

Spiritual Pedagogy and Rhetoric in a Ḥasidic Homily: The *Ma'or va-Shemesh* on *Parshat Qedoshim*

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Abstract

A close analysis of a Ḥasidic homily by R. Kalonymos Kalman Epstein of Krakow, author of *Ma'or va-Shemesh*. The essay focuses on rhetoric, structure, and thematic content. The role of hermeneutics is engaged throughout.

Keywords

Ḥasidic homily – *Ma'or va-Shemesh* – Rabbi Kalonymos Epstein – Ḥasidic hermeneutics – Jewish contemplation

Recovering and interpreting Ḥasidic homilies (*dersashot*; sing. *derashah*) is a hermeneutical challenge in many respects, for these sermons are transcriptions or reformulations of a living religious discourse – after the fact (after the Sabbath or festival occasion of its presentation) and in another language (originally delivered in the “mother tongue” of Yiddish, but later reproduced in the “sacred language” of Hebrew).¹ Insofar as these transcriptions are based on notes or summaries of some kind, the primary rhythms of the original performance (often with elaborations and repetitions fitting an oral setting) are now curtailed or lost in the received asyndetic sequences. Moreover, insofar as these secondary versions are stylistically coherent and syntactically lucid,

1 For striking evidence, see Ariel Evan Mayse and Daniel Reiser, “*Sefer Sefat Emet*, Yiddish Manuscripts, and the Oral Homilies of R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Gur,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mysticism and Texts* 33 (2015): 3–49.

they still reflect second-order literary stylizations in which the rich orality of the original performance is thinned or mostly lost. The hermeneutic issue is therefore more than merely making sense of the composition, but reflects the crucial shift from “voice” and orality to “textuality” and print.² Tone, resonance, and even gesture mark living performances, but these are obscured in the pages of a book. The fundamental gap between these types should not be minimized. One must therefore try to reimagine or otherwise overcome the distance and distinction that is involved.³ If this were not enough, it is also vital to take account of the fact that the early homilies were delivered in a sacred and liturgical atmosphere, among disciplines and fellow adepts; and especially that the teachings of the speaker were deemed as oracular and even revelatory in nature – instances of revealed Torah, sometimes even referred to as *divrei Elohim ḥayyim* (living words of God).

How a sympathetic interpreter adjusts to these considerations will certainly vary, especially if the interpretation is for scholarly purposes, and not for spiritual instruction. In both instances there is a cognitive and cultural gap to be overcome. Academic researchers regularly try to bracket their own presumptions and enter the presumptive world of the original text – adjusting their linguistic competence to it. More personally engaged students will want the text to bracket their intellectual or spiritual presuppositions, so that they can be instructed by it. The notion of “second naïveté” was formulated to help a historical interpreter to deal sympathetically with content they do not believe in, whereas for the religious reader this term is employed to overcome cognitive differences, so that the text might again “speak” to the reader. My use of this oxymoron is intentional, and one must wonder whether the gap between these two modes of interpretation is altogether unbridgeable.

My dear friend Kalman and I regularly engaged in these and other questions over a lifetime. These conversations are now only a memory. I shall nevertheless have him firmly in mind in the ensuing exposition of a powerful nineteenth-century Ḥasidic *derashah*, chosen both for its rhetorical art and its use of Maimonides in an unusual spiritual setting. Kalman would have surely been bemused and engaged. I offer this study in his memory and in tribute to his multifaceted intellectual legacy.

2 On this issue more generally, see Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), chs. 1–2. Regarding Ḥasidic texts, cf. Moshe Idel, “Hermeneutics in Hasidism,” in *Journal for the Study of Religion and Ideologies* 9, no. 25 (Spring 2010), 3–16. He also notes that a key focus in the homilies is on the worshipper’s spiritual life or *avodah*, a matter to be considered below.

3 See the various hermeneutical considerations discussed by Paul Ricoeur, in *From Text to Action* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), chs. 3–5.



