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978-1-107-08133-8 -Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World

David Mevorach Seidenberg

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Kabbalah and Ecology

Kabbalah and Ecology is a groundbreaking book that resets the conversation about ecology and the Abrahamic traditions. David Mevorach Seidenberg challenges the anthropocentric reading of the Torah, showing that a radically different orientation to the more-than-human world of Nature is not only possible, but that such an orientation also leads to a more accurate interpretation of scripture, rabbinic texts, Maimonides, and Kabbalah. Deeply grounded in traditional texts and fluent with the physical sciences, this book proposes not only a new understanding of God's image but also a new direction for restoring religion to its senses and to a more alive relationship with the more-than-human, both with Nature and with divinity.

David Mevorach Seidenberg received his doctoral degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary for his work on ecology and Kabbalah and was ordained by both the Jewish Theological Seminary and Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. He also studied physics and mathematics at Dartmouth College, educational philosophy at Harvard University, and social ecology at the Institute for Social Ecology. He teaches Jewish thought in Europe, Israel, and throughout North America, in communities and universities and through his organization, neohasid.org, focusing on ecology and spirituality, Talmud, Maimonides, Kabbalah, and Hasidic thought; on embodied Torah, dance, and *nigunim* (Hasidic song); and on ecological and environmental ethics. In addition to scholarly articles, he was a contributing editor of the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, and his writing has been featured in *The Jewish Daily Forward*, *Huffington Post*, *The Times of Israel*, and the *Los Angeles Jewish Journal*.

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“David Seidenberg’s book is a tour-de-force that moves the dialog of Judaism and ecology forward in remarkably fruitful ways. This book takes a tremendous step toward reconfiguring religion, showing how we can transform some of the foundational premises of Western civilization by drawing on deeply earth-centered traditions. It is a must read for everyone interested in the impact of the Bible on the world, and for everyone studying the growth of ecotheology. *Kabbalah and Ecology* will be a seminal work for years to come.”

Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director, Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University

“This is one of the boldest, most imaginative, and theologically significant works on Jewish Thought to appear in recent memory. With lucid expositions and meticulous scholarship, Seidenberg invites his readers to reconsider the ways we think about God, humans, animals, and the cosmos as a whole. His elegant and vibrant writing makes a persuasive case for a reverent embrace of all creation as the divine image and encourages us to ennoble our ethical postures and religious lives.”

Nehemia Polen, Professor of Jewish Thought, Hebrew College

“A careful but exhilarating examination of ways our traditions have imagined – and might again re-imagine – our fraught relationship with the more-than-human world. Stunning in its depth!”

Bill McKibben, founder, 350.org, author, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*

“Seidenberg’s *Kabbalah and Ecology* is one of the most, if not the most, original and important contributions to the growing discourse around religion and the environment of the last decade. Jewish mysticism is a woefully ignored mine of rich sources and insights for those wishing to ground their environmentalism in a spiritual base with deep roots and fertile branches. Too many works in this field are by people who are not experts, or not knowledgeable in all relevant fields. Seidenberg brings to the work truly impressive transdisciplinary learning and experience. The book deftly spans the divide between scholarship in Jewish and mystical studies and contemporary social-environmental thought and analysis. There is much here for everyone – both scholar and activist, professional and layperson, and I daresay – Jew and non-Jew. One of Seidenberg’s many strengths displayed in this book is not only making accessible otherwise obscure or esoteric source material, but doing so in such a way that it virtually jumps off the page with relevance.”

Dr. Jeremy Benstein, co-founder and deputy director, The Heschel Center for Sustainability (Israel), author, *The Way Into Judaism and the Environment*

“What a rare find – a work that integrates theology, science, and activism in organic and well-researched ways that make sense and can impact the future. Seidenberg presents texts and ideas that many modern Jews and Christians have not encountered, and offers a fresh new look at Jewish views of humanity’s role in the cosmos. Through ideas that range from Maimonides’ theory of the universe as a single organism to Jewish mystical writings in which the human shares the divine image with the cosmos, Seidenberg convincingly proves to the reader that Judaism can and does support a belief system that does not elevate humans above all other species. For Jews and others who want to

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be part of a human world that acknowledges its interdependence with all other species, this is a crucial and irreplaceable book.”

