors, for just as I was surrounded by darkness and You brought me into light, so shall You bring me out of darkness and bring me into light!"[147]

Rather than describing the statutory elements of Jewish prayer as a method for continuing practices enshrined in sacred history by our ancestors, or ensuring continuity in the wake of the Temple's ruin, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmeni's teaching asks us to consider the immediate facts of the physical world—and the existential feelings that emerge from its changes—as a prompt for worship. Early rabbinic sources claim that ancient devotees would direct their heart to "the place"—a name for God—in preparation for prayer. Hasidic sources frequently describe prayer as an activity that grounds oneself in the specifics of a particular space, enabling one to reach toward heaven—which dwells within, not above—from within this strong sense of rootedness, emplacement, and grounding in the material realm.[148]

Building on a long tradition of practices for how to get up in the morning, the seventeenth-century mystic Isaiah Horowitz recommends:

> To cultivate faith: upon arising from bed, do not immerse yourself in any this-worldly concerns, or speak any word. Rather . . . wash the hands and consider the blessed Creator of the world with connective mind (*be-mahshavah devukah*), for God is One, unified and whole. Contemplate God as the holy King of king of kings. . . . Look to the heavens and the earth, and reflecting in your heart upon the verse "Raise your eyes on high and see who created these" (Isaiah 40:26)—God created the world, existence from absolute nothing. Consider "how wondrous are your creations, O God" (Ps. 104:24), and contemplate the greatness of God's creations in the earth and all of their array—the inanimate, vegetative, living, and speaking beings—such great, wise, and wondrous creations. [Contemplate] the great sea and all it holds, from the mighty whales [to the tiniest creatures], and the created mountains, fire, and wind. . . . Thus you will become filled with the fear of God, and love will enter the heart to become attached to God.[149]

Innumerable Jewish traditions counsel against taking part in idle conversations, economic activity, or any type of this-worldly engagement—like eating or drinking—before prayer.[150] Horowitz goes further, suggesting that one must use contemplation to develop a paradigm of devotion and gratitude upon awakening. Connectivity to the world and its inhabitants must be the orienting principle of religious life, not the quest for productivity.

A particularly useful form of Jewish liturgy for contemplative ecology is the array of rabbinic blessings (*berakhot*). These include special formulations for witnessing natural phenomena, from uncommon animals to thunder and lightning, majestic sights, and beautiful places. They call our eyes—and our mind's eye—to the world around us, jolting us to attention and giving us a vocabulary for that experience. A particularly elaborate set of blessings is laid out within the rabbinic liturgy for offering thanks upon works of creation that provide physical benefit and enjoyment, and especially upon various types of food. Each of these benedictions is specifically

tailored to the nourishment at hand: before drinking wine, one thanks God for cultivating "fruit of the vine;" before eating vegetables, for establishing the "fruit of the earth;" and so on. The reason given for why one must recite a blessing before eating bespeaks the fundamental posture of obligation and gratitude they are meant to engender. Rather than sanctifying the food, the act of reciting a blessing decommissions it from God's holdings, asking permission to take part in something that is not *ipso facto* permitted for human consumption: "One is forbidden to derive benefit from this world, without a blessing. One who takes benefit from this world without a blessing is guilty of misusing [a consecrated object]."[151] Everything belongs to God, and partaking in the world's sustenance requires acknowledging the tremendous significance of that gift and the obligations of connection and reciprocity.

Medieval Kabbalists developed new food rituals and reinterpreted traditional practices in their quest to frame eating as a sacrament with the power to transform the human being and even to impact the flow of blessing through the Godhead by uniting the *sefirot*, the "qualities" or "powers" of divinity.[152] This practice reached its peak in Safed Kabbalah, where elaborate contemplative formulae (called *yihudim* or "rituals of divine unification") were developed to accompany eating, especially when undertaken on the Sabbath and or other sacred holidays:

> You can mend the cosmos by anything you do—even eating. Do not imagine that God wants you to eat for mere pleasure or to fill your belly. No, the purpose is mending.
>
> Sparks of holiness intermingle with everything in the world, even inanimate objects. By saying a blessing before you enjoy something, your soul partakes spiritually. This is food for the soul. As the Torah states: "One does not live on bread alone, but rather on all that issues from the mouth of God." Not just the physical, but the spiritual—the holy sparks, springing from the mouth of God. Like the soul herself, breathed into us by God.
>
> So, when you are about to eat bread, say the blessing (*motsi*): "Blessed are you, Y-H-V-H our God, sovereign of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth." Then by eating, you bring forth sparks that cleave to your soul.[153]

Although Kabbalistic literature reveals some draw toward fasting, a characteristic held in common with medieval Christian and Sufi pietism, medieval and early modern Jewish mystical sources developed a rather robust relationship with eating as an act of spiritual and cosmic significance.

