

THE UNIQUE SELF AND NONDUAL HUMANISM

A Study in the Enlightened Teaching of Mordechai Lainer of Izbica

Marc Gafni

ABSTRACT This article outlines one of the key sources in the great traditions for the integral teaching of Unique Self. The Unique Self is rooted in what is termed as *nondual* or *acosmic humanism* of a particular strain in Hebrew mysticism, as expressed in the teachings of Hasidic master Mordechai Lainer of Izbica. After examining and challenging previous scholarship on Lainer, the article reconstructs a theory of individuality from Lainer's writings, which becomes the lodestone of his nondual humanism. In unpacking Lainer's metaphysics of individuality, his ontological understanding of will, Torah, name, and uniqueness, the framework of the Unique Self teaching become clear. The article then reconstructs two matrices of sources from the intellectual history of Kabbalah, which serve as possible precedents to Lainer's Unique Self teaching in the older traditions of Kabbalah. The article then outlines the seven core principles of acosmic humanism that are incarnate in the typology of Unique Self that appears in Lainer's writing (in what is termed *the Judah archetype*). Finally, Lainer's view is placed in a larger context even as it is distinguished from the intellectual zeitgeist of its time.

KEY WORDS enlightenment; Integral Theory; Kabbalah; Torah; Unique Self

The teaching of Unique Self, which I have been privileged to experience and give language to in recent years, is rooted in my lineage tradition of Kabbalah.¹ The Unique Self teaching is particularly inspired and guided by my chosen teacher, the mid-19th century Hasidic master Mordechai Lainer of Izbica. Lainer did not invent the Unique Self teaching; rather, he evolved and refined it as it was transmitted through Hebrew mystical lineage.² In this article I explore Lainer's enlightenment teaching and some of his sources in earlier masters that are part of this lineage.

I want to emphasize that Unique Self in Izbica's teaching is an enlightenment teaching. Contrary to some contemporary writers who claim that enlightenment is an imported conception from the East, it is clear that enlightenment, in various interpretations of the term, was a primary concern of many seminal teachers and schools of Kabbalah.³ A close reading of Mordechai Lainer of Izbica reveals that what he calls *he'arah*, literally and correctly translated as enlightenment, is specifically the level of consciousness attained by one who has realized their Unique Self.

The assumption of all Hebrew mystical teaching is that the desired endgame of personal spiritual evolution is enlightenment.⁴ This may be termed *nullification*, *redemption*, *enlightenment*, or a host of other terms.⁵ This is what is often referred to in classical mystical parlance as "the realization of your true nature" or "the enlightenment of True Self." The first movement toward enlightenment is the movement from experiencing oneself as a skin-encapsulated ego to realizing one's true nature. This movement from separate self to True Self is a movement beyond the personal—it is an evolution from the level of ego identification to an infinitely more profound identification with the impersonal essence of one's true nature.

The Unique Self enlightenment teaching of the Hebrew mystics radically re-envisioned what enlightenment actually means. In this teaching, True Self realization is essential but is only the first of two stages on the

Correspondence: Marc Gafni, 17 Ridge Road, Fairfax, CA 94030. E-mail: eytanyair@hushmail.com.

path to enlightenment. The second step, the emergence of the Unique Self, comes when one moves beyond identification with ego and clarifies their unique identity. *In the realization of Kabbalistic consciousness, your Unique Self is both the epistemological perspective of your True Self, the ontological source of your existence, and the teleological trajectory of your fully realized Being and Becoming.* In other words, the Unique Self births the individual. Once born, its realization becomes the purpose of life.

This is the essential meaning of the Kabbalistic “one-letter” teaching that is introduced below. The Unique Self is envisioned in this teaching as “your letter in the Torah.” The Torah in the Kabbalistic idealization is not a third-person text; it is rather the incarnation of the living, aware, and purposeful divine nature of all that is (Idel, 1981; Scholem, 1965a; Wolfson, 1989). “Your letter in the Torah” is therefore the unique personal incarnation of divinity that lives in you, as you, and through you. In Unique Self enlightenment, you realize your role in the seamless coat of the universe (i.e., you are infinitely interwoven with every manifest part of the universe). At the same time, you discover that even while the coat is seamless, it is not featureless. That is, you are the uniquely featured expression of the seamless coat and the obligation of your life is to realize and enact your uniqueness within the seamlessness (to live your letter in the Torah).

It is worth noting at this point the split between the absolute and the relative—a common duality in much of contemporary spiritual discourse—is sharply attenuated in Hebrew mystical realization. While Kabbalah abounds with testimonies discerning between *Ein Sof* (“the limitless”), the infinite absolute which is undifferentiated ineffable divinity, and the *Sefirot*, which are the ten qualified emanations of divinity each expressing a different face of the divine essence, the unity, even non-difference of *Ein Sof* and the *Sefirot* is paradoxically affirmed even as they are distinguished (Idel, 1981).⁶ So while the distinction between the absolute and the relative is clearly articulated in Kabbalah, it is often paradoxically effaced in favor of the absolute nondual unity and identity of all that is. From this perspective, Unique Self is an expression of the ultimate identity between the relative and absolute dimensions of the divine, with both aspects of divinity ultimately incarnate in one’s letter in the Torah (Idel, 1981).⁷

The Unique Self teaching holds that there are four basic stages in the evolution toward authentic personhood.⁸ In the first stage, we evolve from the pre-personal to the personal; in the second stage, the personal or egoic personality is clarified and integrated; in the third stage, the personal is transcended and the impersonal True Self, which we all share, is realized; and in the fourth stage, the supra-personal comes online and the Unique Self, which is True Self + Perspective, is realized. One might say that at that level of Unique Self the personal comes back into the picture, clarified of its narrowness and grasping by the illumination of the True Self realization. At the level of Unique Self, the human begins to fully express and incarnate their personalized expression of being and essence. Unique Self is both the source and quality of one’s being as well as the uniquely textured trajectory of one’s becoming.

I lay out the wider and deeper contours of the Unique Self teaching in a separate article in this issue (2011) and in a forthcoming book (In press b). At this point, I turn to the teachings of Mordechai Lainer of Izbica, which inspired, formed, and continue to inform the Unique Self teaching.

Part 1: The Individual

Uniqueness and Individuality in the School of Izbica

Lainer was an important Hasidic master who taught in Eastern Europe in the mid-19th century. He emerged from the lineage of the Hasidism founder, Israel Baal Shem Tov,⁹ and was a close friend and primary student of Menachem Mendel of Kotz and the founder of his own highly significant enlightenment lineage.¹⁰ The notion of Unique Self as advanced by Mordechai Lainer of Izbica is a radical one. I use the word *radical* because, as outlined below, Lainer believes—against the weight of virtually the entire classical Jewish tradition—that the individual has the ability to access and incarnate an unmediated revelation of divinity that

overrides the binding normative character of the national revelation at Sinai. The individual in effect becomes Torah.¹¹ Since the Torah is identical with the divine in Kabbalistic understanding, what Lainer is in effect claiming is that the individual incarnates divinity. Moreover, both the portal for this incarnational revelatory experience, as well as its manifestation, according to Lainer, come not from the effacement of the self but rather from the identification and intensification of the person's unique post-egoic individuality. What is nullified is not the ego, but the exclusive identification with the ego,¹² and what becomes available is a sense of one's unique relationship to—and unique participation in—the living and commanding ground of reality by which every being is personally addressed.¹³ This is the realization of Unique Self.

The focus in this article will be on the book *Mei Hashiloach* (1995), the primary source for all of Mordechai Lainer's teachings. In the initial analysis I will ignore the Jewish and European context of those teachings, although I will return to both. It is worth noting here, however, that Lainer's individualism was primarily one version of the Romantic variety and not of the rational Enlightenment variety. The entire intellectual project of the Enlightenment was to assert that the individual per se was a sufficient locus of authority and dignity, and therefore not inexorably bound to the larger organizing systems of religion or state. By contrast, the Romantic notion of individuality suggested that it was, paradoxically, in the revelation of the unique individual that the cosmic spirit of the divine—the God within, the natural divine—was also revealed.

The essence of my argument in reading Lainer revolves around rethinking what an enlightened master might mean when he proclaims, "All is God." It might mean: since all is God, there is essentially no room for humans—the human being is effaced in front of an overpowering divine force. Or, one might interpret the same texts very differently: if all is God, then the human being is God as well. In the spirit of the Romantic zeitgeist in which Lainer wrote—and following the thrust of important Kabbalistic traditions upon which he creatively draws—"All is God" can be a highly empowering notion in which the lines between God and humans significantly blur, with more than provocative implications for normative behavior and psychology.

I suggest the term *nondual humanism* or *nondual acosmic humanism* for this theological position. It is important to recognize at the outset that Lainer's acosmism is not unique. He merely adopts, in extreme form, the classic nondual acosmic position of many Kabbalists who followed the teaching of Isaac Luria, including most of the major Hasidic masters, most notably Schneur Zalman of Liadi (Pachter, 1989; Ross, 1982a, pp. 109-112; Ross, 1982b, pp. 153-155). By *acosmism* I mean there is no independent existence to the cosmos outside of the divine ground of being; I do not mean to suggest that there is no cosmos which might be a different reading of the term.

Yet his interpretation of acosmism is very different from that of Lainer's predecessors or contemporaries, yielding surprising corollaries, including the Unique Self teaching of radical individualism that is the focus of this essay. This radical individualism, which permeates the entire *Mei Hashiloach* (MHs), is a powerful and poignant expression of Lainer's anthropocentric focus, manifesting the unique human dimension of his nondual realization and acosmism. Lainer's radical concept of uniqueness is rooted in ontology and finds expression in his reading of sacred texts, psychology, ritual, study, and religious anthropology.