Rabbi Jill Hammer, co-founder, The Kohenet Institute, author,
The Jewish Book of Days: A Companion for All Seasons

“People have had an intuitive knowledge that the Kabbalah and the reality map of our life on the planet are congruous to each other. It took David Seidenberg to bring this intuition into a full and rich intellectual conceptualization. This book is an important contribution that harmonizes ecology with divinity.”

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, founder of the
Jewish Renewal movement

“This rich and well-researched book into the ancient theme of the image of God is a blessing for humans and the more-than-human alike, for it restores the intrinsic dignity and sacredness of all beings. Thus it moves us beyond anthropocentrism and our narcissism as a species to our true place, not above but alongside other creatures that also reveal the God-face, in all its grandeur and diversity. While all creatures currently tremble under the ongoing diminishment of the planet, this book liberates humanity from its self-absorption and sets it free to face nakedly our responsibility to change our ways of living on Earth, so that Earth and all earth creatures may thrive anew.”

Rev. Matthew Fox, author, *Original Blessing, Coming of the Cosmic Christ, Meister Eckhardt: A Mystic Warrior for Our Times*

“*Kabbalah and Ecology* is a tour-de-force – serious thoughtful theology, generous and respectful to the wide range of sources and thinkers cited, developing a remarkable direction for theology. This book is stunning and will greatly enrich the conversation.”

Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, founder, CLAL National Jewish Center
for Learning and Leadership, author, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*

“An ecological sense of the interbreathing of all life is at the heart of both ancient Biblical thought and practice and the most advanced science of today. Rabbi Seidenberg has with impeccable scholarship unearthed how ecological ways of thinking underlie the Bible and have also permeated Kabbalah. Since Kabbalah for the last thousand years has been at or very close to the heart of Jewish thought, his work is extraordinarily important to our understanding of Judaism. His findings can help empower action to heal the web of life that has been so deeply wounded by human behavior.”

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director, The Shalom Center, author,
Tales of Tikkun, Godwrestling

“*Kabbalah and Ecology* is an extremely detailed, careful, and well thought out attempt to fashion a Jewish theology adequate to the environmental crisis. It advances the discussion, offers important insights, and makes a real contribution to the work of helping us change our ways. At times there are instances of lovely and even poetic theological insight. This is essential reading.”

Roger S. Gottlieb, Professor of Philosophy, Worcester Polytechnic
Institute, author, *Engaging Voices: Tales of Morality and Meaning in
an Age of Global Warming and Spirituality: What It
Is and Why It Matters*

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“Rabbi Seidenberg constructs an ecotheology from Talmud and Kabbalah wherein each species partakes in the image of God, and the awe of beholding a natural marvel is transferred onto every person. It invites us to join a conversation about humans and animals that has been going on for over a thousand years, yet, I suspect, is unknown to most conservation biologists or environmentalists.”

Scott Gilbert, Professor of Biology, Swarthmore College, author,
Ecological Developmental Biology

“Most contemporary religious environmentalists have gone beyond, given up on, or at least radically reread Jewish and Christian texts that suggest a strong anthropocentrism. In this significant new work of constructive theology, Rabbi Dr. David Mevorach Seidenberg takes a different tack, arguing that we have long misunderstood these texts. What is unique about *Kabbalah and Ecology*, however, is that Seidenberg does so not with mere assertion but with scholarly rigor, delving deeply into Biblical, rabbinic, Midrashic, philosophical, Kabbalistic, Hasidic, and contemporary texts. Seidenberg provides a serious theological backbone for Jewish environmental ethics – as well as one of the most systematic contemporary Jewish theologies of any type. The more serious the scholarly or theological reader, the more powerful Seidenberg’s challenge will be.”