The notion that God can be worshipped, and the world repaired, through ordinary deeds—such as eating, drinking, and mundane conversations—emerged as a cornerstone of Hasidism even as its leaders continued to debate this issue and grapple with its implications for the formal commandments.[154] Eating, for example, is turned into a sacramental activity in which the worshipper joins the sparks held in the food—fragments of the Torah itself—and raises them up to their origin in the Divine. Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (d. 1760), the charismatic religious leader from whose teachings the Hasidic movement emerged, totally rejected those earlier forms of Jewish pietism that recommended strict asceticism. The Baal Shem Tov outlined a religious path founded in open-heartedness and joy rather than moribund guilt and fasting, explicitly critiquing one of his early disciples who insisted on starving himself. Only through eating, he claimed, can we accomplish some important sacred work. "Why did God create food and drink, which people

desire? . . . Because each time we eat and drink, we encounter holy sparks that belong to us. We must restore and elevate them to their rightful place."[155] Eating, explained the Baal Shem, was another type of opportunity to serve God, because food and drink contain within them sparks of holiness waiting to be redeemed.

Perhaps the most unequivocal defense of using ordinary activities to complement the commandments comes from Rabbi Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, another Hasidic leader who lived and flourished in the latter half of the eighteenth century. His sermons constantly underscore that the physical world is filled with the vitality of Torah: "Therefore, through all things one should seek to be drawn near to Y-H-V-H, no matter how earthly or corporeal those things might appear."[156] No realm of human activity, reiterates Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl with striking frequency, falls outside the domain of sacred service. One emblematic homily cites the Talmudic view that the biblical Nazirite must bring an expiation sacrifice because his decision to abstain from wine is a sin.[157] Menahem Nahum explains:

> Sparks of fallen souls became encased in things of this world, including food, drink, and all other worldly matters. There is nothing in this world that does not have a holy spark within it, proceeding from the word of the blessed Holy One, making it alive. That divine spark is the taste within the thing, that which is sweet to the palate. "Taste and see that Y-H-V-H is good" (Ps. 34:9). . . . Therefore, when you eat something, the spark within it is joined to your own life-energy, and you become strengthened by it. When you have whole and complete faith that this spiritual sustenance is indeed God's presence hidden within that thing, you will turn your mind and heart entirely inward. Linking both of those aspects of yourself to the sustenance coming from that spark, you will join them all to the Root of all, that One from whom all life flows.[158]

To eat, claims Menahem Nahum, is to encounter the divinity that animates all physical objects. This vital energy is experienced by the individual as the pleasant taste and the physical delight of that action, and the result is the sacred spark becoming rejoined to godly power within the worshipper. But he notes that this power extends to other domains: "The same is true of everything in this world, including trade and that which we earn. All the pleasure you get from these derives from sparks within them that belong specifically to you."[159] The divine sparks trapped in physicality are lingering fragments of cosmic fracture and lost dimensions of the worshipper's soul. Attentive engagement with materiality connects body to spirit and, in freeing that fallen spark, the worshipper recovers a part of their scattered self and ignites a direct encounter with God.

Hasidic sources also remind us that eating should be an experience of empathy and compassion, a chance to remember those who are less fortunate. This devotional idea undergirds the sacral quality of communal meals in Hasidism. The fellowship of seekers assembles around the Sabbath table—a gathering that is serious, but not solemn—to listen to the Hasidic leader speak words of Torah, to eat together, and to sing with a single heart. Such meals are among the height of one's communal religious life. Sitting down to table certainly involves ritual commandments, but it also has moral questions, blending the religious and ethical dimensions of our lives. Gluttony and overconsumption are described as acts of arrogance and immodesty, and such behavior is unbecoming of a religious person. "When the community is suffering, one may not say: I will go

to my home and I will eat and drink, and peace be upon you, my soul. . . . One who is distressed together with the community will merit seeing the consolation of the community."[160] But misguided asceticism and pious denial, even if well intentioned, may cause an individual to close his heart to the suffering and need of others; strict piety may become yet another form of callous self-obsession. This balanced appreciation is rather characteristic of the Hasidic approach to the life of the spirit. As the late Elie Wiesel poignantly summarized, Hasidism teaches that: "The way to heaven . . . the way to God leads through your fellow man."[161] One who seeks only to fill his own stomach will surely forget the needs of others, but a similar pitfall awaits the pinched ascetic whose ears and heart are closed to the suffering of those around him.