The homily to be considered is by the Ḥasidic master Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Epstein of Krakow (1754–1823) and is preserved in the collection of his teachings called *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, first published in Breslau in 1842, and often thereafter.⁴ His teachings are especially influenced by his major teacher, Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizhensk (1717–1786/87), who was sent by Dov Ber of Mezritsh to spread Ḥasidism to Poland. R. Epstein also considered himself to be a disciple of other Polish and Galician masters and reflects several strands of second- and early third-generation Ḥasidism in eastern Galicia.⁵ His emphasis on communal prayer and related spiritual practices will be discussed below. The homily is an extended series of comments on verses from Leviticus 19, publicly recited on the Sabbath corresponding to the Torah portion *Qedoshim*. Given the format and structure, it is conceivable and quite likely that this series of teachings reflects distinct or independent homilies that have been collated into one coherent sequence and pattern of teachings – and thus present a distinctive Ḥasidic “take” on a number of key religious topics. The range of sources that are cited or alluded to is quite wide, and includes the work of Maimonides and Isaac Luria, and the oral teachings of Rabbis Elimelekh and Dov Ber. This notwithstanding, the allusions or citations are now formulated in a popular style – one that minimizes the various esoteric allusions. Certainly, in this way, the content would have been instructive beyond the initial, immediate circle of listeners and reached a new audience – namely, the populace to be influenced by Ḥasidic doctrine via the printed book.⁶ Central to the discourse is the biblical text and rabbinic midrash. Thus the overall collection is a window into the broad range of religious themes put in play by Ḥasidic teachers and to the transformations designed to serve their particular spiritual concerns and outreach. For all that, despite the highly stylized rendition of our text, one can still “pick up” the oral intonations and character of the original presentations, through the pedagogical intonation of the preacher and the modes of topical repetition and emphasis.

In the following, I shall cite the opening portion verbatim, since it serves as the fulcrum of the entire teaching; and then present the structure of the teachings and their content through partial paraphrase and selected translation. I

4 I shall be citing from *Sefer Ma'or va-Shemesh, Ha-Shalem Ha-Mefo'ar*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Machon Even Yisrael, 1992), 363a–367b.

5 For a concise overview, see A. Aescoly, *Ha-Ḥasidut be-Folin* (1954; repr., Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999).

6 On this phenomenon, see Ze'ev Gries, *Ha-Sefer ke-Sokhen Tarbut ba-Shan'im 1700–1900* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2002).

shall divide the structure into four parts: Part 1, the Prologue, sets up the discussions of Leviticus 19:2; Part 2 is comprised of three units dealing with the meaning of v. 2; Part 3 contains two units dealing with two laws found in v. 3; and Part 4 is composed of a single unit dealing with laws found in vv. 23–25.

1 Part 1: Prologue

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to all the congregation of Israel, and say to them: Be holy (qedoshim tehiyu), for I the Lord your God am holy (qadosh), etc.” (Lev 19:1). And Rashi, of blessed memory commented: This teaches that that this portion was said in a public gathering (*be-haqhel*), since most of the key Torah regulations (*gufei Torah*) are dependent upon it; hence [the injunction] *Be holy* means “be *perushim*, etc.” Now the words of Rashi require explication. What do they teach us through this formulation? For this portion was recited in a public gathering; and it is a further reasonable implication that all the commandments that are practiced by the entirety of Israel were said in a public gathering (*be-haqhel*).

The homily opens with this prologue. Rashi’s comment, which is actually a direct citation from Midrash *Torat Kohanim* 1.1, is triggered by the key scriptural reference to “all the congregation” – implying that this portion was delivered at a public recitation, precisely because Leviticus 19 includes a broad variety of central laws for communal practice.⁷ In fact, Rashi’s comment goes well beyond the terse comment adduced here and specifies that to “be *perushim*” means to be *separated* from “illicit sexual acts and sins” (and this is just how the passage in *Torat Kohanim* is explained by Rabbeinu Hillel ben R. Eliakim of Greece, a student of Rashi).⁸ And by not adducing this additional clarification, Rashi’s comment seems to advocate the ideal of being an *ascetic* (or a

7 Two classical medieval commentators, R. Shimshon (the Rash) of Sens and R. Avraham b. David (the Ra’avid), both stress that the pericope was enunciated *be-haqhel*, “for it is not like other units,” wherein Aaron learned it first from Moses, then taught it to his sons, then to the elders, and finally to the people – the chain of instruction noted in b. ‘Eruvin 54b. See in *Sifra de-Vai Rav hu Torah Kohanim ‘im Peirushei Rabboteinu Ha-Rishonim Ha-Ra’av’d ve R”Sh. Mi-Sens* (Jerusalem: Sifra, 1959), 86a.

8 See the edition of *Sifra de-Vai Rav hu Torah Kohanim ... ‘im Peirush ... Rabbeinu Hillel b”R Eliakim*, ed. S. Koletditzky (Jerusalem: Ha-Teḥiyah Press, 1961), part 2, 39a. In his comment R. Hillel actually refers to illicit acts and “all forbidden things (*issurin*) in the Torah,” whereas Rashi speaks of “transgressions (*aveirot*).”

person who has *withdrawn* from the community) – and seems in direct contradiction to the public nature of the laws specified in our portion. On this basis, R. Kalonymos takes up various aspects of the relationship between spiritual asceticism and communal practices. His clipped citation thus appears to be both rhetorically intentional and highly tendentious.