Prior Scholarship on Izbica

Lainer's concept of individualism has largely been ignored or glossed over by scholars as not integral to his system. This, in my view, is a fundamental misreading of MHs. The reason for this mistake lies primarily in the claim first put forth by Joseph Weiss as to the radically theocentric nature of MHs. In Weiss' (1985) reading of Lainer, the human being is but a "passive instrument" of the divine. Weiss further characterizes a major thrust of Lainer's thought as establishing the "insignificance of human action...[or] its complete nullification." Weiss (1985) writes:

The religious anarchy of Mordechai Joseph is not based on the concept of individu-

ality of differing natures but on the concept of Divine Will...Mordechai Joseph... takes no account of [the concept of the individual] or of that of the highly personal disposition of mankind, his “inner form,” the “roots of his spirit,” as expressed in [K]abbalistic terms, essentially logical concepts from which antinomian propositions can indeed easily be derived. (p. 248)

Not only does this conclusion ignore key texts, but also the terms cited by Weiss (especially “roots of his spirit”) and the conceptual world they imply are in fact absolutely central to *MHs*.¹⁴

Weiss’ (1985) reading of Lainer as radically disempowering the individual is consistent throughout. He writes dramatically of the “breakthrough of divine action” that becomes manifest “in the untrammelled power of absolute compulsion” (pp. 231, 236; also 1961, p. 452). Weiss’ (1985) final sentence sums up the theocentric axis of his reading of Lainer: “Human salvation begins when man is rendered defenseless before the divine power...” (p. 242). Nearly all of Izbica scholarship follows Weiss’ lead to varying degrees (Gafni, In press a). In my work on Mordechai Lainer, I believe that I demonstrated, quite to the contrary of Weiss’ theocentric reading, that individualism in Lainer is the central pivot point of his teaching, and the most natural and logical manifestation of his acosmic humanism.¹⁵ Lainer’s thought has a primarily anthropocentric axis that intends to empower, not to enfeeble.

Not only have Joseph Weiss (1985), Rachel Elior (1993), Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer (1963), and other scholars missed or marginalized the essential strain of individuality that is central to Lainer, they have completely missed the core construct of Unique Self, which is the very essence of the Judah archetype that I have shown to be central to Lainer’s teaching.¹⁶ These two aspects of Lainer are actually intimately related. Because Weiss correctly read many of Lainer’s texts as referring to what Lainer calls *berur* or “clarification”—the spiritual process of dis-identifying with ego, in which the human being evolves beyond the illusion of a self separate from God—he naturally assumed that any affirmation of individuality would be antithetical to the radically theocentric axis of Lainer’s teaching. However, Weiss and other scholars miss the core distinction between ego and the Unique Self expressed as the Judah archetype, which is absolutely essential to Lainer’s theology.¹⁷

Once this distinction is understood, it becomes clear that the texts of Lainer’s which reject individuality are referring only to individuality at the level of exclusive identification with separate egoic consciousness. This then naturally explains all of the other texts in Lainer, which seem to embrace individuality in a sense that Weiss and others could not make sense of. A thorough perusal of those texts indicates clearly that they are bound with Lainer’s Judah archetype (i.e., with the Unique Self level of consciousness, which comes fully to the fore only after *berur*).

The Metaphysics of Individuality

Lainer’s theory of individuality is rooted not in moving away from the divine center, but rather in a radical locating of the human being within the realization that self is rooted in, and an expression of, the divine self. For Lainer, every individual is absolutely unique. That uniqueness is not merely an expression of historical, cultural or psychological conditioning. It is rather more that for Lainer, the unique individual expresses a unique face of the divine, which is prior and beyond all historical, cultural, or psychological conditioning. For Lainer, radical uniqueness derives from the ontological axiom that every individual, every *perat nefesh Yisrael*,¹⁸ is infused by God, a unique dimension of holiness or essence. God is the direct lineage of every member of the covenant.¹⁹

This is a major motif of Lainer’s interpretation of the census in his commentary on the beginning of the Book of Numbers (see *MHs*, Vol. 1, Bamidbar s.v. Vayedaber).²⁰ In that passage, he makes two major points. First, the counting of each person was to affirm their full uniqueness and infinite value before and as

God. The concepts of uniqueness and divine providence are inextricably linked in Lainer's metaphysics—the intimacy of providence derives from the charisma of uniqueness. Second, Lainer moves from a language of providence, or *hashgahah*, to a language of the mystique of participation. Uniqueness is rooted in an acosmic metaphysics in which the human being is not merely subject to divine providence but actually participates in divinity.

The result of this ontology is the daring, yet obviously necessary, assertion made by Lainer that if one unique spirit, *nefesh biferat*, were to be missing, then divinity itself would be lacking. Lainer interprets the phrase “This shall be the number” (Hos. 2:1) as meaning that:

[E]veryone will be needed, for from all of the people of Israel, God's greatness can be seen. And if one person is missing from all of Israel, then “the goblet would be lacking wine” (Cant. 7:2). Just as when the portrait of the king is drawn on many thousands of tiles—if one of them is lost, the portrait of the king would be lacking. (MHs, Vol. 1, Bamidbar s.v. Vayedaber)

This passage affirms the radical uniqueness and infinite value and dignity of every individual. Were one unique individual to be *haser*, missing or lacking, then there would be a *hisaron*, or lack in God. This passage speaks of the indivisibility and absolute inseparability of the finite from the infinite as well as the absolute inseparability and indivisibility of all finite forms. To take away one individual is to take away the whole. Since each finite person is the infinite, to subtract one finite thing would be to subtract the infinite; everything would collapse, hence my designation of Lainer's realization as nondual humanism.

Helek (Dimension) and the Metaphysics of Individuality

Lainer generally refers to uniqueness using one of the following terms: *peratim* (individuals or particulars); *perat nefesh yisrael* (a unique, or specific, individual of Israel); *madreigato* (his [unique] level); *ma'alato ha-shayakh lo beshorsho* (his stature, intrinsic to him at his root); *makom ha-shayakh lo* (the place related to him); *shayakh lehelko* (related to his [unique] portion); *helko* (his portion); *ha-tov ha-shayakh lo* (the good that is related to him); or *shorsho* (his root). Of the three primary terms (*perat*, *shores*, and *helek*), I will focus here on *helek*,²¹ which most strongly expresses the idea that the individual spirit is co-extensive with divinity.²² The human being (or more accurately, in Lainer's framework, Israel) is literally a *helek*, a *part* of God. I will briefly explore some of the parameters of this term, which is so central to Lainer's thought.

According to Lainer, the desire to understand the unique nature of every individual spirit was the inner intention of Moses' entreaty to see God's face (MHs, Vol. 1, Ki Tisa, s.v. Vayomer ani A'avir). God responds, in Lainer's reading, with an affirmation that divinity knows the depth of unique individuality for every person, and that from a divine perspective everyone chooses their unique root. In this passage (as in many others), uniqueness is ontological, rooted in the order of the cosmos “from the beginning of creation.” The moment of revelation for Moses in this story is in the *satori*-like realization that every choice made by every person is precisely the choice necessary for the realization of their uniqueness, which is prior to their conditioning. Moreover, Lainer lays out the interpersonal implication which concerns us here: One who is rooted in their own spirit's uniqueness will not need to violate or co-opt or otherwise impinge on *helek haver*, the unique portion of their friend.

This *helek* is the root of one's connection to the divine. Returning to Lainer's commentary on numbers, he states:

[C]oncerning every unique, individual person in Israel...every one [has his own] number, that is to say, in the *minyan* count, and he will be valuable in *Hashem's* eyes... for all of Israel is a part *helek*

of God, as it is written, “for God’s *helek* portion is His people” (Deut. 32:9). Every single one is attached to a unique dimension of all the dimensions of God. (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Bemidbar s.v. Vayedaber)

Lainer uses *helek* here to refer to the radical ontology of uniqueness, expressing both individual uniqueness (i.e., every person has a unique *helek*) and acosmism (i.e., God’s people are a *helek* of God). The human being is a *helek* of God, as an individual and not just as a part of the whole. Consequently, each person is possessed of unique individuality. Each person is a prism that refracts a unique face of the infinite divine.

The Unique Self, Dignity, and Redemption

Lainer affirms that *le’atid* (in the future), in the expanded consciousness of the eschaton, uniqueness will still remain a demarcating feature. Lainer describes this characteristic of the eschaton as the time of *ner* (candle). Here he uses this framework to explain why Hanukkah candles are lit after the sun sets:

... for a candle is a unique individual thing, but light is general ... Therefore from the miracle that occurred through the *menorah*, they established a unique candle for each individual, to illuminate the individual light of every unique person in Israel... and that is what it means [that candles should be lit] “when the sun sets,” for the sun symbolizes the general principles of Torah, and *le’atid* in the future there will be no need for the general principles. Rather, God will cause the flow of explicit understanding *binah* to every person in every individual act. (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Shabbat s.v. Mai Hanukah)

For Lainer, the phrase *le’atid*, denoting redeemed consciousness, is always an indication of ontological significance.²³ As we will see, this consciousness can be realized in the present through the process of *berur*, which is a crystallizing of post-egoic uniqueness.

Berur (Clarification), Will, and Uniqueness

The key to realizing one’s divine nature and destiny is what Lainer terms the religious path of *berur*, an introspection and contemplation that yields deep understanding of the post-egoic unique nature of the individual spirit.²⁴ Success in *berur* for Lainer is the demarcating characteristic of the eschaton, while the inability to do so is what produces suffering (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Toldot s.v. Ahi). This eschatological or redeemed consciousness, which is characterized as *’olam ha-ba* (the world-to-come), can be realized in the present moment, as evidenced in the following passage:

In [any specific] action that [a person] does, he should search to understand whether this act and will are clarified *mevorer* [in the present] such that it will exist forever *le’olmei ’ad*, even in *’olam ha-ba*. (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Shemini s.v. Vayehi)

Lainer even suggests that an individual can complete the process of *berur* in the present:

[Regarding] a person who is holy and completed in all of his [process of] *berur*, who is drawn after the will of God, there will not come into his heart any will which is not the will of God, whose will is flowing to him... He must not treat any arousal of will as superfluous. [He must give expression] to every will that arises, for when a will arises in him it is certainly the will of God. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Vayak’hel s.v. vayak’hel 2)

Lainer's presentation of individuality is entirely about the development of the Unique Self. Initially, the person has not identified their unique individuality or *mitzvah* (divine commandment), the expression of their unique part in Torah. This may be the case even if they have reached a high level of realization of the True Self (i.e., transcendence of the ego). Through the process of *berur*, the person reaches beyond this, where they discover their radical personal uniqueness. Significantly, a person's progress need not be linear—they may access the unmediated will of God (i.e., have clarified the identification of their will with the divine will, in particular moments, even before they have completed the process of *berur*).