This approach to the moral implications of foodways, and the social and agricultural systems concerning them, returns us to a Talmudic teaching on how the home's table can provide expiation for our sins after the destruction of the Temple: "Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish both said: 'The altar atoned for individuals when the Temple was standing, but, now, their table atones for them.'"[162] Commentators root this cosmic power in ethical behavior: one has a moral obligation to welcome guests and strangers to their meal, allowing them to take part in the staff of life and share whatever bounty one may have. This emphasis on hospitality, on giving, was the source of a striking custom in eastern Europe: "Benevolent individuals, who fed the poor at their table during their lifetimes, should be buried in a coffin made of boards from those tables, as it is says, 'Your righteousness shall go before you'"(Isa. 58:8).[163] Our merits in the afterlife, like the physical box that accompanies us to the grave, are built from the willingness to share with others in this life, from our commitment to reciprocity, connection, and gift-giving.

Eating is also a time for reflecting on the brokenness of the world.[164] In rabbinic literature, we find references to sages who continued to eat their food in a state of ritual purity even after the destruction of the Temple rendered many such laws obsolete. The Talmud recounts a story about pietists who, in their mourning, refused to eat anything that had once been offered in the Temple.[165] This practice is ultimately rejected as untenable, but a brooding voice of discontent remains to declare that all our eating contains within it a broken-hearted acknowledgment of the imperfection of this world. The Tosefta, an early rabbinic text, teaches that we should always leave out one dish from a meal in order to remind ourselves of this fact.[166] When one sits down to a fully laden table, it is easy to forget that ours is a world of fracture, imperfection, and want. But denying any and all pleasure from eating is equally unjustified. Indeed, say the sages, one who fasts unduly—like the biblical Nazir (Num. 6:1–21), a devotional ascetic who abstains from wine and fruit of the grape—sins by not partaking in the beauty of God's creation.[167] The rabbinic answer to this tension is to embrace eating, but to do so within sacral boundaries and with expansive moral consideration of those around you.

This ethos of foodways that entwine community, connection, and mutuality calls to mind the poem by Joy Harjo, "Perhaps the World Ends Here," an exploration of the moral, existential, and ecological issues raised by table and hearth:

> The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.
> The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation,
> and it will go on.

> We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.
> It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.
> At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.
> Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.
> This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.
> Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.
> We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.
> At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.
> Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.[168]

Harjo's remarkable words give poetic, stirring articulation to the vision of how rituals of eating embody the human—and more-than-human—entanglement found in Jewish mystical sources. The table is a source of expiation not because it has magical or apotropaic qualities, but because it is a site of intergenerational education, of self-formation, and a place of ethical stirring and reflection.

CODA

Contemplative ecology offers us new ways of reading, thinking, and acting. Rather than a type of hermeneutical extraction, of looking for what might be hewn or quarried from religious sources, contemplative work cultivates a mode of interpretation that is affective, inclusive, close, and intimate, allowing the source to shape us and move us even as we read them from our own time and place, and with our own set of contemporary concerns. This creative way of engaging with the texts and practices of the past has much in common with the study of music.[169] Both pursuits require a set of skills, a type of attunement cultivated over many years: careful listening, perceptiveness to subtlety and the sublime, and the open-heartedness to be moved and transformed by the object of one's interpretive attention. This art requires a willingness to revisit the same compositions many times over, always plumbing the depths of the well in the search for deeper resonances or layers of meaning. Exegesis of texts as well as creative interpretation of music requires attention to the silence, whether to the white spaces on the page or the pauses between the notes. One must also have an ear to what remains unspoken and unexpressed in traditional texts and in musical compositions, glancing toward the font of inspiration that generated this artistic work and indeed continues to flow through it.