2 Part 2: Three Interpretations of Leviticus 19:2

2.1 *The First Interpretation*

The first interpretation takes up a structure that other units will follow.⁹ It includes (i) a citation and discussion from an authoritative thinker or teacher; (ii) a citation and discussion of a passage from classical midrash (*Leviticus Rabbah*); (iii) a specific interpretation of a passage from Leviticus 19; and (iv) an application of the teaching to the spiritual act of *devequt*,¹⁰ or attachment to God. In this instance, the teacher first turns to a passage from Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Ha-Mada'* (*Hilkhot De'ot* 6.1).¹¹ The paragraph in question deals with the importance of living within a civilized province and stresses that “a person must (*tzarikh*) always conjoin with righteous persons and live near scholars, in order to learn from their ways.” This means moving away from such locales where the people are bad or do not follow “an upright path” of life. When this proves impossible, “one should dwell by himself alone (*yehidi*),” even to the extent of leaving habitable places and living in the desert. This allowance for ascetic withdrawal in extreme circumstances is transformed by R. Kalonymos. It begins with a basic paraphrase of the issues and key terms, even stressing that “one must flee” bad environments and “separate (*lifrosh*) himself” from the rabble. Indeed, by alluding to the act of withdrawal, the preacher hints at the problematic issue of being *perushim* from the community.

9 *Ma'or va-Shemesh*, 363a–364a.

10 The topic of *devequt* is repeated in various ways and referring to various techniques in this collection of homilies. For the religious theme overall, with a focus on Ḥasidic themes, see Gershom Scholem, “Devekuth, Or Communion with God,” in his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 203–227. For a conspectus on this topic in early Ḥasidism and its place in the teachings of a contemporary of R. Kalonymus Epstein in eastern Galicia, see Miles Krassen, *Uniter of Heaven and Earth: Rabbi Meshullam Feibush Heller of Zbarazh and the Rise of Hasidism in Eastern Galicia* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), chs. 2–3.

11 See in the critical edition of *The Mishneh Torah*, book 1, ed. M. Hyamson (New York, 1937), based on the Bodleian Codex, ad loc.; and also *Mishneh Torah*, ed. S. Fraenkel (Bnei Brak, 1995), vol. 1, ad loc. (p. 78).

But this only sets up the turn: separation is only helpful in cases where such negative behaviors or opinions “prevent (*me’aqvim*)” the proper “worship (*‘avodah*)” of God; for one can only achieve the “higher holiness (*ha-qedushah ha-‘elyonah*)” when “one cleaves (*yidbaq ‘atzmo*)” to true worshippers, and joins “together (*yaḥad*)” with them in collective prayer. The ensuing citation from the Talmud (b. Berakhot 49b), that one should bless God according to the “number (*rov*) of the congregation (*qahal*),” reinforces the point. In context, the mishnah cited means that the Name of God one uses in the blessing after meals varies with the number of the participants. R. Kalonymos adduces it to certify the point that one should (ideally) bless God in a public quorum; for the degree of holiness one attains is related to whether one prays alone or with a congregation. The strong implication of the scriptural lemma is thus: to strive “to be holy” by praying in a ritual congregation. Hence the concluding warning that “if one isolates himself (*yibodded ‘atzmo*),” he will be “separate (*yifrosh*) from the community (*tzibbur*).”¹²

It is therefore striking that the master refocuses the discussion around the ritual importance of communal prayer, and then goes on to stress that one should “cleave (*dabbeq*)” to those who serve God – lest one think that the meaning of the lemma is to become *qedoshim* by becoming separate, for one cannot “merit *qedushah*” in isolation. Presumably this is directed against certain ascetic trends or practices in his day that were thought to be a way to attain the highest level of holiness. To counter that conclusion, R. Kalonymos adduces a passage from *Leviticus Rabbah* (24.9).¹³ In context, that source proposes and rejects the following hypothetical reading of Leviticus 1:2 (*be holy*): “One might suppose (that these words mean) ‘be holy like Me’; but Scripture (adds) *for I am holy*, for My holiness is higher (*le-ma’alah*) than your holiness.” This teaching is clearly formulated to delimit any sense of *imitatio dei* with regard to this ideal. But the Ḥasidic master explains it differently. One might think that if one were “to isolate oneself alone (*le-hitbodded lehiyot be-yaḥid*)” it would be possible to attain the “higher holiness”; but Scripture says *for I am holy*, meaning that “My holiness” is superior to yours, for God alone is “one and

12 This refers to m. Avot 2:4 (in the name of Hillel): *al tifrosh min ha-tzibbur*, “do not separate yourself from the community.” In his commentary on this passage (2:5 in his text), Maimonides again avers that “it is not proper to separate oneself from the community except because of *sheḥitutam*, their destructive ways.” See *Mishnah ‘im Peirush Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon*, ed. Y. Kafih (Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, 1965), *Seder Niziqin, Avot*, p. 276.