The process reaches completion when a person is so deeply integrated into the divine that they merge the divine with their Unique Self identity. When the process of *berur* is complete, the integration of the divine into the essential identity of the individual is so profound that separate identity itself collapses and the ontic identity between human and God is realized. The God beyond becomes the God within. These two faces of the divine then live in dialectical harmony in the form of radical devotion and radical audacity. It is at this point that a person both accesses and indeed incarnates, through the prism of their radical uniqueness, the unmediated will of God. This is the stage at which a person fully accomplishes their unique *tikkun*, a term best translated as “evolutionary healing.”²⁵ A person is born to realize their unique *tikkun*—that is to say, the unique evolution of God that depends on the individual's realization of their clarified Unique Self, in all of its expressions and implications.

Part 2: Torah

The Individual's Unique Helek (Dimension) of Torah

While the public character of the Sinaitic theophany is not formally denied by Lainer—indeed, it is an axiomatic principle—Sinai is just the beginning of the story.²⁶ Lainer assumes a theory of continuous revelation, which he explicitly relates to his central theme of individuality. God is *noten ha-torah*, present tense (i.e., constantly giving the Torah in the present and not merely in the past), according to “what is needed in this moment, in this place, by this *nefesh*” (*MHS*, Vol. 1, Nedarim s.v. Davar). Each human being in all the particularity of their person, place, and time must receive their own unique revelation.

The eschaton will be marked by the fact that each person will access their own unique Torah:

Even in the future . . . [there will be] distinct levels of uniqueness. However, no one will fear his teacher at that time, “For no longer will a person teach his friend” (Jer. 31:34). Rather, he will tell his friend anything he innovates in the knowledge of Torah, with a laughing countenance, since everyone will be clearly possessed of his own clarified unique portion of the Torah. (*MHS*, Vol. 1, Toldot s.v. Ahi)

In the eschaton, there will be no hierarchy, and yet uniqueness will remain.²⁷ Thus, Lainer teaches that even though in the future, *mora rabo* (fear of one's teacher)—interpreted by Lainer as teacher-student hierarchy—will not exist, as it does in our present level of consciousness. Indeed, the future will be the time of the ultimate *berur* of uniqueness. In this redeemed reality, one's unique Torah will not be a source of hierarchal power. Rather, everyone will share their unique Torah, the product of their singular creativity and realization, with *panim sohakot* (a laughing countenance).

Upon perusal of countless teachings in Lainer's work, it becomes clear that the way to access and incarnate one's unique revelation of divinity—the revelation that speaks to and within one's unique life—is through the specific prism of one's own unique story. Rather than effacing the Unique Self in order to allow one's natural divinity to manifest itself, Lainer teaches that it is only by deepening one's uniqueness, accessing the Unique Self, that a person becomes transparent to their divine nature.

Uniqueness and Law

Lainer's theory of personal uniqueness is inextricably bound to his antinomian impulse, and a person's unique *mitzvah* or *helek*, their portion in Torah, can have normative ramifications. Until this point, the antinomian potential implicit in the sources has not led to antinomian conclusions. However, Lainer, in two daring passages, which to the best of my knowledge have no legal precedent in the classical sources, suggests that one must sacrifice one's life rather than violate one's unique *mitzvah* (MHs, Vol. 1, Va'et'hanan s.v. Ve'ahavta).

Generally, rabbinic sources allow or obligate martyrdom only for three major transgressions: murder, incest, or the denial of God through idolatry. Lainer's extension of the obligation of martyrdom, in light of his theory of uniqueness, is elegantly simple: since one's uniqueness is precisely their *helek Hashem* (portion in God) (i.e., their participation in the divinity), to deny that uniqueness, which is expressed through their unique *mitzvah*, is to deny divinity or, as we have seen, to deface the image of the king. Certainly, this violation is of sufficient gravity to warrant martyrdom.

However, Lainer further suggests that there is a level of personal revelation that directs one not only to move beyond the realm of law, but to nullify the law in response to the higher imperative of one's personal revelation.²⁸ This major move in Lainer's thought emerges directly from the sources I have presented here. It is not an anarchic idea, as Weiss (1985) suggests, but rather a choice guided by a different controlling mechanism than law, by the incarnational integrity of each spirit's unique contours. Far from anarchic, it is precise and demanding. In fact, it is by far more demanding than the mere strictures of the law.

Unique Mitzvah and Unique Torah: The Matrix of Antinomianism

It is in light of these ontologies that we must read the passages which teach that a unique portion of Torah and/or a unique *mitzvah* exists for every person in Israel. In the following passage, based on the verse "*Hashem* loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob" (Ps. 87:2), Lainer compares unique Torah with the law in general:

"The gates of Zion" refer to the words of Torah and that commandment which belong to each individual. This is called "the excellent gates of *halakhah*,"²⁹ (*bBer.* 8a), for this commandment belongs to this particular individual, and these specific words of Torah are according to his level. "The dwelling places of Jacob" are words of Torah and the commandments in general. This is the meaning—that God loves and cherishes the words of Torah that are needed by the individual at a specific time, far more than the dwelling places of Jacob. (MHs, Vol. 2, Psalms s.v. Oheiv)

Here, uniqueness and personal revelation fully converge. The term used consistently by Lainer for Unique Self and unique *mitzvah* is *perat*, as we have discussed above.³⁰ In this passage, we see how Lainer connects these two critical dimensions of "the particular individual" (*perat nefesh*) (i.e., the Unique Self) and "specific words of Torah" (*perat divrei Torah*) (i.e., the unique Torah of that individual). Personal revelation to the individual, through the portal of individual uniqueness, Unique Self, is the revelation of one's unique Torah, including that which may move one to transcend and even contradict the law.

Lainer terms the law *kelalim* (general principles), *kelalei ha-Torah* (general principles of Torah), or *kelalei divrei Torah* (general principles of the words of Torah) in contrast with the *perat*.³¹ Lainer explains that the revelation of *peratei divrei Torah* "illuminates one individual with more brightness because he is greater than his fellow" (MHs, Vol. 1, Mas'ei s.v. Kein Mateh 2; Vol. 2, Psalms s.v. Oheiv). That is to say, the *peratim*, the individual or situation-specific revelation of law, is revealed according to the level of the *perat nefesh*, the Unique Self. It is through the prism of *perat nefesh*, the essential ontological uniqueness of one's

story, that one is able to access *peratei divrei Torah*, one's personal Torah, through unmediated personal revelation (the revelation of Unique Self).

According to Lainer in this same passage, personal revelation cannot only allow one to transcend *halakha*, it may also cause one to be "compelled to act against the *halakha*." This is also a quality of Lainer's Judah archetype, which represents the enlightened state of the awakened Unique Self.³² That unique Torah, as we have seen, is far from being anarchic. It is also far from rendering the human being autonomous. Rather, the unique Torah possesses a *commanding quality* that supersedes all other sources of authority, including the law itself. This means that illumination requires the fostering of deep connection to the part of Torah that is most related to that person.³³ The personal revelation of depth in Torah can only take place, writes Lainer, when the Torah is *shayakh lenafsho* (profoundly related to his unique spirit) (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Proverbs s.v. Hokhmah Bahutz).

Part 3: Name

Called by the Name of God

Name is an ideal conceptual vehicle for Lainer's expression of the Unique Self principle that lies at the core of his nondual humanism, because name is both the symbol of essential personal identity as well as the ultimate expression divinity. For Lainer, name, like Unique Self, is also not merely an expression of social, psychological or historical conditioning. Rather, it stands for the ontological validity of human activism, which emerges directly from the realization of one's Unique Self.

Weiss (1961, p. 451) and other scholars of Ishbitz have read Lainer as wholly rejecting the ontological efficacy of human activism. In a key passage to support his thesis that Lainer's theology of the divine will lead to a radical devaluing of human action, Weiss cites a central mantra-like refrain appearing throughout *MHs*: human action is "called by the name of God" (Vol. 1, Pesachim s.v. Bayom).³⁴ However, as a divine gift to the human, God allows human actions to nonetheless be "called by the name of man."³⁵

Virtually all students of *MHs* understand this phrase and the passage Weiss cites it from to mean that all human actions belong to God and have no real connection to the human being. The gift that one's actions should be called by one's name is a divinely granted illusion that human activism is valuable; the ontological truth is that human activism is irrelevant. A closer reading of this passage, however, suggests a different interpretation. Especially in the context of many other passages dealing with names, which together form a coherent cluster, a picture emerges that dramatically supports nondual acosmic humanism, rooting it in one of the central Kabbalistic doctrines: the secret of the name of God (Gafni, In press a).

Lainer, emerging from a long Kabbalistic tradition and going one step further in his conclusions, actually teaches the paradoxical identity between the name of God and the human name.³⁶ Human actions are correctly ascribed to human beings, or "called by the name of man." Actions are also correctly ascribed to the name of God. This is the great paradox of nondual acosmic humanism. Religious difficulty only arises when human actions are ascribed solely to the name of the human, to the separate self, that is to say, when the human being claims the ability to act independently of the divine name and will.

Name alludes to three distinct levels of consciousness operative in *MHs*. At the first level, there exists a necessary illusion that human effort independent of God creates change in the world. This corresponds to what Lainer refers to as actions called by the name of man; this is the level of consciousness in which a person's exclusive identity is with separate self. This illusion fails when one ascends to the second stage of consciousness, in which one realizes that all is called by the name of God; this is the level which is referred to in enlightenment literature as *True Self*. The individual becomes fully absorbed into and indivisible from the One. They realize that there is no action one can take which is not truly God acting in and through them. This, however, is not the end of the story. A third level of consciousness then emerges in which, once

again, one realizes that human action is indeed called by the name of man. This is the level of Unique Self. At this level of redeemed consciousness one realizes that the name of the human and the name of God are ontically identical.