Song affords us one of the most powerful, and resonant, opportunities to see the power of human voices working together. On one hand, the mystical tradition in Judaism puts some emphasis on private religiosity. "Solitary meditation (*hitbodedut*) is a wondrous virtue, greater than everything else," said Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. "This means establishing at least an hour—or more—for solitude in some room or in a field, to pour forth your conversation between you and

your Maker."[170] But song and prayer are most often described as activities that bind the community of worshippers together. Melody is often depicted in Jewish sources as a place of redemption, of opening the heart and opening the mind.[171] It is a vehicle of revelation, of spiritual transformation, of moving from one state of being to another. But melody is also a font of creative community. "If there are musicians in a city," said Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz, "there are new ideas (*mohin hadashim*) as well."[172] Song is an expression of sociality and a call to connectivity:

> Sometimes it is impossible to lift up one's voice when singing. But when someone else comes along to help, lending their voice, the first person can also raise their voice! This is also among the deeper meaning of connecting spirit-to-spirit.[173]

We strive together, work together, reinforce one another—community in the sense of obligation, responsibility, and the shared possibility of religious uplift.[174] Such things are only possible if one approaches melody without arrogance and self-obsession:

> Therefore, when you are in a group of spiritual seekers singing together, whether in prayer, at a meal, or in some other manner, you should sing along with them. But don't sing just to hear the sound of your own voice, in the manner of aggressive domination. Rather, sing to uncover and propel your soul upward, in the manner of "as the musician played, the spirit of Y-H-V-H came upon him" [2 King 3:15] . . . and [sing] not only when you are together with a group of singing Hasidim. When you are alone in your home, whenever you feel that you are ready, you can also sing! You do not need to shout, since some may utter the words in whispers while their voice is heard on high.[175]

What if we were to extend this across the lines of species? The mystical teachings of Judaism can help us cultivate our awareness of a radiant world filled with divinity, including a strong sense of being grounded in place and a vision of the animals around us as teachers, mentors, and friends.

Such sources often describe the act of prayer as imbuing the physical world with vitality, drawing together the human, divine, and cosmic melodies into the song-breath of our worship and contemplation. Such is the message that reverberates within this teaching of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, a spiritual seeker and theologian who understood the symphonic power of the natural world:

> "Take of the land's produce (*mi-zimrat ha-arets*)" (Gen. 43:11) . . . Know that each shepherd has a unique melody, shaped by the grasses and the place where they pasture. Every animal has some unique vegetation that it must eat, and the shepherd moves from place to place. Their song reflects the plants and the place in which the shepherd dwells. Each grass has a song which it sings . . . and the shepherd's melody is composed of their songs. . . . The shepherd knows the melody through which strength is given to the grasses, and thus food is produced for the animals. This is the meaning of "The flower buds are seen in the land; the time of pruning (*'et ha-zamir*) has arrived" (Song 2:12)—the flower buds grow upon the land because of the song and the melody connected to them.[176]

While the link between the words for "produce" (*zimrah*) and "song" (*zemer*) is found in rabbinic sources, this eighteenth-century Hasidic scholar and mystic takes the association much further.[177] The world is filled with the unique songs of each and every animal species, claims Rabbi Nahman, but all forms of inanimate being have their melodies as well. These songs are learned and threaded together by creatures as they interact with the various kinds of vegetative life and physical phenomena in their environments.

A shepherd must hear these intertwined songs, taking them to heart and weaving them into a melody that reflects her or his own experience of the places through which they have traveled and the forms of sentient life they have encountered. Rather than instrumentalist attempts to extract from the earth and to domesticate animals solely for human benefit, this reciprocal process requires depth of connection, sensitivity, and engagement. To summon up the food for his animals, the shepherd must first learn to listen to the surrounding world and, from its melodies, to braid a song of her or his very own.

The noted botanist and writer Robin Wall Kimmerer argued for the importance of learning songs of plants around us, not just scientific names. Indigenous knowledge, she writes, reflects an awareness of the sonorous musicality of the world around us. The affordance of song is connection, a circulation of energy between engaged participants. Song simply cannot exist without shared breath. Melody can also serve as a powerful ritual of contemplation; song functions as an act or process of coming to attention that sparks a particular type of reflective consideration. It is a prompt that aligns our interior realm by linking the inner reservoirs of spirit to the physical body and to the community of beings that surrounds us. "Know"—Rabbi Nahman's homily points us toward a process that transpires beyond the mind, taking place in both heart and body and situated in a particular place and grounded in the biological relationships woven there.