Dr. Jay Michaelson, founder, *Zeek*, contributing editor, *The Forward*, author,
Everything is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism

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Sooner or later, technological civilization must accept the invitation of gravity and settle back into the land, its political and economic structures diversifying into the contours and rhythms of a more-than-human earth.

David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*

These are the spheres in which the world of relation is built. The first: life with nature, where the relation sticks to the threshold of language. The second, life with people, where it enters language. The third: life with spiritual beings, where it lacks but creates language. In every sphere, in every relational act, through everything that becomes present to us, we gaze toward the train of the eternal You; in each we perceive a breath of it; in every You we address the eternal You, in every sphere according to its manner . . . But when the perfect encounter is to occur, the gates are unified into one gate of actual life, and you no longer know through which one you have entered.

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

R' Amorai said: *Gan Eden*, where is it? He said to them: In the earth.

Sefer Bahir

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For Chanina, and for Reb Zalman, z"l

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Acknowledgments

This book is especially indebted to Seth Brody, a Kabbalah scholar only a few years my elder, who shared with me a hometown, a childhood synagogue, a love for spiritual endeavor, and a passion for ecology. His very straightforward understanding of Kabbalah as a search for cosmic blessing and as an expression of human responsibility for Creation is what encouraged me to go beyond an academic vision of what Kabbalah means and to find a deep well in this field of scholarship. I imagine that large parts of this work are what he might have written had he lived to teach his Torah. I pray that he may be honored by it.

A handful of teachers have touched my life and supported my learning in key moments: Michael Paley, a Hillel rabbi who loved physics as much as Torah; Ron Kiener, who wryly taught me the rudiments of Kabbalah in the last year of Gershom Scholem's life; Shaul Magid, who bought for me my first books of Kabbalah when we were both studying at Yeshivat Hamivtar in Jerusalem; Murray Bookchin, whose work on the connections between human oppression and ecological degradation established a foundation for my own thought; Elliot Wolfson, who first exposed me to *Sefer Bahir*; Bill Lebeau, who supported me through tumultuous times at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS); Irene Diamond, whose understanding of ecofeminism incited some of my own breakthroughs; and Arthur Waskow, whose teachings on Torah and nuclear war in the early 1980s inspired me in 1982 to explore the Jewish response to hunger and the system of Sabbatical and Jubilee years, which began my awakening to what *Chazal* (the sages) taught about the Earth. Jacques Derrida, with whom I studied in the summer of 1986, also had a large influence on my later thinking about rabbinic texts. More concretely, Shlomo Gruber, the wizened old *buchmacher* who *schlepped* his store from Borough Park to JTS, pressed upon me several volumes that turned out to be central to my thesis. I also would like to recall two precious mentors from my year as a congregational rabbi in British Columbia, Enrica Glickman and Julian Silverman, who passed

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away while I was writing the dissertation this book is based on. Serendipitously, just before Tu Bishvat 2014, I stumbled upon the works of an ancestor of my great-grandmother from Aleppo, the sixteenth-century rabbi Sh'muel ben Avraham Laniado, who was, I learned, a student of Yosef Karo. Plugging into a hitherto unknown Kabbalistic lineage just as I was finishing this book felt both profound and reassuring. Most importantly, standing at the very beginning of my personal journey is my great-grandfather, Benyamin Mevorach, who came to the United States from Jerusalem Palestine in 1910 with his drum; who integrated music, joy, and kindness into his practice of Judaism and life; and who showed me the magic and theurgy of ritual. His example continually invigorates my spiritual search for holiness and community.