13 See *Midrash Vayiqra Rabba*, ed. Mordecai Margulies (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1972), 2:565.

unique (*yaḥid u-meyuḥad*.) And not only that, but one can only “draw down (*le-hamshikh*)” the “holiness of God” upon oneself in a “collective congregation (*be-haqhel yaḥad*),” when “in social solidarity.” Presumably the teacher refers to the “higher holiness” on the basis of a phrase used in the *Zohar* on this Torah portion (*qedushah ila’ah*) – but ignores its original context (regarding Divine Unity), and only emphasizes the liturgical ideal of accessing the holiness of God through theurgical prayer within a community.¹⁴ In the process, he takes the old midrash passage in a mystic manner: God’s holiness is not simply “superior” but in the “supernal heights (*le-ma’alah*),” and is thus of an ontologically superior order of holiness. To achieve this one must be in a worshipping community. The ritual act of “cleaving” to fellow worshippers in communal prayer is elevated above all else, and is the sole means of drawing down Divine blessings “upon” oneself. In R. Kalonymos’s polemic, individual and social spirituality are to be integrated. All the cited sources are reformulated or reworked to establish this central theological point.

2.2 *The Second Interpretation*

The second interpretation deepens the spiritual issues involved,¹⁵ answering the concern that individual contemplation has no place in this new communal view. The new point (presented as *’od*, a “further” explanation) begins with a recitation of Leviticus 19:2 and turns immediately to another passage from *Leviticus Rabbah* (24.4), which explains the lemma with the exhortation (of God to Moses): “Go to the Israelites and say to them: My children, just as I am *parush* so should you (also) be *perushim*; (and) just as I am *qadosh* so should you be *qedoshim*, [as Scripture says]: *qedoshim tiheyu* (become holy)!” One must “be astonished (*tamoah me’od*),” as this teaching flies in the face of the preceding polemic. R. Kalonymos wonders if this can be meant seriously, for how can an individual or community be holy like God, or *parush* like Him?! Stymied, the teacher says he has no recourse than to interpret it in a strictly straightforward manner (*’al pi peshuto*); he then proceeds to employ this hermeneutical strategy to produce a paradoxical conclusion.

He begins with the observation that although there are many paths to the worship of God, the central one is to worship God out of love, in order to arrive at “*devequt* with God.” Many people naturally think that the path to this goal is by ritual isolation (*hitbodedut*) in one’s room – neither speaking nor looking at any person. But this is not the “true” way, since one can follow this practice

¹⁴ See *Zohar* 3:81a.

¹⁵ See *Ma’or va-Shemesh*, 344a–b.

for years and not attain the desired goal. R. Kalonymos supports his assertion by referring to an exegesis of Jeremiah 23:24 that he heard from his master, Rabbi Elimelekh. The verse is ironic: it refers to a rhetorical query by God that even if a person were to hide in isolation, wouldn't He see still him?! But the polemical explication is very derisive: if a person were to engage in isolation, God would certainly not pay any attention to him! "True ... worship," the preacher stresses, is to join a community of righteous persons. For although "the ideal way (*ha-īqar*) is contemplative isolation (*hitbodeddut ha-maḥshavah*)," whereby one "thinks" or meditates "continuously on God's exalted Divinity," a person can "cleave (*yidbaq*) to God in one's mind" even in a group setting, by imagining (*yidmeh*) that one is alone with God and devoid of human contact. Moreover, performing such a practice in prayer will lead to the highest isolation (not of one's body but of one's mind) with God alone. The supreme ideal is therefore to be *parush* or "separated" in one's mind or "thought (*maḥshavto*)" – in a state of contemplative isolation.¹⁶ Just as R. Kalonymos used Maimonides in his earlier teaching, so he now adduces Rabbeinu Bahye ibn Paquda to support this ascetic ideal: mental asceticism within the community!¹⁷

R. Kalonymos has thus rhetorically flipped the midrashic passage: its plain sense is actually its inner-spiritual sense. And if one were now to ask further how one can be *parush* like God, the answer is a theological tour de force. Just as God "fills all the worlds, and surrounds all the world, and there is no place devoid of God," and God is totally "separated" (*muḥdal*) from all "materiality" (*geshem*), so should the spiritual adept attempt to "be" (*tiheyu*) likewise: "to be *parush*" even among the community, *davuy* ("attached") to the Divine Name, and not mingling with their "physical" or "corporeal" being (*be-gashmiyutam*). This is the ideal of "become *qedoshim*." It is a totally interiorized ideal, requiring a maximum of mental focus while in the midst of society. One may thus see a notable progression from the first interpretation to the second; and note its explicit assertion of a radical duality between corporality and spirituality. One comes to God through a purified mind and spirit; through a refined attachment of the alone to the Alone.