The essence of redeemed consciousness derives from what Lainer refers to as *binah*, (understanding).³⁷ It is in “*binah*-consciousness,” so to speak, that a person can incarnate and intend the will of God. In other words, Lainer understands *binah*-consciousness in terms of name, that is to say, Unique Self. In the following passage, Lainer is analyzing the commandment that on Purim a person should drink ‘*ad delo yada*, meaning, “until he does not know” the difference between the wicked Haman and the righteous Mordechai of the Purim story. Lainer explains:

[T]his means [a person should know] *beli leda* ‘*at vehakarah* without any conscious knowledge or recognition—only from the understanding in the heart *ha-binah she-balev*—so will he know that Haman is cursed and Mordechai blessed. And this is [the meaning of] the custom to exchange clothes on Purim, which teaches that even without *hakarah* recognition of external appearance...the peoples of the world will see that the name of *Hashem* (God) is called upon us, and the spirit of Israel will be recognized. (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Megilah s.v. Amar Rabah)³⁸

Here, what is accessed on Purim is not drunkenness but the redeemed consciousness of *binah* associated with visibly personifying the name of God. “The name of *Hashem* called upon us” is not just a figure of speech. Lainer means here that the name of the human participates in the identity of the name of God, and *not* that it is effaced into nothingness by the divine name. Name as the symbol of personal identity, and the divine name as the expression of all that is in its revealed form, are realized as one in the human realization of Unique Self. This reading is made clear in a critical series of passages, each of which makes the point in a different way.

In the first passage, Lainer interprets the rabbinic saying “What is the relation between the *tzadik* [righteous person] and the *Shekhinah* [the immanent presence/manifestation of God]? That of a candle before a torch.” He writes:

They did not say like a candle before the sun...for in that image, the light would be nullified and absorbed in the source of the light, which is the sun. But a candle before a torch is not nullified *mitbateil*...it remains a light unto itself. It is in this sense that the relationship of the righteous to *Shekhinah* was held to be analogous to a candle’s relation to a torch. That is, even at that time when the clarity of divine light will be revealed and it will be seen that choice and human activism have no independent existence *metzi’ut* [ontological status], nonetheless, the work of the righteous, who toiled and endured in this world in the time of occlusion [of the *Shekhinah*], will have a *hash’arah* [something essential and immortal that remains theirs], through their work ‘*avodah* being called by their name. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Likutim 2 Pesachim s.v. Lamah)

It is very clear in this passage that human activism (expressed by human actions being called by the name of man) has ontological value. The ontological efficacy of human action is clear as well from the following passage:

It is God’s way that a person receives some divine good (i.e., blessing) and after that it is hidden from him...and he prays to God, as it is written, “You exalted me and you

cast me out” (Psalms 102:11), and by means of this crying out, God returns to him what he has lost with added good. And through this, the good [he received] *is called by his name*, for he acquired it through his suffering. And through this [suffering] holiness is established in his heart firmly, so that it cannot be undermined *lanetzah* forever. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Ki Tisa s.v. Vayedaber Hashem el Mosheh Leikh Reid)

The revelation of divine light in the future world, that is to say the consciousness of enlightenment, as Lainer explains above, removes the illusion of independent human action but does not undermine the ontological value of human activism. Rather, as we have seen, it is empowering, lending *tekufot* (power, audacity, urgency, and determination) to the human being, who becomes conscious that he participates in divinity. Ontology means, as in the previous passage, that the name of man and the name of God are identical. *Hash'arah* is a key phrase, indicating that human action has effect in the world not only in a relative sense, but also in an absolute ontological sense, as an expression of the true divine nature of reality. A second key phrase in this passage is *ma'aseh tzadikim*, the work of the righteous. Lainer regularly uses this phrase to refer not to the Hasidic *tzadik*, but to any person who realizes their ontic identity with the divine and thus “intends the will of God” (i.e., embodies the Unique Self).

The category of *tzadik* was extended by Lainer to the entire Judah archetype, which, as we shall see below, is the archetype of one who has realized the identity between human and divine will and therefore can intend the will of God *mekavein retzon Hashem*. We will see below that the category of one who can intend the will of God is not limited to any particular elite but includes in potential at least all of Israel *mikaton ve'ad gadol* (meaning “young to old” and “small to great”) (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Balak s.v. Ka'eit). That deeds are referred to by the name of man, *nikra 'al shemo*, means therefore not that the actions are merely human actions. Rather, this means that human action, when it emerges from Unique Self, symbolized by the human name, participates in the name of God.

The significance of *nikra 'al shemo*, “called by his name,” namely that actions are ascribed to the human, is not an illusion. Only human action independent of God, claimed by the separate self, is an illusion. The idea that whatever is *nikra 'al shemo* possesses real ontological status is expressed in many *MHs* texts. In one example, Jacob, according to Lainer, wants God to tell him “what blessing and sanctity of God (lit. ‘the name’) will remain after him [as] a lasting legacy to be called by his [own] name?” (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Vayehi s.v. Vayehi). The phrase *hash'arah kayemet*, lasting legacy, is of course a *terminus technicus* in *MHs* for the ontologically real. Jacob wants to know that his life—his unique individuality—has lasting ontological value; in Lainer’s refrain throughout *MHs*, Jacob wants to know what will be *nikra 'al shemo*, called by his name.

In another critical passage, Lainer deals directly with the efficacy of human actions in the context of name and makes very clear what he means when he says human actions are “called by the name of man”:

[A] person should not rely on the general principles of Torah alone. He should only look to God in every specific action, according to the specific time, [to know] what God desires, but this is not within the ability of a person to intend without the help of God. And since this is true, “What is the profit” (Eccl. 3:9) for the one who takes action, since all the acts of service a person does for God derive from the divine will which flows to him, and they will not be called by his name?... Regarding this, it says [in the continuation of the verse] “in whatever he has toiled over,” for this *is* his profit: however he exerts himself by wanting from his side to fulfill the will of God, this [exertion] remains for him *l'olmei 'ad* forever (i.e. it is ontologically real), and as a result, God *yaskim* agrees concerning all his actions that they will be called by the name of the person who acts... so one must take care and understand how to do

and intend the divine will at every moment, and God *yigmor ba'ado* will complete [his actions] for his sake. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Ecclesiastes s.v. Mah Yitron 2)

The human being in this passage is charged with an activist spiritual posture. Instead of relying on the precedent of the law, he must seek anew in every situation to discern the specific will of God. It is clear in this passage that human activism, emerging from the realization of Unique Self according to Lainer, has lasting significance. The phrases at the end of this passage, “God agrees” (i.e., affirms human action) and “God completes” human action, are often used by Lainer to express acosmism in a way that affirms rather than effaces the human being.

The parallel phrase expressing nondual acosmic humanism in *MHs* which underlies the ontic identity between the name of God and the name of man is that “God seals His name” upon human action. For example, Lainer states: “God seals His name instantly on all the actions of King David even before they are made manifest” (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Likutim s.v. Hashem YKVK). David, a Judah archetype, represents Unique Self in this sense of one who has realized his unique identity with the divine will and therefore can intend the divine will. Thus, just as a person’s name is sealed upon their actions through their effort, so too is God’s name sealed on their actions through their *tekufot*. Human action, in its most perfect expression, is both symbolized or called by the name of the human, and merged or sealed with God’s name. There is no sense here of David being effaced or overpowered by divinity, however. Quite the opposite, David personifies divine will and name rather than being effaced by it. That this conjoining of the human and divine names is at all possible is because of the ontic identity between human and divine will. Contrary to Weiss’ understanding, name is not shown to be mere illusion, even in the full light of the eschaton.

Called by the Name, Ontology, Uniqueness, and Will

Lainer uses name to specifically express uniqueness throughout *MHs*.³⁹ A particularly important example of the identification between name and uniqueness appears in Lainer’s discussion of the rabbinic adage that every person has three names. This passage is important because it affirms the ontological status of the unique name acquired by the human being as result of human action, ascribed to the third name of the adage:

“The name that he acquires for himself” comes through fixing and healing his *hisaron* (unique ‘lack,’ i.e., flaw or deficiency)...Great is what the person acquires for himself, for the word “name” always indicates the root of life, through which every person is *medugal* distinguished... (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Vayeitzei s.v. Shem Ha-gedolah)⁴⁰

“Root of life” refers to the divine. Lainer states here that the name acquired by human action is not effaced at all; to the contrary, it participates in the divine. The prism for that participation, as this passage makes clear, is the healing embrace of one’s Unique Self, which is paradoxically expressed in one’s unique *hisaron*. This is a recurrent theme in *MHs*.

Lainer makes it clear that the human being’s name is never independent; rather, it is in and of itself the name of God. This is the realization of enlightened consciousness unique to every name. This idea emerges in the following passage, where Lainer explains a *midrash* about Aaron’s son Eleazar fleeing the tribes, who have “risen up against him.” Lainer applies the verse “The name of God is a tower of strength; the righteous man will run into it and be lifted to safety” (Prov. 18:10) to Eleazar:

One [like Eleazar] who flees and comes in God’s name has “a tower of strength” *migdal oz*, even when he does something that is not right on the surface...[H]e has *tekufot* (sacred audacity) and *migdal oz*, since he is the name of God *shem Hashem*

even running into [the name] (i.e., merging with it); in any case, he intends the depth of God's will...and this is the meaning of "and lifted to safety" *venisgav* (Prov. 18:10): this action is [lifted] beyond the reach of a person's grasp in this world. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Va'era s.v. Vayikah)⁴¹

We will analyze a portion of this passage referring to the Judah archetype below in our discussion of the same; for now it is sufficient to notice that the person who reaches the level of post-*berur* consciousness merges with the name of God. The person's audacity is the audacity of God, because the ontic identity between the individual's name and the name of God has been realized. The *tekufot* (postconventional courage and power) of the individual and the *oz* (strength or power) of the name of God are one and the same. This is a classic expression of nondual acosmic humanism: "For he is the name of God."

It is not at all surprising then to learn that Lainer identifies name not only with uniqueness but also with will, *ratzon*:

For [God's] name expresses will. Just as we find with people that their deeds and crafts are called the name, because all of their will is manifest in that which they are engaged by their actions, and "His name" in *gematria* (numerology) is [equivalent to] *ratzon*... (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Tazri'a s.v. Ishah)⁴²

In this passage Lainer speaks about the unity of the divine name and the divine will. In the next passage, both the human and the divine name are but another face of will—the name of God and the name of the human participate in the same ontological identity.