Since 2000, I have had the opportunity to share material that became part of this book in teaching settings around North America, as well as in Israel and Europe. I want to especially thank the Teva Learning Center (now the Teva Learning Alliance) for providing many of those opportunities, along with all my colleagues in the Jewish environmental movement who have encouraged and supported my work. Beyond the Jewish world, my relationship with Sun-gleska Oyate in Washington State, a Lakota-based community founded by Buck Ghosthorse, has been transformative. It also brought me together this summer with Matthew Fox. My friend and fellow Breslover-in-spirit Julian Ungar also deserves special recognition for being my first "lay reader", and I am still moved when I think about the amazing *hashgachah* that brought us side-by-side in a makeshift hostel in Uman on Rosh Hashanah 2003. I want above all to express my deepest appreciation for my "fellow fellow", Benjamin Baader, now of Winnipeg, whose support and encouragement have been constant, and whose wisdom grows ever deeper. I also want to thank my brother Steven for his constant contact during the dissertation phase and his willingness to be a resource in all matters philosophical. And I am grateful to Riqi Kosovske, who shares with me the raising of our son and who has been an ally and supporter, sharing the vision of this work through many chapters of our lives.

I would also like to thank the many people who helped in some way with the preparation of this book: David Arfa, Ben Baader, Evan Eisenberg, Gretchen Laise, Hayyim Rothman, Cara Michelle Silverberg, Nili Simhai, and especially Menachem Kallus and Jonathan Schorsch for reviewing parts of the manuscript, Emily Branton for proofreading the transliterations, Itsik Pariente for help with grammar questions, and Michael Bernstein, Lauren Deutsch, Irina Feygina, David Kaufman, Riqi Kosovske, Clementine Lazar, Larry Moss, Nili Simhai, and Alon Weinberg for helping me to review the proofs, with the obvious proviso that I am responsible for errors. Thanks also to Lewis Bateman, Shaun Vigil, Dave Morris, Tim West, Anamika Singh, and others connected to Cambridge who helped bring this book to light. Lastly, I want to thank Nikki Green (www.nikkigreen.com.au) for permission to use her exquisite artwork.

Many things have happened since the time this book was born as a dissertation in 2002. The outlines of global warming and its consequences have begun

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to clearly emerge, while at the same time the movement in the United States to deny what is happening has grown stronger and stronger, especially among Orthodox Jews and Evangelical Christians. I hope that this book, rooted in the most traditional of perspectives, can be used as a resource by people within those communities to help bring their communities to the side of honoring the Creation and the Creator, not just in word but in deed.

On a personal level, in 2003 I received *s'mikhah* from R' Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. (My first ordination, from JTS, came in 1994.) Reb Zalman, as he was known, inspired many people of many generations to pray, feel, and work on behalf of the Earth, and he called on his students to bring the Jewish paradigm into alignment with his vision of ecumenism and responsibility for Gaia. Reb Zalman took a strong interest in the progress of this book, and he passed away just as it was coming to press. Of course, of all the things that have happened, nothing has been more important to me than the birth of my boy Chanina in 2004. Imagining the world of his future is what pushes me to carry on when I am feeling the least hopeful. Finally, greatest thanks are due my parents Richard and Ronnie for their financial and emotional support, which enabled me to work on this book full-time in 2002 and 2013–14. In the time between the dissertation and the book, my father passed away. It is sorrowful to not be able to share the completion of this book with him.

The seeds of this work were planted when I started keeping Shabbat at Dartmouth College in 1981. My visceral experience of an Earth-centered Judaism from that time remains the unshakeable foundation for this book, and for my Jewish practice. My experiences led me to apply for a Mellon Grant in 1982 to study the Sabbatical and Jubilee years – this began my lifelong research on Judaism and ecology. The broadest outline of this book was limned in a curriculum I wrote for the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life in 1996; I realized its deeper significance only later, while leading a series of “Nature and Torah” walks in Central Park for Manhattan’s Congregation Anshe Chesed. I did much of the textual research as a Finkelstein fellow at the University of Judaism, fall 1997 to fall 1998. The first statement of my thesis was delivered in a lecture sponsored by the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Victoria in British Columbia in 1999, while the dissertation this book is based on was completed for JTS in 2002 in Seattle.