16 For the notion of *hitbodeddut* as mental concentration in earlier sources (and not only as physical isolation), see the discussion of Moshe Idel, "Hitbodeddut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah," in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages*, edited by A. Green (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 1:405–438; an earlier, more extensive Hebrew version appeared in *Da'at* 14 (1985): 35–82.

17 See his *Sefer Hovot ha-Levavot*, translated from the Arabic by Y. Kafih (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1984), gate 9, ch. 5 (especially the end).

2.3 *The Third Interpretation*

The third interpretation expands the ideal of mental attachment to God¹⁸ – and provides a technique for its daily enactment, in all circumstances, in all places, and in relationship to all forms of existence. This exegetical development (marked by the phrase *ʔ yomar*, “or one may say”) opens with an explication of the midrash cited earlier (*Leviticus Rabbah* 24.9), which stated, “My holiness is higher (*le-maʿalah*) than your holiness (*mi-qedushatkhem*).” We noted that the reference to Divine superiority was transformed to have a mystical valence (referring to the supernal heights), and the emphasis was on the theurgical access to Divine holiness through communal prayer. The mystical aspect is now considerably developed through an interpretation that R. Kalonymos says he heard from Rabbi Dov Ber in his youth. The report requires explication. It states that God’s holiness is higher – precisely *mi-qedushatkhem*, “because Israel has *qedushah* on high through their good deeds”; that is, “because you [Israel] sanctify yourselves [on earth] below.” Nothing more is added, but the theurgical implication is that God’s holiness above is *effected* or *activated* by Israel’s acts of sanctity below. This mystical-theological assertion is made by reinterpreting the comparative adverb *mi-* (“than”) as agential (“through,” or “by means of”). Hence the point is that God’s sanctity is influenced by Israel’s acts of sanctity on earth. The causative effect is vertical, from below to above.

The homilist does not further explicate this exegesis; but rather goes on to say that it is “possible to give a bit of support” to this reading from another direction. He then launches into a mystical reading of Psalm 104:24, which says, regarding the creation, that God “made all [things] with wisdom (*be-ḥokhmah*); the [entire] earth is filled with Your creations.” Understanding “with” wisdom to mean “by means of” Wisdom, R. Kalonymos goes on to follow the teachings of the Ari (R. Isaac Luria), who said that *Ḥokhmah* is the most superior heavenly gradation, and the “first” knowable dimension is the creation of all existence – being the “soul” force enlivening all things from the infinite heights to the infinities of creations on earth below. Hence, if a person were to “contemplate (*yistakel*)”¹⁹ the “Divine wisdom” in all things – by which “they live and are sustained” – one can “arrive at supernal Wisdom (*ḥokhmah ilaʿah*)”; and “being *davuq*” to it, one can “draw down (*limshokh*) a manner of worldly benefit.” Hence one can conjoin with God above through attachment to the sphere of Wisdom, to which God is also bound; and it is from this supernal dimension

18 *Maʿor va-Shemesh*, 364b–365b.

19 This usage is akin to the use of Aramaic *istakkel* in the *Zohar*, though *histakkel* does mean “contemplate” in early rabbinic sources (cf. m. Avot 3:1).

that the Divine soul force joins worshippers to God, in order to “enflame the hearts (*le-hitlahev ha-levavot*)” of these worshippers in spiritual ecstasy.

But one may rightly still ask, apart from this expansive notion of spiritual conjunction with God, how it supports the teaching of Dov Ber. This is the focus of the final rhetorical turn of this section. For the homilist says that it is “known” (among mystical adepts) that the word *qadosh* is a synonym of *Hokhmah* (*Zohar* 3:121a); hence the meaning of the exhortation to “be holy” in the Scriptural lemma must mean to “be” attached to the Divine sphere of Wisdom (which is also God, who is also called *Qadosh*), and thereby (through one’s attachment to the principle of Wisdom in all existence) to “draw down” “vitalities and benefits” to this world below. And thus the puzzling passage in the midrash takes on a new meaning: that God’s *qedushah* can be drawn down to earth through the ritual acts of *qedushah* of Israel. Hence, the emphasis is not just on activating the Divine level from below, but theurgically to channel it from on high downwards. This contemplative act is special, for it is not merely attaching one’s mind to the vital principle of God in all things. We learn, in conclusion, that it is one which “effectuates (*tif’alu*) great and sacred mystical unifications (*yihudim*) in all the worlds; and (even) causes pleasure to God, Who spoke and the world came into existence!”²⁰ Our preacher thus wants it both ways: both meditative attachment to the Divine Wisdom by all persons (the entire community of Israel addressed by the biblical command) and those initiated into the most recondite practices of mystical theurgy. Clearly, this remains a basic substratum for R. Kalonymos and for his elite disciples. Attachment to God is not only for worldly beneficence, but for God’s benefit as well. We are thus left with another exegetical echo of the midrash taught by Dov Ber: that God’s holiness is influenced by the holy meditations and acts of Israel; that human deeds effectuate Divine Bliss (*naḥat ruaḥ*) on high.