At the beginning of this passage, Lainer takes the phrase *da'at kedoshim eida'*, "I would know knowledge of the holy," (Prov. 30:3) to indicate the clarified consciousness of the Judah archetype that is embodied by Solomon, discussed below.⁴³ Lainer then interprets a question in Proverbs that is raised in the verse immediately following the statement *da'at kedoshim eida'*. The question is "What is his name? And what is his son's name? Would you know?" (Prov. 30:4):

"What is his name?"—that means, a person should at all times know God's will. For "name" indicates will... "And what is his son's name?"—that is, a person should sense the birth of a new will, for new will begins from this *gevul* boundary (i.e., the point which crosses over or is beyond the boundaries of *halakhah*). This is why the verse concludes with *ki teida'* "you would know"—meaning you will know all these things through *berur* clarification. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Proverbs s.v. Ki va'ar)

Post-*berur*, the person knows the divine will that originates within them as identical with their own will, hence their own name. The post-*berur* and therefore post-egoic unification of the human name with divine will is an essential dimension of Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism. It is through *berur* that one understands the ontic identity of will and name, and the unity of the unique human will and God's will. Here we see that this knowledge is identical with both name and will. The boundary (i.e., the general principle of the law), which is superseded by *heshek* (desire), provides the measure which allows a person to know that he is experiencing the birth of a new will, which has been clarified.

The Dialectical Dance of Nondual Acosmic Humanism

This blurring between the human name and the name of God expresses itself in a dialectical and paradoxical dance in which the human is called by the name of God, as we have seen in some of the aforementioned

passages. In the next passage we learn that God also desires to be called by the human name. Underscoring the ontology of human action and linking it with God's desire to be called by the name of man, Lainer states:

God gave place to the work of Israel, so much so that it is God's will to establish a place for their service (i.e., human action) higher than the grasp of man... as it says, "Israel through whom I will be made glorious" (Isa. 49:3), meaning that God desires to be called by the name of Israel. (*MHS*, Vol. 2, Likutim Va'etchanan s.v. Ukeshartem)

In the human divine dance, a person gives up any sense of ownership deriving from their action and in direct response God affirms the ontological dignity of human action. According to Lainer, this paradox is precisely the meaning of human action being called by the name of man. Using the building of the tabernacle as his model, Lainer devotes a very long passage to explaining that a human being can claim no real participation in manifesting the effects which seem to result from his action. However, as is the case many times in *MHS*, Lainer's true position is revealed only in the last several lines of the passage:

Even though the person sees that he has no *hitnas'ut* (distinction) [as a result of his efforts], nonetheless...after he recognizes that he has no independent adornment in his root, God shows him that he does have *hitnas'ut* as a result of his effort at his work. And God Himself clarified this [in regard to Bezalel], as it says, "[God] filled him with the spirit of God" (Exod. 35:31), and after that it says, "Bezalel made the ark" (Exod. 37:1), that is, the work was called by his name. (*MHS*, Vol. 2, Vayak'hel s.v. Vayak'hel 3)

According to Lainer, Bezalel's participation in the work of the tabernacle is ultimately not an illusion to be dispelled but that which accords him *hitnas'ut*, individual distinction, a clear indication of ontological status in Lainer's lexicon. A similar notion appears in regard to Lainer's understanding of the relationship between human thought and action. One might have thought, states Lainer, that action was in human hands and thought in God's hands. However,

When a person realizes that action is also in God's hands... and that without Him, no one raises a hand or a foot, then God gives him his reward *quid pro quo*, and ascribes even thought to man, that is to say... even thought is called by your name. (*MHS*, Vol. 1, Ruth s.v. Yeshalem; Vol. 2, Yitro s.v. Vayishma' 2)⁴⁴

Calling action by the name of the human is not a meaningless divine reward (though one might interpret the above passage as stating such if read out of context). Rather, in light of the passages we have adduced thus far, one is paradoxically freed and empowered to the extent that one's actions and thoughts are called by one's name. Lainer's intention here becomes clearer. By recognizing that there is no thought or action independent of God, the human in effect realizes the ontic identity between the human and God, so that one's name participates in the name of God.

The final source I will quote captures both the paradoxical nature of nondual acosmic humanism and makes clear that *nikra 'al shemo* specifically indicates the ontological efficacy of human action even within the framework of post-*berur* consciousness. In this passage, Lainer interprets the verse "What is the profit for the one who acts in what he has toiled over?" (Eccl. 3:9). The context is Lainer's assertion that the 28 times the word *'et* (time) is mentioned at the beginning of Ecclesiastes imply that each moment has its own com-

mandment that cannot be captured by the general principles of law; rather, a person must “only look to God in every specific action according to the specific time, to see what God desires” (*MHs*, Vol. 2 Ecclesiastes s.v. Mah Yitron 2).⁴⁵ If so, asks Lainer, what is the point of human activism, “since all the acts [a person performs] derive from the divine will...and they will not be called by his name...”? To this Lainer responds:

Whatever [way] he exerted himself in order from his side to fulfill the will of God... remains for him forever, and as a result, God agrees concerning all his actions that they will be called by the name of the person who acts. (*MHs*, Vol. 2 Ecclesiastes s.v. Mah Yitron 2)

In the first stage, where human action seems an illusion, Lainer refers to human action as not called by man’s name. However, in the second part of the passage, where he affirms his notion of nondual acosmic humanism, when God agrees to all human action, the ontology and dignity of human activism is affirmed. At that point, Lainer writes that human action is called by man’s name!

Part 4: Precedents for the Theory of Uniqueness in *Mei Hashiloah*

In the first half of this article, I investigated radical individualism and uniqueness in Lainer’s ontology. Now I turn to some of the earlier lineage sources from the Kabbalistic tradition that informed his teaching. These sources show that Lainer is not simply a maverick teacher, contrary to some claims that have been put forth, but rather he is the fullest crystallization of a long and venerable Unique Self enlightenment tradition.

The Hermeneutic One-Letter Tradition

A major source for Lainer’s theory of individuality, which we will term the *one-letter tradition* (i.e., the idea that every spirit is a unique letter in the Torah), emerges directly from the Talmudic notion of *mitzvah ahat*, which teaches that every person has a special relationship with one particular commandment. In Kabbalah, this is taken to mean that one’s spirit is ontologically connected to a unique commandment. While from a normative perspective it would seem that all of the commandments are equal, from a mystical perspective one’s root spirit is specially connected to one’s unique *mitzvah*. This Talmudic teaching formed the matrix for the one-letter tradition, which is rooted in the 16th-century Kabbalistic schools of Safed. Although the *mitzvah ahat* and the one-letter framework are in some sense entirely different, the post-Lurianic Hasidic masters, including Lainer, essentially conflated the themes. Two short articles that address the concept of *mitzvah ahat* assume, one implicitly (Sperber, 1988) and the other explicitly (Hallamish, 1996), that the one-letter tradition is essentially a Kabbalistic garment for the *mitzvah ahat* tradition.⁴⁶ This conflation is not altogether accurate. The *mitzvah ahat* tradition is normative, while the one-letter tradition is hermeneutic and deeply rooted in the complex systems of Lurianic Kabbalah; what they share in common, however, is the matrix of unique individuality in which they are rooted. Both frameworks are understood as expressing the individual’s unique spirit and their unique portion in Torah.

This distinction is important because Lainer’s original contribution to the concept of uniqueness is rooted in part in his extension of the assumptions specific to the Lurianic one-letter theorists. Lainer’s original understanding of uniqueness, however, goes one dramatic step beyond any of the previous one-letter teachers. For according to Lainer, the Unique Self of the individual is by itself the will of God. However, let us content ourselves with analyzing the essential claims of these sources and the way in which these sources provide a foundation for conceptions of individual uniqueness present in Mordechai Lainer’s thought.

It is important to note at the outset that, as Louis Jacobs has pointed out, the idea of uniqueness is already found in the rabbinic sources (1992, p. 120). In the following *midrashic* text, which may prefigure the

Lurianic one-letter tradition, the theme is the divine voice and specifically the power of that voice:

Scripture says: “The voice of the Lord is with power” (Psalms 29:4), not with “His power” but “with power,” that is to say, according to the capacity of each individual...each person according to his [own] strength *kefi koho* R. Yosi ben Hanina says: If you are doubtful of this, then think of the manna that descended with a taste varying according to the taste of each Israelite...Now if the manna, which is all of one kind, became converted into so many different kinds to suit the capacity of each individual, was it not even more possible for the voice, which had power to vary according to the capacity of each individual, [to do so as well], so that no harm should come to him? (*Shemot* 5:9, as cited in Jacobs, 1992, p. 120)

Here, we have a position that flirts with the idea that the nature of divine power implies the infinity of the divine voice, not least in terms of the human experience of that voice. Hearing a voice of revelation that violates one’s unique individuality is harmful. The power of the divine voice is that it has the ability to project itself in a way that can be heard differently by every person.

Such an expression of pluralism might be based on two different but complimentary understandings, the first being the limited nature of the receiver and the second being the infinite nature of the giver. Because the receiver of revelation is limited, each face of the Torah is a partial expression that can only be made whole in relation to all other interpretations. Alternately, what may seem to be contradictory “faces” or interpretations can all have ontological legitimacy (Idel, 2002, p. 518, n. 74; Scholem, 1971, p. 297).

Lurianic theorists adopted a sophisticated hybrid of both approaches, arguing for the ontological congruence between the nature of the text and the nature of the interpreter. Just as there are 600,000 letters in the Torah, there are 600,000 spirits in Israel, and every spirit corresponds to a different letter. In this regard, Scholem cites a series of sources from the Safed school that affirm what Scholem calls the “infinite meaning” of the Torah. Luria writes:

Consequently there are six hundred thousand aspects and meanings in the Torah. According to each one of these ways of explaining the Torah, the root of a spirit has been fashioned in Israel. In the Messianic age every single man in Israel will read the Torah in accordance with the meaning peculiar to his root...⁴⁷

This passage actually implies much more than the infinity of the meaning of Torah suggested by Scholem; it also suggests a parallel infinity between interpreter and text.