A large focus of this work is to highlight and call into question some of the modernist assumptions that scholars and theologians make when they read rabbinic literature and Jewish thought, and to offer alternatives to these assumptions that might bring us closer to the first meaning of these texts. I likewise expect others to offer challenges and refinements to the assumptions I make.

This book is intended to address academic, theological, and spiritual interests, which means that many elements that would be unnecessary to explain in an academic context are explained here and, conversely, many elements that would be taken for granted in a spiritual context need to be justified here. I have taken care to distinguish the homiletical and the theological from

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the historical and critical aspects of the discussion. I encourage each reader to use the cross-references provided to find the threads that fit her or his inclinations.

I pray this book, coming out soon after the beginning of the first Sabbatical year ever to be widely noted and observed in the diaspora, will be a meaningful step toward renewal in our relationship with the Earth and with Spirit. Most importantly, and above any intra-human concerns, I pray that we may see a flowering of relationship, a flowing of knowledge, to and from the real fields and forests, from the manifold creatures and beings, that encompass our human world and that make up the reality of Being we so often ignore. May this also be a flowering of truest praise for the One whose infinite and infinitely diverse image is held within every being.

27th of Iyyar, *Yom Hakeshet* (Rainbow Day), 5774

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Notes on translation, transliteration, and bibliography

Because of the attention given to terminology in this work, most passages are translated according to the principles of concordant (“literal”) translation. They are non-idiomatic and are intended, as far as possible, to reflect ambiguities in the Hebrew and to represent midrashic and philological connections between words. Important terms or words that are etymologically connected in Hebrew are sometimes given in transliteration in order to show their connection. Where the Hebrew is difficult to translate, I often include transliteration as well, and in some cases, alternative translations. Many passages translated concordantly here can be found in idiomatic translation elsewhere.

Please note that the British convention that puts punctuation inside quotation marks only if it is part of the quote (“logical punctuation”) is followed.

Consonants: The system of transliteration used in this work is somewhat scientific but is meant to be readable and typeable, so it is not completely reversible to Hebrew. The common conventions of “q” for *Quf* ק and “k” for *Kaf* כ, “kh” for *Khaf* כּ and “ch” for *Chet* ח are used. *Tsadi* צ is represented by “ts” rather than “tz”. The diacritical mark (˘) is used for *ʿAyin* ע. *Tet* ט, *Samekh* ס, and *Vet* ו are underlined to distinguish them from *Tav* ת, *Sin* ש, and *Vav* ו in transliterated text; they are not underlined in book titles or names. (Consonants with *dagesh* are also not doubled.) The letter *Alef* א is represented by a single quotation mark ('): for example, *ha'el* (God). This mark is left off of words beginning with *Alef*, since it may be assumed. Aramaic words ending in *Alef* (indicating the definite article) are also transliterated without (') at the end: e.g., *d'yoqna* (image) rather than *d'yoqna'*.

Other diacritics may also be left out of names, and conventional transliterations may be used. For example: Ezra instead of ʿEzra, Yehoshua instead of Y'hoshu'a (Joshua), Yitshak instead of Yits'chaq (Isaac).

Vowels: The vowel *tseirey* (a long “a” sound) is transliterated “ei”; where it is followed by a *Yud*, the combination is transliterated “ey”. *Tseirey* may be

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transliterated “e” in closed syllables, especially those ending a word, e.g., *hineh* (here), and in places where “ei” would lead to difficult-to-read spellings. The combination *patach* or *qamats* plus *Yud* (a long “i” sound) is transliterated “ay” in the middle of a word and “ai” at the end of a word. Similarly, *chirik* (a long “e” sound) is transliterated “i”, even when combined with *Yud* at the end of a word. For *sh’va*, only *sh’va na`* (the pronounced *sh’va*, which makes a short “i” sound) is indicated by a single quote ('). The single quote mark is also used to separate consonant or vowel combinations likely to be elided and mispronounced by an English reader: e.g., *tsomei'ach* (growing thing) or *par'tsuf* (face). It may help the reader unfamiliar with Hebrew to know that in transliteration, *sh’va na`* always appears between two consonants, while *Alef* never does.