It is noteworthy that, according to Rabbi Nahman, song does not efface the differences between species. Human beings remain at the center of the story he has told. There are dangers in any anthropocentric theology, hazards that become more pronounced in the time of climate change, yet Rabbi Nahman's text highlights the role of human beings without denying the spiritual and moral agency of other animal or vegetative species. We inhabit a world that is first and foremost the world of people: We live, breathe, and sing as humans, and this perspective on the world and our environment—this Umwelt—is the only one that we can know from the inside. But our songs include the melodies of other companion species and the particular places that sustain them.

Song has an inclusive capacity to stretch across boundaries, opening the self to all other forms of life, but at the same time, musical harmony requires the preservation of distinction. Melody allows for an experience of unity without uniformity, as the noted twentieth-century Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore might have it. In song, we dwell together as a community whose spiritual richness and empowerment are rooted in diversity. We collect songs as we move from place to place, a dynamic that holds true for both terrestrial travels and for spiritual journeys across time. The High Holidays offer us a series of interlocking fens and fields, waystations or rungs, each with its own song. We must first learn to sing these songs, and must then bring them with us into the rest of the year. "Take of the land's produce"—"take" refers not to a license to extract, but to an invitation to take up, to join and co-create the melodies that guide the arc of our lives. The message of this song? Slow down, breathe deeply, connect fully, and love more.

NOTES

[1] Shapira, *Hovat ha-Talmidim*, 7a. All translations from Hebrew are the author's unless otherwise noted.
[2] Distraction itself, though intensified in our day, is hardly a new phenomenon; see Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*, esp. no. 3; North, *The Problem of Distraction*; Kreiner*, The Wandering Mind*.
[3] See Rosa, *Social Acceleration*.
[4] See Christie, *Blue Sapphire of the Mind*; Allison, "Using Contemplative Practice."
[5] Werner, "When You Feel the Need to Speed Up."
[6] Whyte, "Against Crisis Epistemology," 52–53.
[7] Whyte, "Time as Kinship."
[8] Whyte, "Against Crisis Epistemology," 53.
[9] Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 37.
[10] See Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, nos. 137–162, 202–232.
[11] Christie, *Blue* Sapphire, 35.
[12] Bernstein, *Toward a Holy Ecology*, 23.
[13] Lopez, *The Syntax of the River*, 61, 77, 83–86, discussed below.
[14] Berry, "7 Steps Toward Rescuing Earth."
[15] Macy, "Encouraging Words for Activists," 253–254.
[16] See, inter alia, Wolfson, *Through A Speculum that Shines*; Persico, *Jewish Meditative Tradition*; Reiser, *Imagery Techniques in Modern Jewish Mysticism*; Verman, *The Books of Contemplation*; Margolin, *Inner Religion in Jewish Sources*. See also Buxbaum, *Jewish Spiritual Practices*; Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation*; and Komjathy, ed., *Contemplative Literature*.
[17] See Rosenblatt, "The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing;" and Josselson, "The Hermeneutics of Faith."
[18] See Green, "Early Hasidism: Some Old/New Questions," 445; Green, *Defender of the Faithful*, 154; Mayse, "Neo-Hasidism and *Halakhah*," 199; and Wiskind, "A Hasidic Commentary on the Passover Haggadah," 248.
[19] Fishbane, "Spiritual Pedagogy and Rhetoric in a Ḥasidic Homily;" Holzer, "Poetics of Exegesis in the *Sefat Emet*'s Homilies;" Wiskind-Elper, *Hasidic Commentary on the Torah*.
[20] Shapira*, Derekh ha-Melekh*, *shemot*, 91; see also, 88.
[21] Shapira*, Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 7, 80–82.
[22] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 7, 79.
[23] Shapira, *Derekh ha-Melekh*, *shemot*, 87.
[24] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 3, 16.
[25] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 5, 51–52; Shapira, *Hovat ha-Talmidim*, *ma'amar rishon*, 170.
[26] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 4, 30.
[27] Shapira, *Derekh ha-Melekh*, *tsav*, 135–136.
[28] See Mayse, *Laws of the Spirit*, 16 and 129.
[29] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 3, 23; see also, 17.
[30] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 5, 52.
[31] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 2, 15.
[32] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 4, 30.
[33] See Nahman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Moharan*, 2:25.
[34] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 6, 69.
[35] Mopsik, *Les Grands Textes de la Cabale*, 9.
[36] Seeman, "Reasons for the Commandments;" Heineman, *Reasons for the Commandments*.
[37] Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text," 544, parenthesis in the original. See also Sullivan, "'Seeking an End to the Primary Text.'"
[38] *Bereshit Rabbah* 44:1.
[39] Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," 153.
[40] Rich, "Diving into the Wreck;" Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1.
[41] Christie, *Blue Sapphire*, 39.
[42] Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms:*, esp. 109–114, 147.