Helpful in expanding the full intent of Luria’s text is a key citation from Hayyim Vital (1863):

Know that the totality of spirits is six hundred thousand and not more. And the Torah is the source of the spirits of Israel for from it they were hewn and in it they are rooted. Therefore in the Torah there are six hundred thousand interpretations...⁴⁸

Vital goes on to say that in each of the four levels of interpretation there are 600,000 interpretations.⁴⁹ The text continues, “...it emerges that from every interpretation there was formed a spirit and in the future every spirit in Israel will merit to know the interpretation through which he was formed.” What becomes clear here is that it is not merely that every spirit is unique and therefore capable of producing a unique interpretation. Rather, Vital says that each spirit of Israel is both rooted in, and created by, its one unique letter in the Torah.

Each unique interpretation yields a unique spirit. Uniqueness for Vital, as for Lainer, is clearly not a function of cultural, psychological, or historical conditioning. It would be more appropriate to say that uniqueness is both the source and purpose of individual existence. Continues Vital:

In the end of days every single person in Israel will grasp and know all of the Torah in accordance with that interpretation that is aligned with the root of his spirit, for through this interpretation he was created and brought into being.

In effect, redemption is the realization of uniqueness; indeed, it would not be inaccurate to express Vital's idea by saying simply that uniqueness *is* being. For now, note that uniqueness is much more than the subjectivity of the receiver or even the infinity of divine power that produces unique interpretation. *Rather, uniqueness itself is ontologically prior to the text.* It is in this precise sense that we might assert that reality itself is constructed from perspectives.⁵⁰ Vital continues in the same passage:

Every night when a person gives over his spirit...and ascends on high; he who merits to ascend on high is taught the unique interpretation upon which the root of his spirit depends...However, it is all in accordance with his deeds on that day...Similarly, on that night they would teach him a specific verse or portion, for his spirit was illuminated with that verse on that night and on another night his spirit might be illuminated with a different verse...

In this formulation, Vital affirms that uniqueness is the very illumination upon which the spirit depends. Vital also refers to another dimension of uniqueness that has clear resonance in Lainer: that which results from the interface of the individual with the realm of time. This sense of uniqueness becomes clearer in another text by Vital: "The worlds change each and every hour, and there is no hour which is similar to another..."

In our context, just as the individual has a Unique Self, so too does each period of time have its own quality and demand something unique of each person. In the third generation of Hasidism, we see what is perhaps the clearest formulation of these parallel tracks of uniqueness (of the human being and time) in the writings of Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk (1896):

From the day God created the world until the end of all generations, there is no day which is equal to another...and no two moments which are not distinct, and no two people equal to each other...for if [every one was not unique] what need would there be for each one?⁵¹

The uniqueness of time is also a core axiom of Lainer in his discussion of personal revelation. These ideas of interpretation and time, as they appear in the work of these pre-*MHs* writers, are, in and of themselves, anomian in character. It fell to Mordechai Lainer to apply these very same ideas in a radically antinomian context.⁵²

Returning to Vital, it is important that this idea of radical uniqueness is not merely a theoretical construct, but a practical part of the lives of Luria's students. Indeed, guidance in realizing their uniqueness was one of the primary teachings that Luria gave to his inner circle of students.⁵³ Vital writes:

My teacher (i.e., Luria) every evening would look at the students who stood before him, and see what verse was especially shining in the forehead of the person...And he would explain to him some of the interpretation of the verse which was related to the root of his spirit. And before that person would sleep, he would *mekavein*,

direct his intention, to the interpretation of this verse [partially explained to him by Luria] and he would read with his mouth the verse out loud so that when his spirit ascended...other things would be taught [in regard both to his unique spirit destiny and the interpretation of this verse] and he would ascend to very great levels...and through this the spirit would be purified.

Not only was individual uniqueness an integral part of Lurianic theology, it also was a *kavanah*, or practice of intention taught, apparently by Luria himself, to his inner circle of students as part of their daily mystical ritual. Abraham Azulai, a later compiler of Lurianic thought, suggests that not only must each person engage their uniqueness through a prism of their own interpretation, but they are also obligated to reveal that interpretation to the community. Azulai (1863) writes: “For every individual spirit has a unique dimension of Torah, which cannot be revealed by anyone other than that specific spirit” (2:21).⁵⁴

All of this has resonance in the inner zeitgeist of the Hasidic world inhabited by Lainer. The following example will suffice to show us that the one-letter theorists of Safed thoroughly penetrated the Hasidic consciousness. Yitzhak Yehuda Safrin of Komarno (1869) writes:

All the letters of the Torah...are what cause change. For there is no day similar to another, and no righteous person similar to another, no creature similar to another... And all creations were created...by the letters...And in the midst of the letters there is divine energy *hiyut*... but the suckling *yenikah* [of no two people] is the same and the *tikkun* fixing/healing of no two is the same. (5:31:19)

Here we find the concept of uniqueness, both of time and person; the fundamental idea that the letters themselves are the agents of creation, each creating a manifestation of their own unique interpretation. The last phrase in the passage is particularly interesting: “and the fixing/healing of no two is the same.” Here we find a conflation of the Lurianic one-letter theory and the evolutionary Lurianic theory of *tikkun*; they are assumed to have the same ontological matrix of radical uniqueness. It is clear that the hermeneutic one-letter theory is but a counterpoint to the theory of *tikkun*.

Spiritsparks (Soul) and Tikkun (Evolve)

This brings us to another strand of thought that informs Lainer’s notion of Unique Self, which is the Lurianic theory of *tikkun* and “spiritsparks.”⁵⁵ In Lurianic myth, after what the Kabbalists call the breaking of the vessels, sparks are scattered throughout reality (Fine, 1987). In the process of nothing becoming something, as described by Kabbalah, divinity emanates worlds. The worlds are expressed by divine light penetrating divine vessels. In an image of profound poignancy, the vessels, because of their alienation from each other, are unable to properly contain and nurture the penetrating light. The vessels are too fragile and therefore shatter, spreading sparks of the source light throughout existence. The sparks must be redeemed and returned to their proper place within the divine anthropos. The redeeming of the sparks is considered an act of *tikkun*, best understood as the repair of the divine structure. Indeed, the entire process takes place within divinity. The language used by Luria throughout *Shaar Hagilgulim*, *The Gate of Reincarnations* (Vital, 1863) to describe what is needing repair is *hisaron* (roughly translated as flaw, lack, or deficiency). For Luria and those who follow his teachings, *hisaron* is associated with several possible types of flaws (i.e., it might refer to an ontological flaw in the structure of being, an existential flaw, or an epistemological flaw).

It is clear that Lainer, in part, drew inspiration for his concept of *hisaron* directly from Luria. The key notion in *Shaar Hagilgulim* for our purposes is that there is one type of *hisaron* that demands human *tikkun*. This type of *hisaron* is of a kind with Lainer’s *hisaron meyuhad*, unique *hisaron*, or what I call *Unique Shad-*

ow (In press b). It focuses on the particular flaws—occasioned by sin or by the failure to perform a particular *mitzvah*—for which a person undergoes *gilgul* (transmigration). Like Lainer’s teaching, the *hisaron* described by Luria is unique to every individual. Said more clearly, a person’s Unique Shadow is a direct function of their failure to fulfill their Unique Self.

Of course, the uniqueness discussed in the Lurianic theory of sparks is not distinct from the uniqueness discussed in the Luria’s Kabbalistic hermeneutics. Indeed, Vital often conflates the two. Both frameworks are based on the same core sacred enlightenment myth (i.e., 600,000 root spirits at each level of existence). On the hermeneutic level, this translates into 600,000 different interpretations at four levels of interpretation. In terms of spiritsparks, this is manifested as 600,000 root spirits for each organ of Adam’s spirit. Each root spirit itself, however, divides into another 600,000 sparks, and so on. What emerges in the correspondence between unique spiritsparks and unique Torah interpretation is a highly complex and sophisticated system of distinctions that affirms the radical uniqueness of each individual spirit.

This interpretation of the spiritspark theory in terms of radical uniqueness is grounded in a shared ontology between the hermeneutic myth of uniqueness and the spiritspark myth of uniqueness in the Lurianic system. It is clear that Luria’s theory of transmigration and *hisaron*, developed in great detail in *Shaar Hagilgulim* and other Lurianic writings, and rooted in the matrix of uniqueness, is both conceptually and linguistically a key strand informing the theory of uniqueness in Lainer.

Part 5: The General Themes of Nondual Acosmic Humanism

At this point I turn to a brief outline of the *homo religiosus* of Unique Self that emerges from the matrix of Lainer’s nondual humanism. The archetype that wells up is one of the core sources that inform my teaching on Unique Self enlightenment (see Gafni, 2011, in this issue). In this section I will outline, in broad strokes, the nine major themes of nondual acosmic humanism.

1. Acosmism and Uniqueness

The first central expression of nondual acosmic humanism is the theme of radical post-egoic individualism (i.e., Unique Self) that runs throughout *MHs*. Lainer’s theory of unique individuality, and thus of individual dignity, is fully rooted in his nondual acosmism. In Lainer’s words, if any individual is lost, then “the form of the King *tzurat ha-melek* is lacking... for all of Israel are a *helek* of God.” Each individual is possessed of *hitnas’ut*, a princely or exalted ontological status, each is *hashuv be’einei Hashem*, “important (i.e., ontologically) in God’s eyes,” and *medugal*, “distinctive,” a special expression of the divine (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Bemidbar s.v. Vayedaber 1). This is in distinct contrast to the often impersonal nature of *unio mystica* (the state of being in which a person realizes their supreme identity with the godhead).

2. Empowering Acosmism

The second major expression of Lainer’s nondual acosmic humanism is its distinctively empowering nature. This is expressed in his notion of *tekufot* (personal audacity and determination), which, as we have already noted, is a defining characteristic of an enlightened person. This refers not to an enlightenment at the level of True Self, but to what we might term Unique Self enlightenment.