The mark for abbreviations used in Hebrew texts is also represented by ('): for example, R' for *Rabi* or *Rabbi*. The mark for acronyms and numbers is represented by the similar looking (”), appearing before the last letter as it does in Hebrew: e.g., B”N; commonly used acronyms that have a conventional pronunciation, such as *Rashi* and *Chazal*, are given without this mark. Some words and names that have well-known transliterations or English renderings are spelled conventionally, such as *Rabbah* in *Midrash Rabbah*, *aggadah* and *aggadot*, *gematria*, *Moshe*, *Sukkah*, and *Gemara*. Words commonly used in English, like *midrash* and *mitsvah*, are not italicized; however, when given a plural Hebrew ending, they are italicized: *midrashim*, *mitsvot*.

A few other conventions have been adopted to help the reader. For translated passages, material in square brackets should be read as part of the quote, while supplemental or alternative material is placed in parentheses: for example, “were it not said (told) to them, they would [still] be beloved”. When transliterated Hebrew appears alongside translation, if the English or the Hebrew is a phrase of two or more words, a space is left between the slash and that phrase: for example, “very good / *tov m'od*”. When scripture is quoted, its citation appears in square brackets. When it is referred to without being quoted, its citation appears in parentheses. Also, in any rabbinic text where scripture is quoted and then followed immediately by its interpretation, the two are connected by an em dash: for example, “‘in our image as our likeness’—not man without woman and not woman without man, and not both of them without *Shekhinah*”, or “‘In beginning / *B'Rei'ShiT* [Gn 1:1]—look at the letters and see: *Desiring Song / ShiR Ta'eV*”.

Page numbers preceded by “p.” or “pp.” always refer to pages within *Kabbalah and Ecology*. In cases where a full citation is given for passages in journal articles or book chapters, the page range is separated from the specific pages cited by a semi-colon: for example, “*Science* 252 (2004): 378–81; 380”.

There are three indexes provided, along with a diagram of the Sefirot (in the Appendix). Note that the general index can also serve as a rudimentary glossary. Lastly, both the full bibliography for this book and a discussion of its methodology are published online at: www.kabbalahandecology.com.

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Overview of *Kabbalah and Ecology*

This book examines precedents in Jewish thought for going beyond the strictly anthropocentric interpretation of the cosmos that characterizes Judaism and the Abrahamic traditions. The fulcrum for this examination is the idea of God's image, or *tselem*, and the ways it has been stretched in both Midrash and Kabbalah to include more than human beings. At the book's core is a transvaluation of the human–Nature relationship, indicated by a relatively new term for Nature: the “more-than-human world” (see Introduction, n.4).

One central focus is to establish a theology grounded entirely in traditional texts that envisions Creation and all creatures as participating in the divine image. Throughout, I examine precedents from Midrash, Kabbalah, and *Chasidut* (Hasidism) that differ from modernist or humanist anthropocentrism and that point toward alternative anthropologies or ways of understanding humanity. While in each case I am interested in the historical meaning of the texts, and there are many insights that I hope will make a meaningful contribution to the history of Jewish thought, the overarching purpose is to enable Jewish theology to sustain a more biocentric reading of Torah and the Jewish tradition.

The Introduction discusses the challenges that arise from ecology, beginning with general reflections on the ecological crisis and its impact on religious thought and on specific challenges faced by the Abrahamic traditions. A survey of previous work in Judaism and ecology can be found here, along with discussion about the contribution and method of this book. Broad questions are explored under the headings of “diversity”, “non-human subjecthood”, and “evolution”. In the last section, on evolution, anthropocentrism is critiqued directly from a Maimonidean perspective. Evolution, which contradicts human exceptionalism, is discussed in light of the thought of both Maimonides and Abraham Isaac Kook. The Introduction concludes with what I call a

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“theological map”, that is, a homiletical statement of the thesis developed herein, based on *Mishnah Avot* 3:14, which is this: When we affirm and extend the idea of God's image to other creatures, we more fully embody the image of God. This may be deemed our theological niche.