[43] Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms*, 112.
[44] Keller, *Facing Apocalypse*, 6.
[45] Whyte, "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene;" and Jenkins, Berry, and Beck Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change," 96–97.
[46] Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.
[47] Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 22, 104.
[48] See Franny Choi, *The World Keeps Ending*.
[49] *Pesikta Rabbati* 31:4. See also McKibben, *Earth: Making Life*, 25: "We are running Genesis backwards, de-creating."
[50] *Bereshit Rabbah* 3:7, 9:2. See also Babylonian Talmud, Rosh HaShanah, 31a. All quotations from the Talmud are from the standard Vilna edition.
[51] See Babylonian Talmud, *Zevahim*, 116a.
[52] See Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit, 27b.
[53] See, for example, Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 245–247; Pedaya, *Walking Through Trauma*; Lachter, *Kabbalah and Catastrophe*; and, more broadly, Christie, *Insurmountable Darkness of Love*.
[54] See Kreskas, *Or Hashem*, pt. 4, ch. 1.
[55] See Isserles, *Torat ha-'Olah*, 2:2.
[56] Isserles, *Torat ha-'Olah*, 2:4.
[57] See, for example, Zohar 1:223b, 2:176b (*Sifra deTseni'uta*), 3:128a–b (*Idra Rabah*), 3:192a (*Idra Zuta*); Har-Shefi, *Myth of the Edomite Kings*; and Hellner-Eshed, *Seekers of the Face*, 174–184, 246–251, 323–327.
[58] Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, 96.
[59] See also Rubenstein, *Worlds Without End*.
[60] Sachs-Shmueli, "Human-Animal Reincarnation and Animal Grief," 30–56; Schnytzer, "Metempsychosis, Metensomatosis and Metamorphosis."
[61] Idel, *Saturn's Jews*, 57; Schnytzer, "R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's Cosmic Theory of Reincarnation."
[62] Shternhartz, ed., *Sihot ha-Ran* (Jerusalem, 2012), ch. 40.
[63] See Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, chs. 7–8, 78–100.
[64] van Dooren and Bird Rose, "Keeping Faith with the Dead," 376. See also van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, 126.
[65] Mishnah, Ta'anit 2:1–2. All citations from the Mishnah follow the standard printing, unless otherwise noted.
[66] See Ghosh, *Great Derangement*, 134.
[67] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *hilkhot ta'aniyot*, 1:2–3. Based on Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader*, 114.
[68] Green, *Speaking Torah*, 1:83.
[69] Nahman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Moharan*, 1:115; Twersky, *Me'or 'Eynayim*, 1a.
[70] Stengers, "Autonomy and the Intrusion of Gaia."
[71] See Kauffman, "Beyond Reductionism: Reinventing the Sacred;" and Landy, "Formative Fictions."
[72] Khosla, "The Sierra, A New History," 23.
[73] Khosla, "Rejuvenation," in *All the Fires of Wind and Light*, 25.
[74] See *Shemot Rabbah* 2:2; Mishnah, Megillah 3:3; and Babylonian Talmud, Megillah, 28a. Cf. Ramban's comments on Megillah 25b; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *hilkhot beit ha-behirah* 6:16.
[75] *Va-Yikra Rabbah* 7:2.
[76] de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 26; and Christie, *Insurmountable Darkness*, 122.
[77] Adler, *Engendering Judaism*, 209–211; Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*.
[78] See Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 3a; and Deloria, Jr., *God is Red*, esp. 277–278.
[79] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 10, 138–139, ch. 1, 3.
[80] See Horowitz, *Sefer ha-Fla'ah, hakdamah, 2b*; and the comments of Abraham ibn Ezra on Ps. 104:1.
[81] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 2, 9.
[82] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 2, 10.
[83] Zohar 1:20a; Matt, *Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 1, 151.
[84] See Zohar 1:15a; and *Bereshit Rabbah* 21:5.
[85] See the passage from Moshe de Leon's *Sefer ha-Rimmon* translated in Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*, 26; and, more broadly, Manes, "Nature and Silence."
[86] King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."
[87] See Christie, *Blue Sapphire*.