3. Acosmism and Will

According to Lainer, the essence of acosmism means the ontic identity between the will of God and the human will. Lainer takes two distinct steps in this direction. First, he identifies the essence of divinity as will

(*MHs*, Vol. 2, Yitro s.v. lo Ta'asun). Second, he posits the identity of human and divine will. Of course, he does not assume that the identity of wills is naturally expressed in the world. Like many of the great perennial philosophers, he assumes that some sort of process is necessary to realize the supreme identity of the human being and the godhead. Lainer terms his particular version of this process *berur*.

4. Affirmation of Human Activism

A major corollary of the empowering *tekufot* dimension of Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism lies in his affirmation of human activism. Here the essential paradox of Lainer's theology affirms that once a person has achieved full *berur*, human action does not become irrelevant, as Weiss (1961) has suggested. Rather, the notion of human action independent of God becomes absurd. The result, however, is not an effacing of human activism, but rather radical human empowerment through the realization of the ontic identity between human and divine action. In this reading, post-*berur* human activism is radically affirmed as one attains full power in the realization of ontic identity with the divine. The individual's action and divine action are identical.

5. The Ontic Identity of Name and Will

The fifth major theme expressing Lainer's nondual humanism is the identification he assumes in many passages between the name of God and the name of the human. This is how we read—against the implicit assumption of previous scholarship—Lainer's common refrain that human actions are “called by the name of man.” This is not, as has been assumed, a kind divine consolation prize to the human whose actions in fact have no ontological efficacy, but rather a veiled expression of his true position: that the name of God and the name of the human are, on some level, identical. This theme is grounded in the centrality of *ratzon* in Lainer's theology, and on the identity of wills as a primary manifestation of the ontic identity between human and God.

6. The Ontological Dignity of Desire

The sixth major expression is Lainer's affirmation of the ontological dignity of *teshukah* (inner experience or stirring of human desire). In contradistinction to other contemporaneous major strains of Jewish thought, Lainer affirms that the experience of *teshukah*—after the clarification effected by *berur* to insure that the *teshukah* is an expression of *'omek* (depth) and not merely *gavan* (surface or superficial) *teshukah*—is a primary mediator of divine revelation.⁵⁶

7. Lema'aloh Mida'ato (The Suprarational)

The seventh expression, having a distinctly European Romantic cast, is Lainer's affirmation of the state of receptivity beyond normal awareness, which he terms *lema'aloh mida'ato* (the suprarational), as a primary mediator of divine revelation. The “God-voice” speaks through the human being, especially when the person transcends the confines of reason and thought. Lainer, however, is profoundly aware of the danger inherent within this Romantic agenda, which dominated the zeitgeist of his age. Therefore, Lainer tempers his affirmation with an insistence that one cannot rely on the authenticity of the God-voice unless one has first successfully completed a process of *berur*. While *lema'aloh mida'ato* has important antecedents in Habad literature, Lainer radicalizes it and brings it to antinomian conclusions that are explicitly rejected by the Habad masters.

8. The Human Being as a Source of Revelation

The eighth expression of Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism is his assertion, already noted, of the human being per se as the source of divine revelation that may override earlier divine revelations including that of

Sinai. The old revelations were addressed to a different time and place and what remains of them is only their formulaic expression in the legal codes. These legal codes are nonetheless critical, for as we shall see, it is paradoxically the norms of *mitzvah* contained in them that effect the necessary *berur* to enable one to access the unmediated divine revelation.

Lainer affirms that the human being can be trusted to hear the voice of revelation through the agency of human will. Lainer's operating assumption is that the divine nature of revelation is precisely what makes it not eternal, but rather subject to change at any time. Therefore, the new revelation, which is unmediated by law and mediated rather through the agency of human will, and which becomes ontologically identical to the divine will, overrides the old revelation.

9. *The Democratization of Enlightenment*⁵⁷

While for some earlier Hasidic masters and older Kabbalists, the *tzadik* alone was identical with God, Lainer transfers the Hasidic apotheosis of the *tzadik*, rooted in ancient Hebrew mystical texts, to—in theory—every individual. In effect, Lainer can be viewed as one of the latest expressions of the old Hebrew tradition of apotheosis. In Lainer's nomenclature, every individual participates in what I have termed the *Judah archetype*, whose primary characteristics are *tekufot* (personal audacity and determination) and *hitpashtut* (a sense of expansiveness, both in consciousness and in action). Many other minor motifs in Lainer's thought express his nondual humanism. These include his affirmation of the legitimacy of *tir'omet*, his affirmation of the central importance of risk and uncertainty as core characteristics of his ideal religious archetype, the nature of *teshuvah* (repentance), and the paradoxical nature of sin.

Part 6: Nondual Humanism and the Expression of Will

In the following section, the focus will be on the first three themes mentioned above. Together they describe the interaction between the will of God and the will of the individual that leads to the emergence of radical freedom. These themes are uniqueness, which of course is the foundation of Lainer's thought, *tekufot*, which is the radical empowerment that emerges from the realization of Unique Self, and the merging of human and divine will, which leads to trust in the individual as source of revelation and supraconscious action.

Acosmism, Uniqueness, and the World-To-Come

What is unique in *MHs* is not merely that Lainer underscores the need for each person to identify and then embrace their unique individuality, it is rather that he understands uniqueness as a function and expression of acosmism. It is this second facet that allows Lainer's acosmism to be termed *nondual acosmic humanism*.

One of the key words used by Lainer to describe the idea of a Unique Self as the essence of every individual is *helek*, literally meaning *part*. Crucially, *helek* is also the key term that expresses Lainer's theory of acosmism. "Israel who are *helek* [part of God] are attached to God in their root" (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Beshalah s.v. Nikheho).⁵⁸ This concept of *helek* is the source of uniqueness. In another passage, Lainer writes:

"And for me you will be a kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6)—that is, a chain of lineage. The lineage begins with God Himself, for God is their father and from God holiness unfolds through the patriarchs unto us, and so it is in regard to every unique individual, [who] receives unique holiness for his individual spirit [deriving directly from God]. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Yitro s.v. Va'esa 2)

Uniqueness, however, according to Lainer, is not only a function of acosmism. It is also the portal through

which to realize unity consciousness: the acosmic nature of reality. One of the key code words in *MHs* indicating unity consciousness is *'olam ha-ba*, the world-to-come. The world-to-come, for many of the Hasidic masters, refers not merely to a future eschatological reality but to a stage of consciousness that inheres within the present. It is accessed not as a reward after death, but through an internal shift in perception during life. What is different in Lainer's thought is that one accesses *'olam ha-ba*, that is to say unity consciousness, through the prism of uniqueness. For Lainer, the door to the unique One is through uniqueness. *Prima facie*, in a mystical system one needs to abandon personal uniqueness in order to access the One. Indeed, such an impersonal cast is the dominant tone of Hasidic masters who preceded and in many ways influenced Lainer, including the Magid of Mezerich and Schneur Zalman of Liadi.⁵⁹

The level of *'olam ha-ba* is accessed not by abandoning but by identifying and deepening one's unique individuality. Writes Lainer: "For every individual has a *mitzvah* that is connected to his unique root, and it is through this unique *mitzvah* that he achieves *'olam ha-ba*, the world-to-come" (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Ki Teitzei s.v. Ki Yikareh). In a similar vein, one of the fundamental expressions of Lainer's theory of the unique individual is that every person possesses a unique *hisaron*, or flaw. According to Lainer, the process of *berur* involves the identification of one's unique *hisaron*, and that when one heals one's unique *hisaron* (described here as what is "prior"), one achieves *'olam ha-ba*.

[B]y means of service *'avodah* (or work, toil)...one can heal that which is *kodem* prior... and knowledge *da'at* is called "life," since it comes to a person after *'avodah*, for this is what is called "the life of the world-to-come," i.e., complete perfection.⁶⁰

Moreover, the very identification of one's uniqueness is itself essential in healing *hisaron*.⁶¹ Again we see that uniqueness is connected directly with the unity consciousness, which is the essential nature of *'olam ha-ba*. The emphasis on radical uniqueness is thus a key feature in Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism.

Empowering Nondual Acosmism and Tekufot

It is not the empowering humanistic nature of Lainer's teachings on Unique Self per se that make his theology unique; rather, it is the fact that this humanism is rooted specifically in Lainer's acosmism. Hence, it is fair to call this empowering quality the first defining feature in Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism.

According to Lainer, once one has achieved *sheleimut* (a level of completeness), one is empowered to act with *tekufot* (audacity), knowing that both one's thoughts and actions are a manifestation of divine will. Israel in general is said to act in this state: "Israel are the *merkavah* [chariot] for the *Shekhinah* [a synonym for acosmism in Izbica], and in accordance with God's will, they take action" (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Mikeitz s.v. Vehineih). When they have a thought, they can assume that it is a direct expression of the will of God. Being the chariot to the *Shekhinah* expresses some level of human-divine merger and identity. The human is empowered to act even before accepting the yoke of divine kingship because the acosmic matrix ensures the divinity and therefore value and dignity of human action.

It is worth noting as well that in the beginning of the passage, Lainer refers to the possibility of one being a chariot to the *Shekhinah* as limited to the *'atid*, the eschaton, while in the second half of the passage it becomes a genuine option in the pre-eschaton reality for one who has lost track of time in the desert (as per the Talmudic case under discussion) and needs to determine when to observe the *shabbat*. Moreover, the simple will of God is aroused, not only in the spiritual elite, but in the heart of every spirit in Israel.

The notion that acosmism is not effacing of the human being but rather profoundly empowering is designated by a formal term Lainer uses to express this empowering notion throughout *MHs*. The term is *tekufot*, which literally connotes some form of strength or power. For Lainer, *tekufot* means the personal audacity and determination that courses through a person as a function of their participation in the divine (i.e., in other

words, nondual acosmic humanism). The understanding of *tekufot* as an expression of nondual acosmic humanism is explicit in many passages throughout *MHs*.