Part I of the book, on Midrash, outlines classical rabbinic anthropology and ideas about the image of God (*tselem Elohim*), the soul, and the human place in the world. This provides a basis for comparison with the texts of Kabbalah. Here it is demonstrated that the standard interpretation of *tselem* given by modern thinkers – that only human beings are in God's image – is not the best reading of rabbinic texts.

In Chapters 1 and 2, midrashic interpretations of *tselem* are organized according to whether they focus on intellectual, physical, behavioral, or ethical qualities as the essence of the divine image. *B'rei'shit (Genesis) Rabbah* is the central midrashic text analyzed, while other texts are looked at in comparison to it. A central idea in early midrash is that only half of Creation, the *'elyonim*, higher or upper creatures, is in God's image, while the *tachtonim* or lower creatures are not. This metaphysical division is queried in all subsequent chapters.

Throughout these chapters, I explore the ramifications and evolution of various midrashic motifs in both medieval and modern thought. Maimonides, who adopts some remarkably eco-centric theological positions, is a frequent reference point. Here and in Chapter 4, the growing influence of anti-corporealism theology in Judaism – that is, the belief that the body is in opposition to Spirit¹ – is also traced from early midrash to later midrash to Jewish philosophy.

In Chapter 3, I tease apart the value complex that unites within the human being the ideas of *tselem*, soul, and infinite value. This value complex characterizes most modern Jewish thought. I use the term “modernist-humanist” to refer to this value complex in the rest of the book. Midrashic texts thought to be the source of these ideas are carefully analyzed to show that they do not ground human value in God's image, but in the value of Creation.

Four points are drawn from these three chapters:

1. *Tselem* according to the rabbis is not limited to human beings but includes the angels and the heavens.
2. Soul, *nefesh* or *n'shamah*, is not equated with *tselem* in early midrash.
3. The modern idea that human life has “infinite value” has no clear representation in rabbinic thought.
4. The rabbis do not connect the idea of God's image with imitating God until after the close of the Amoraic period (around the eighth century).

Focusing on these points clears space for alternative readings of the tradition. Modernist-humanist theology is not “disproven” by this. In fact, a central element in the modernist (and medieval) understanding of *tselem*, the idea

¹ “Anti-corporealism” can also refer to a different belief, that God has no physical body or form.

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that God's image is realized through imitating God, is also central to any ecotheological interpretation. Rather, the modernist-humanist interpretation is shown to be a hermeneutical choice.

Chapter 4 deals with the evolution of the rabbinic understanding of soul, including the impact of Hellenism on Jewish thought and the conception that animals have souls.

Chapter 5 discusses the ethical norms applied to animals in Torah and rabbinic literature, the fact that the rabbis believed animals have moral standing and the potential to be moral actors, and how the rabbis understood stewardship and dominion. The rabbinic view of animals elucidates how the rabbis viewed the non-human other in general, including mountains, stones, and rivers, and most especially land, and how they extended a kind of moral standing to such entities.

This chapter is followed by a brief summary of the Intermediate Conclusions arrived at in Part I, as well as reflections on the idea of biophilia.

Part II, on Kabbalah, begins with a survey of ideas about *tselem* in Kabbalistic texts. Chapter 6 focuses on interpretations that extend midrashic ideas, while Chapter 7 discusses ideas that differ from the Midrash. The most important points in these chapters are:

1. In Kabbalah, *tselem* has a physical meaning that includes sexuality and the structure of our bodies and that simultaneously reflects the divine realms of the Sefirot.
2. Kabbalah sees many non-human creatures or dimensions of the earthly or lower realm as being in the divine image.