[88] See Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 3–25.
[89] Zohar 1:20a; trans. in Matt, *Zohar*: *Pritzker Edition*, vol. 1, 151.
[90] Osorio, *Remembering Our Intimacies*.
[91] Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 34.
[92] See the sophisticated appraisal in Kapstein, "Rethinking Religious Experience," making the counterintuitive but convincing argument that both romantics and scientists privilege experience as a source of knowledge and investigation.
[93] Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 39.
[94] Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 40.
[95] See Fishbane, *Fragile Finitude*.
[96] Berry, *Evening Thoughts*, 17–18.
[97] Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*, 24.
[98] See also Cordovero, *Or Ne'erav*, 2:2 (18b–19a); Garb, *History of Kabbalah*, 51: "while for Cordovero connectivity is the organizing trope, for Luria it is that of rupture." See Lorberbaum, *Before Hasidism*, 26–45, and 167, 180–185; Rubin, *Kabbalah and the Rupture of Modernity*; Ben-Shlomo, *Mystical Theology of Moses Cordovero*, esp. 281–331.
[99] Yitshak of Berditshev, *Kedushat Levi*, *bereshit*, 1:1.
[100] This description of the divine vitality coursing through the cosmos, a flow that is integrated into the worshipper's body and soul through rituals such as eating, bears a striking resemblance to Daoist portrayals of the porous boundaries between the physical world and the human body. "To observe the Dao," writes James Miller, "is not simply to be a passive recipient of sensory data. It is to engage in an act of transformation . . . [that] connects the outer landscape of mountains and streams . . . with an inner world of bones, viscera, blood, and breath, a landscape of the inner body nourished by the same vital energy, or *qi*, that flows through the earth." See Miller, *China's Green Religion*, 25; and esp. 38 and 126.
[101] See, inter alia, Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Kavvanot*, *derush keri'at shema*; Karo, *Shulhan Arukh*, *orah hayim*, nos. 24:2 and 51, and the commentary of the Magen Avraham ad loc.
[102] See the text translated in Green, *Speaking Torah*, 2:27, interpreting the word "fringe" (*tsitsit*) as connected to "gazing" (*metsits*), as in Song 2:9.
[103] Shneur Zalman of Liady, *Likkutei Amarim: Tanya*, *iggeret ha-kodesh*, no. 20.
[104] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 10, 133.
[105] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 10, 134; Schlanger, *The Light Eaters*.
[106] See Schopenhauer, "On the Sufferings of the World," 12.
[107] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, 581.
[108] Shapira, *Hovat ha-Talmidim*, 147, 52.
[109] See Fishbane, *Art of Mystical Narrative*.
[110] Zohar 2:127a. See also Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 3, 34, 67–74; and, inter alia, Zohar 3:266a–b. Such journey-tale stories build upon the famed account in early rabbinic literature of the "four who entered Pardes," as well as a similar story in which two rabbis discuss the mysteries of Torah while walking along the way. See Tosefta, Hagigah 2:2 and Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah, 14b.
[111] See Bahye ben Asher, *Perush Rabbenu Bahye ben Asher 'al ha-Torah*, on Num. 1:1; Babylonian Talmud, 'Eruvin, 54a; *Be-Midbar Rabbah* 1:7; Altmann, "The Treasure Trove;" Christie, *Word in the Desert*."
[112] Bahye ben Asher, *Perush Rabbenu Bahye ben Asher 'al ha-Torah*, on Ex. 3.
[113] Plato, *Republic*, Book VII, 514a–520a.
[114] Lopez, *Syntax of the River*, 86.
[115] Gould, "Corrina Gould on Settler Responsibility and Reciprocity."
[116] See also Tirosh-Samuelson, "Nature in the Sources of Judaism."
[117] Rubenstein, "A Pantheology of Pandemic," 20.
[118] Sacks, *Mendelssohn's Living Script*.
[119] Shlomo ben Aderet, *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, 1:94, suggesting that the reasons for each commandment are "endless" (*ein sof*) and inexhaustible; each particular rationale is only "a drop among the aims and intentions."
[120] See Recanati, *Ta'amei ha-Mitsvot le-Ha-Rav Rabbenu Menahem Recanati*, 3a.
[121] Azikri, *Sefer Haredim*, *hakdamah*.
[122] Cordovero, *Or Yakar*, 2:181.