3 Part 3: Two Interpretations of Leviticus 19:3

3.1 *The First Interpretation*

The first interpretation of the next part of the homily turns to an example of the fundamental laws of Torah (*gufei Torah*) found in the portion of *Qedoshim*.²¹ It may originally have been a self-standing unit, insofar as it is

20 On the beginning of a shift away from kabbalistic unifications in early Ḥasidism, see J. Weiss, “The Kavvanot of Prayer in Early Hasidism,” in his *Studies in Eastern European Hasidism* (Oxford: Littman Library, 1985), 95–125.

21 *Ma’or va-Shemesh*, 365b–366a.

explicitly concerned to clarify the relationship between the initial commandment to *be holy* (v. 2) and the subsequent exhortation that *a person shall fear his mother and father* (v. 3). As it now stands, this section has been joined to the preceding one by a transitional phrase: “*and on the basis of the preceding (discussion) we can understand the verse a person shall fear his mother, etc.*” It is explicated by summarizing key points of the earlier unit: that a person attached to the Wisdom of God will be enflamed with the love of God. And he then adds: “and it is known that *Hokhmah* (Wisdom) and *Binah* (Understanding) are two companions that are never separated.”²² By this he alludes to the esoteric knowledge that these two supernal gradations are conjoined under the rubrics of “male and female” or “father and mother” (*Zohar* 3:281a); and on this basis he remarks that one who wishes to return to God through “repentance in love” (which in esoteric sources is symbolized by *Binah*) must do so with requisite “fear” (*yir’ah*), since it is from this gradation (*Binah*) that the Divine “judgments” (*dinim*) come. By this he means that the loving gifts of God’s laws are entwined with legal punishments for their malpractice; hence one must come to God with the (theosophical) consciousness of the conjunction of Love and Fear in the Godhead. By speaking this way, R. Kalonymos undoubtedly evoked in his listeners the well-known rabbinic explication of the difference between this commandment (which speaks of fear and mentions the mother before the father) and that in the Decalogue, which commands the worshipper to honor one’s father and mother (the father now in the first position). The reason (explicitly stated in b. Qedushin 30b) is that one would naturally fear one’s father and honor or love one’s mother; hence, the order is inverted to stress the need for the love and fear of both parents. And just as this dual emotional attitude should obtain on earth, so should it also regulate a person’s theological disposition.²³

The link between this commandment and the exhortation to *be holy* is now explicated on this basis. The commandment is taken to enjoin the worshipper to be *davuq* to supernal Wisdom and Understanding; and this means to conjoin oneself to the Divine levels of Father and Mother – which symbolize transcendental Love and Fear. And further: the directly following commandment *and you shall observe My Sabbaths* (v. 3) makes the same point, since

22 “Two companions that are never separated,” *trein re’in dela mitparshin*. On the related motif, cf. Y. Liebes, “‘Trein urzilin de-ayalta’: Derashato ha-Sodit shel Ha-Ari lifnei Moto,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1994): 113–169.

23 This correlation between attitudes to parents and to God also appears in an old rabbinic explication of Exod 20:12. See *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, ed. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1960), 231.

“it is known” that on the Sabbath day one can attain to the interior mental gradations of Father and Mother. Hence the word *Sabbaths* appears in the plural – not to refer to all the yearly Sabbaths, but to specify that on this day a spiritual devotee may ascend to the levels of Wisdom and Understanding; the first being the gradation of Love, and the second being the gradation of Fear (hinted at by the verb *observe*, or “reverential obedience”). Thus the second phrase (regarding the Sabbath) makes the same dual mystical reference as the first (regarding parental reverence), and both are enjoined by the exhortation to *be holy*. There is little doubt that R. Kalonymos continues to speak to disciples about the esoteric meaning of Scripture and its laws; for this is the true worship of God. To be holy is thus to love and fear God in all one does – by attaching oneself to the supremely supernal gradations of Wisdom (Love) and Understanding (Fear).