That sexuality in Kabbalah is part of *tselem* is well known but especially important, because sexuality and reproduction were defined in many classical midrashic texts as qualities we share with the lower creatures that are not *b'tselem*, not "in the image".

The second point is based on a hermeneutic essential to Kabbalah: the system of the Sefirot (attributes or vessels of God) and the name YHVH, writ upon the human body and soul, are identified as what constitutes God's image. Under the veil of esotericism, Kabbalistic texts use the same terminology to identify this divine imprint in various non-human creatures and more-than-human dimensions. Generally, elements of the *tachtonim* treated this way represent either the unification of the heavens and the earth (trees, birds), the whole of Creation, some spectrum that stands for the totality of world or cosmos (all colors, all animals), or all of the above (the *mishkan*, the rainbow).

Chapter 8 discusses the connection between *chiyut* or life-force and divinity in the thought of Shneur Zalman of Liady and Yaakov Lainer and whether a general theory about the extension of *tselem* to all the *tachtonim* can be grounded in these concepts.

Chapter 9 looks at how Kabbalah conceives the universe in its totality. In particular, the terminology "*Adam Qadmon*" describes the cosmos, including

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the Sefirotic worlds, as divinity. Some Kabbalists, especially Yosef Ashkenazi, drew the conclusion that if Adam is in God's image and the universe in the form of *Adam Qadmon* is in the human image, then Creation is *b'tselem*.

The second part of Chapter 9 discusses Shneur Zalman's description in *Igeret Haqodesh* 20 of the earthly realm as part of the living body of *Adam Qadmon*. Using the rubric of *Or Chozer*, returning or reflected light, Shneur Zalman of Liady specifically valorizes the Earth, which uniquely manifests the originary love present at the beginning of Creation.

Chapter 10 examines parallels between Maimonidean thought and *Adam Qadmon*, both of which attribute tremendous value and personhood to the whole of Creation, and between both of these and Gaia theory, which posits that the Earth is best understood as a living, whole organism.

Chapter 11 identifies several synonyms for *tselem* that evolved in Kabbalah. One in particular, *qomah*, can be traced from early Jewish texts of midrash, mysticism, and liturgy, through Kabbalistic and Hasidic thought. For Yishayah Horowitz, *qomah* came to mean *tselem in potentia*. The Ba'al Shem Tov and his disciples finally applied *qomah sh'leymah* to the idea that human intervention can reveal the divine image in other beings.

This chapter is followed by a second Intermediate Conclusions section that reviews some of the conjunctions between Kabbalah and ecotheology.

Part III looks more specifically at ecotheology. Chapter 12 focuses on language, a chief element of *tselem* according to early midrash, in the form of prayer, song, and naming. While it does discuss midrashic themes and texts, unlike other chapters it relies on modern thinkers, in particular Martin Buber and Nachman of Breslov, to elaborate the idea that all Creation has language.

Chapter 13 looks at how ideas discussed in earlier chapters line up with popular expositions of Jewish ecotheology found in the writings of Arthur Green and Arthur Waskow, and with "secular" ecotheologies. I also provide two other "theological maps" for extending *tselem* to the more-than-human world; these are analogous to the one discussed in the Introduction, but are earth-centered rather than human-centered. This chapter may be read as a second introduction to the book.

The Conclusion explores the use of historical-critical methods in constructive theology, the limitations of stewardship, and some of the halakhic and ethical implications of expanding God's image to the more-than-human. Finally, it asks: What does the theological process have to do with ecological reparation, with *tiquin* (*tikkun*), and with redemption? How do we turn theology into a living practice?

Methods for Jewish Constructive Theology, published separately online at www.kabbalahandecology.com, situates this book in the continuum of theological discourse, Jewish Studies scholarship, and literary theory. *Methods*

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responds to the questions that *Wissenschaft des Judentums*² scholars may have about combining critical analysis of texts with constructive theology.

² “The Scientific Study of Judaism” – the “positive-historical” school of criticism that began in the nineteenth century.