[123] Puett, "Innovation as Ritualization," 34.
[124] Seligman, Weller, Puett, and Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 27.
[125] Mayse, *Laws of the Spirit*, esp. 31–58.
[126] Schilbrack, *Thinking Through Rituals*, 2.
[127] Schilbrack, *Thinking Through Rituals,* 35–43.
[128] Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist*. See also Mudge, "'God has Breathed into us the Breath of Life;'" and Waskow, "And the Earth is Filled."
[129] Hayim of Volozhin, *Nefesh ha-Hayim*, 1:15.
[130] Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 119b.
[131] Zohar 3:235a.
[132] Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*, *Toledot adam*, *sha'ar hagadol*, no. 338.
[133] See also Bakharakh, *Emek ha-Melekh*, 1:1, 114; 6:34, 217.
[134] See Buxbaum, *Jewish Spiritual Practices*, 109–110, 140, 153, 260–261.
[135] Zisskind, *Yesod ve-Shoresh ha-Avodah*, bk. 5, ch. 1, 199.
[136] Shapira, *Benei Mahashavah Tovah*, *seder hadrakhah u-kelalim*, no. 7, 50.
[137] *Bereshit Rabbah* 14:9.
[138] Yitshak of Berditshev, *Kedushat Levi*, *balak*, 1:354.
[139] Shternhartz, *Hayei Moharan*, no. 37.
[140] See Mayse, *Speaking Infinities*.
[141] Macfarlane, *Landmarks*.
[142] Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 275.
[143] Taylor, *Language Animal*, 338.
[144] Abram, *Becoming Animal*, 10.
[145] Meshullam Feibush Heller, *Yosher Divrei Emet*, no. 10, as translated in Green, *Speaking Torah*, 1:289.
[146] Shapira, *Hakhsharat ha-Avrekhim*, ch. 6, 70.
[147] Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 4:1.
[148] See the discussion of praying, "praying with the floor, and with the bench," in Shonkoff, "Metanomianism and Religious Praxis."
[149] Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot ha-Berit*, *sha'ar ha-otiyot*, *aleph*: *emet ve-emunah*.
[150] See Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 10a; Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 63a.
[151] Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 35a.
[152] See Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals*; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; and Wirzba, *Food and Faith*.
[153] As translated in Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*, 149.
[154] See Mayse, *Laws of the Spirit*, 82–112.
[155] *Keter Shem Tov ha-Shalem*, no. 194, 110.
[156] *Me'or 'Einayim*, *toledot*, 1:82; trans. in Green, *Light of the Eyes*, 270.
[157] See Num. 6, and Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit, 11a.
[158] *Me'or 'Einayim*, *mattot*, 1:280–281; trans. in Green, *Light*, 640.
[159] *Me'or 'Einayim*, *mattot*, 1:281; trans. in Green, *Light*, 640.
[160] Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit, 11a.
[161] Wiesel, *Somewhere a Master*, 151; and see also Buber, "Love of God and Love of Neighbor," 108–129.
[162] Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah, 27b.
[163] Gantsfried, *Kitsur Shulhan Arukh*, no. 199.
[164] See Mayse, "Food for Thought."
[165] Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra, 60b.
[166] Tosefta, Bava Batra 2:17.
[167] Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit, 11a.
[168] Harjo, "Perhaps the World Ends Here."
[169] See the introduction to Mayse and Green, eds., *Be-Ron Yahad.*
[170] See Koch, "All My Thinking Has But One Focus.
[171] Alter, *Sefat Emet* (Piotrków, 1905)*, be-shalah 5650.*
[172] Shapira, *Imrei Pinhas ha-Shalem*, *torat ha-adam*, no. 186.

[173] Shapira, *Imrei Pinhas ha-Shalem*, *torat ha-adam*, no. 19.
[174] Shapira, *Tsav ve-Ziruz*, no. 36.
[175] Shapira, *Benei Mahshavah Tovah*, no. 18.
[176] Nahman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Moharan*, 2:63.
[177] See *Bereshit Rabbah* 91:11.

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