3.2 *The Second Interpretation*

The second interpretation of this part also takes up the conjunction between the commandments *be holy* and *a person shall fear his father and mother*, and between the latter and the commandment *observe My Sabbaths*.²⁴ The homily first mentions the interrelated issues of Love and Fear *and* Father and Mother, as noted earlier, and then adds an exegetical twist. To properly arrive at the gradation of Love and Wisdom one has to pass through Fear and Understanding, symbolizing Repentance. That is, the return of a person to God requires reverence before love as its precondition. And similarly, since the commandment about the Sabbath in the book of Exodus (20:5) uses the verb *zakhor* (“remember”), which hints at the word *zakhar* (male), and therewith alludes to the supernal gradation of Male-Father, the same commandment in the Book of Deuteronomy (5:12) uses the verb *shamor* (observe), and thereby hints at the Divine gradation of Female-Mother. Hence, the Sabbath has two mystical dimensions (Female and Male); and thus one must come to the higher of the two (Father-Love) through its counterpart (Female-Fear), by being constantly on guard and “examining one’s deeds” during the week. The commandment to fear and love one’s parents thus parallels the two dimensions of the Sabbath, in both structure (sequence) and form (content). Thus a worshipper lives at two simultaneous levels: the earthly and the supernal. They are integral to each other, and R. Kalonymos makes this esoteric truth explicit in his sermon.

24 *Ma’or va-Shemesh*, 366a–b.

4 Part 4: Leviticus 19:23–25

The *final homiletic unit* of the homiletic series focuses on the laws in Leviticus 19:23–25 and deals with the laws of planting trees in the land of Israel and the requirement to abstain from eating their fruit during the first four years after planting (in the fourth year the fruit must be a sacred donation); or even deriving any financial benefit or personal pleasure from it. Only in the fifth year may it be consumed and used. The preacher opens by citing this rule, and raising questions about it and its meaning. As the explanation proceeds, it is evident that the concern is to derive a lesson from this agronomic matter related to one's spiritual life.²⁵ The thematic coherence of this exegetical teaching, and its distinctive concerns, suggest that it was originally an independent sermon directed to a broader or more popular religious concern than those in the preceding units. The key values it espouses are nevertheless crucial to the overall social and spiritual concerns of R. Kalonymos.

The preacher begins his exposition by narrowing his rhetorical strategy to a selective presentation of the sermonic composite on this passage found in *Leviticus Rabbah* 25.1.²⁶ The format there follows the ancient form of old rabbinic proems: it first cites the lemma (here: *And when you come into the land you shall plant* [Lev 25:23]), and juxtaposes it to a co-text from the Writings (here: *It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it* [*maḥaziqim bah*; Prov 3:18]). The strategy of this juxtaposition is to arouse curiosity in the presumptive correlation of the passages, and ancient homilists unpacked the issues through various analogies or parables. In the present case, the co-text was certainly chosen to counterpoint a law about tree planting with a metaphor about a tree, and the choice was exploited for full rhetorical effect. R. Kalonymos hits his rhetorical stride more directly – and after proclaiming that the conjunction of these two passages is “very puzzling,” he cites a portion of the rabbinic homily to highlight the issues: first, he emphasizes that the verb “hold fast” is problematic, since one would have expected some reference to an act of “labor” instead;²⁷ and second, he then adds, the midrash is excessively verbose but never explains the linkage. Now, he is correct in strictly formal terms, but also disingenuous, since every rabbinic audience would know that the tree of life refers to the Torah²⁸ – and allusions to this are clear enough in the anthological

25 Ibid., 366b–367b.

26 See *ibid.*, 566–569.

27 The verb used is *‘ameilim bah*.

28 Among the celebrated passages is *m. Avot* 6:7. Another key instance is in *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 89:13 – a passage that R. Kalonymos was certainly familiar with. It discusses the Torah as the Tree of Life and refers to the relations between Issakhar (who studies Torah)

unit which he uses. But this joust serves our preacher's purpose; and he goes on to say that he will resolve the issues *'al pi peshuto*, by interpreting the passage "in (or according to) its straightforward sense." Just what this means remains to be seen.

The link of this homily with the preceding becomes immediately apparent at the outset. R. Kalonymos begins with the fact that this law comes into effect upon entrance into the promised "holy land" – which has a special spiritual character and gives the people the opportunity to "worship God in truth" (it is stated three times at the outset and uses the same formula used earlier). However, he adds, this beneficial plus has a corresponding minus: the rich bounty of the land and its pleasures can induce one to forget the true spiritual service of God and "to be drawn (*limshokh*) after materiality"; and thus the laws provide "counsel" that these beneficences are not for one's personal boon (*bishvil 'atzmo*), but "to effectuate (*mashpi'a*)" their good for all, as a bounty for the poor. Being a channel for the distribution of the material goods of the earth is thus the great spiritual challenge for the worshipper. Indeed, the law comes to advise and "warn" one about this as the proper spiritual intention from the moment of planting. The goal is to "effectuate (*le-haspi'a*)" material benefits to all others – both the physically poor and notably "students of Torah," on the famous midrashic analogy of Issachar and Zevulun (sons of Jacob-Israel), who supported one another: Zevulun engaged in his physical commerce to provide the material resources for Issachar to fully devote himself to study; and the latter's scholarly merits benefited his own financial welfare (see *Genesis Rabbah* 88.9). To support his point, R. Kalonymos sneaks in an allusion to an adage of Ecclesiastes, stating that the "the shelter of wisdom is to be also in the shelter of money" (7:12); and then enjoins that to work (*'avodah*) for others is exceedingly difficult, "but through this one may come to the true worship (*'avodah*) of God." One may presume that this analogy was not lost on the audience, and that the use of the verbs *limshokh* and *le-haspi'a* allude to the spiritual beneficences that the true adept can effect from on high (as repeatedly noted in the discussions above).

The preacher concludes that this counsel to benefit others through one's daily labors is the straightforward meaning of the midrash, which juxtaposed the law of planting trees to the proverb that "it is a tree of life to those who hold fast (*maḥaziqim*) to it." Namely, that *it* should be the intention of all laborers to

and Zevulun (who supports him); and precisely this correlation is specified later in the homily (see below). For this passage and commentary, see the edition of J. Theodor and H. Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 3:1281, and the extensive notes of Minḥat Yehuda (J. Theodor).

help and support (*maḥaziqim*) others, particularly Torah scholars; and that this spiritual beneficence (*it*) will duly redound to their own earthly bounty. But as it is difficult “to train a person (*le-hargil ’adam*)” to act “in support (*le-haḥziq*) of others, and not to be self-focused (*le-haḥziq tovah le-’atzmo*),” Scripture has forbidden all use and benefit of fruit trees for a set period of time (the first three years as a means of inculcating restraint; and the devotion of the fruit to the Temple in the fourth year to inculcate the virtues of devotion and thankfulness). Such acts of selflessness are thus a mode of spiritual service for all, especially the unlettered laborers who were part of the Ḥasidic fellowship. In addition to a teaching about the “service of God through worldly or physical acts” (*’avadah be-gashmiyut*), we have here the ideal of training persons, through Halakhic practices, to divest themselves of material self-interest – and to elevate this divestment to an act of “true worship.” And like the other teachings of this series of homilies, this practice emphasizes interiority *and* community. But unlike the first teaching, Maimonides slips in here silently, via the reference to the issue of self-training through ritual practices and the verb *le-hargil*. Precisely this verb is highlighted by him in a paragraph that concludes a series of concerns that a true worshipper will be exceedingly scrupulous with their habits and traits:

And how should a person train himself (*yargil ’adam ’atzmo*) with [the acquisition of] these character dispositions (*de’ot*), until they are firmly rooted in him? He should repeatedly exercise the practices incumbent upon him to perform according to the dispositions of the middle way, and should return to them continuously, until these practices become easy for him, and not burdensome, so that these *de’ot* become firmly rooted in his soul.²⁹

5 Conclusion

Parshat Qedoshim in *Ma’or va-Shemesh* is a composite series of homilies, all guided by the hermeneutical voice of R. Kalonymos Kalman Epstein, through a variety of queries and citations, and reinterpretations and recalibrations for

29 *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Ha-Mada’ (Hilkhot De’ot 1.7)*. For a fundamental treatment of the terms *mada’* and *de’ah*, and the understanding of the latter as an ethical disposition of a psychological character, see Bernard Septimus, “What Did Maimonides Mean by Mada’?”, in *Me’ah She’arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. E. Fleischer, G. Blidstein, C. Horowitz, and B. Septimus (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001), 83–110, esp. 98 (English section).

diverse members of his communal fellowship. The dominant theme is the true worship of God and the proper means of doing so. The relationship between an individual and the community is taken up again and again in different variations; and the spiritual challenge for finding the balance between these two poles is repeatedly negotiated. Nevertheless, an overall pedagogy is evident in the final collection. It opens with the problematic of serving God in a spiritually dangerous or negative environment, and goes on to give different solutions as to how an individual can be connected to God even within a community of proper worship. The interior life is thus central; but the communal one is fundamental. This is also evident in the concluding unit, in which the role of Scripture in inculcating both interior (personal) discipline and communal care and commitment is at issue. If there is any overall shift, it is the movement from topics concerning the spiritual elite to those involving the masses, who, in the final section, are directly enjoined to support Torah scholars as an act of true worship. The ideal is subtly but firmly proclaimed by using mystical terms used for “drawing down” Divine benefits by the meditative elite to underscore the personal and communal benefits that will accrue through care for both the poor and Torah scholars. Even if these terminological reuses were not clearly evident to all members of the living audience or subsequent readers, they were certainly intended by R. Kalonymos, and they reveal another aspect of his hermeneutical art and purpose as a leader of a religious community. Even centuries after the homily’s original presentation, these and other echoes of his rhetorical skill reverberate on the written page – the textual witness to the oral voice of instruction in a nascent spiritual movement. All told, this anthological unit is an expansive example of the hermeneutical revolution of early Ḥasidism and of the pedagogical power of its teachers.