A key concern in *MHs* is the King of Israel, which for Lainer is synonymous with the Judah archetype of sovereignty.⁶² For Lainer, the Judah archetype is the personification of nondual acosmic humanism in the first-person, namely, Unique Self. “Great *tekufot*” is almost the defining quality of the Judah Archetype often symbolized by Lainer as the king. In the next passage, the tremendous power of the king is contrasted with the enlightened receptivity of the sage:

The essence of the sage is that he recognizes that there is no independent power [in the human being]. Rather, all is from God, even the power of prayer...“for even in all our actions you acted in us” (Isa. 26:12). This is the meaning of, “All is in the hands of heaven.” And the essence of the king of Israel is great *tekufot*, so much so that he may do everything in his heart, for anything that arises in his heart is certainly the will of God. This is a great spiritual level, for he requires no guidance or prophet, and this is very deep...Regarding the king, whatever comes out of his mouth are the words of the living God (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Tetzaveh s.v. Ravu’a 1)

The sage is someone who “recognizes” the reality of nondual acosmic humanism, while the king is someone who has fully realized nondual acosmic humanism by embodying God’s will (i.e., Unique Self). In this quintessential statement of nondual acosmic humanism, the king realizes his ontic identity with the divine to such an extent that any desire that arises in his heart is *ipso facto* affirmed to be God’s will, and anything that the king says is considered God’s word. Without understanding the notion of nondual acosmic humanism in *MHs*, one might very well read the beginning of the passage as theocentric, undermining and effacing the dignity and efficacy of human action. Lainer’s position is, paradoxically, not theocentric but rather an anthropocentric acosmism that empowers the human being. This is but one more representative example of Lainer’s nondual acosmic humanism.

The notion of *tekufot* in *MHs* is in no sense limited to the king. Nondual acosmic humanism and therefore *tekufot* can, at least potentially, be realized by every person. This is the democratization of enlightenment that is explicit in Lainer’s teaching on Unique Self. While there will clearly be vast differences of degree, some level of Unique Self realization is at least in theory possible for every individual.⁶³ This becomes clear in the following passage, in which Lainer identifies *shabbat* with *berur*. *Berur*, as we have seen, is the spiritual work of clarification and disidentification from the ego, which one engages in before realizing any measure of Unique Self enlightenment or unity consciousness, the Judah Archetype. The ultimate clarification achieved by *berur* is the realization of Unique Self unity consciousness:

[Regarding] a person who is holy and completed in all of his *berur* (i.e., beyond the level of *shabbat*), who is drawn after the will of God, there will not come into his heart any will which is not the will of God, whose will is flowing to him...This is symbolized in the Tabernacle by copper. Copper expresses *tekufot*, for the completed person needs to have great audacity. He must not treat any arousal of will as superfluous... [He must give expression] to every will that arises, for when a will arises in him it is certainly the will of God. (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Vayak’hel s.v. Vayak’hel 2)⁶⁴

In fact, in another passage (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Vayikra s.v. Im ‘Olah), Lainer makes every person’s felt experience of *tekufot* the litmus test of whether an act is or is not the will of God.

Acosmism and the Centrality of Will

The third major feature of Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism is the centrality of will. The essence of acosmism is the ontic identity between the will of God and the unique human will, which is equivalent to the identity of the human being and the godhead. Lainer terms the process through which one comes to know one's unique will as an expression of the divine will as *berur*. *Berur* is, fundamentally, the clarification of will needed to bring the will of God and the human will into alignment, but also to conscious realization of their ontic identity. Indeed, for Lainer, the will of God in many if not most decisions is not dictated by the 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah. Lainer states this explicitly in the following passage:

Even if one were to fulfill the entire *Shulhan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law), one would not be sure if they had intended the depth of God's will, for the will of God is very very deep, "who can fathom it." (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Behukotai s.v. im 2)

One can access the will of God through *hargashah* (feeling) and *tevi'at ha-lev* (the uniquely receptive nature of the individual's heart), which, according to Lainer, are reliable guides (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Pesahim s.v. R. Simlai). Human feelings and heart murmurings are accurate antennae because they themselves are part of God. This is the implication of Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism.

In *MHs*, it is the unique, fleeting, and subjective human will that is identical to divinity, and not some intellectualized abstraction of will. It is the full-blooded and engaged human being with the person's ephemeral nature, frailty, and subjectivity whose will, when sufficiently clarified, is identical to the will of the eternal God. The human being is endowed with the ability to access the unmediated will of God, refracted through the prism of one's own unique will. Ultimately, Lainer's understanding is a clear affirmation of human dignity and adequacy, and a central expression of his nondual acosmic humanism.

The notion of nondual acosmic humanism expresses a "raising" of the conception of a human being that is in Lainer's words virtually "beyond the human ability to grasp" (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Yitro s.v. Va'esa). The verse Lainer uses in this passage to explain the ontological status of the human being is "As the girdle attaches to the loins, so have I attached to me the whole house of Israel" (Jer. 13:11). According to Lainer, this reality is what gives a fully realized person the ability to incarnate the divine will. Lainer is not speaking about mere obedience to the divine will—once a person has achieved *berur*, their every human action is fully animated by the divine will. This happens not through an intense study of the Jewish law—Lainer states that one can fulfill the entire code of Jewish law and still not apprehend the divine will—but rather, a person must "look to God in every specific action, according to the specific time, [to know] what God desires to do, and to intend the will of God in every moment" (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Ecclesiastes s.v. Mah Yitron 2). The blurring of human and divine will is so complete for Lainer that he not only declares that the will of God is in fact the internal will animating the human being, he also—consistent with his internal logic—reverses the equation. Interpreting the verse "God is my *helek*" (Psalms 16:5), he states, "The will of Israel is the will of God...and the entire spiritual work of Israel is to clarify that their will is indeed the will of God" (*MHs*, Vol. 2, Psalms s.v. Hashem Menat Helki).

In another passage, Lainer presents the underlying ontology of his conception of will: "The only true existent is the divine will and there is nothing (i.e., no will) besides" (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Psalms s.v. Ki Hineih). These sources ground Lainer's nondual acosmic humanism in his understanding of the person as the incarnation of the divine will.

The Will of God and the Radical Freedom of Unique Self

The most powerful expression of Lainer's humanistic interpretation of his acosmism is the dramatic freedom

accorded by his system to one who realizes, through the incarnation of Unique Self, the identity of wills between the personal and the divine. For Lainer, the will of God is not an abstract or general category. He is concerned, as we have noted above, with a very specific type of will, namely that of the unique individual. It is that will, which, as a direct corollary of acosmism, incarnates the will of God. The word used throughout *MHs* to describe the expression of the divine will beyond the lesser category of *mitzvah* is almost always *perat*, indicating both uniqueness and individuality, which is a *terminus technicus* in Lainer's writings for uniqueness on all levels. It is through the portal of *perat* that one accesses the unmediated will of God.

Part 7: The Judah Archetype

All of the fundamental characteristics of nondual acosmic humanism discussed above are manifested by the Judah archetype.⁶⁵ The Judah archetype is Lainer's expression for what I call the Unique Self. Before discussing these characteristics, we note that for Lainer, living the way of the Judah archetype is not optional; for those who are called to this life it is an absolute obligation which, if ignored, calls down a "divine curse."⁶⁶ Judah represents the typology of one who has realized their ontic identity with the will of God. Lainer contrasts Judah with Joseph, and sometimes with Levi.⁶⁷ While Joseph and Levi are characterized by *yir'ah* (fear or awe), the Judah archetype is characterized by love.⁶⁸

Judah consciously participates in divinity, realizing that his name and the name of God are one. His acosmic consciousness is accomplished through a process of *berur*, in which he understands that there is no such thing as human action independent of God. Rather, he knows and experiences every action he takes as being fully animated by divine will, which is radically empowering for him. Judah manifests and is identified with the quality of *tekufot*—the personal power, sacred audacity, and determination that are direct results of realizing one's divine core. Therefore, in Lainer's language, he can naturally *mekavein retzon Hashem* (intend the will of God). He feels himself called by his inner divine voice, his own personal revelation, to expand beyond the boundaries foisted upon him by external structures (Lainer terms this *hitpashtut*). Judah allows himself to be guided by his *teshukah* (authentic desire) once it has undergone the process of *berur*.

No-Boundary and Judah

Lainer describes Judah's birth as being "*beli shum gevul*" (without any boundary) (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Vayeitzei s.v. Vatomer). Judah is identified with *retzon Hashem*, even *lema'aloh mida'ato* (beyond his conscious will). In other words, he has realized no-boundary consciousness. His prayer, repentance, Torah, and desire all derive from this consciousness, which moves him, even when he is misunderstood by his own community, to sometimes break the law in order to respond to an order of revelation more immediate and personal than the original revelation of Sinai.

Judah's path to no-boundary consciousness is unique. More than participating in the general divine will, he incarnates the unique divine will. Unmediated revelation addressed specifically to him, refracted through the prism of his unique spirit, is expressed in his Unique Self and his *hisaron*. He has undergone a process of *berur*, which allows him to identify his unique *helek* and *shores* (i.e., his unique manifestation of the divine light, which is the root of his spirit). He is particularly connected to his unique *mitzvah*, for which he must be willing to give up his life. Because the very essence of his *hayyim* is his uniqueness, to live without his uniqueness would be deadly. In short, Judah is the personification of nondual acosmic humanism.

Paradox, Activism, and Judah

Judah also symbolizes the paradox of human effort. Lainer applies the rabbinic dictum of "Anyone who says, 'I have not worked yet I have found,' do not believe him" to the birth of Judah. Leah invested great effort in

his first three sons and none in Judah, who was a special gift from the side of God. Yet the effort invested in the first three sons yielded Judah as well. At the same time, it was metaphysically important for Judah to be a gift from God's side and not a direct result of human effort. Lainer suggests that built into the very moment of Judah's birth was the paradoxical consciousness that one must hold with regard to human effort. It is, on the one hand, absolutely necessary, and yet at the same time is really a gift from God.

The Will of God, Judah, and the Name

The blurring between the name of God and the name of the human is fully crystallized in Judah. Lainer states, "In the letters of Judah the name *Havayah* (YHVH) is found" (MHs, Vol. 1, Vayehi s.v. Vayikra). As we have seen, Lainer associates the *shem havayah* with the Unique Self incarnating the will of God.⁶⁹ While in the future world the *shem havayah* will express the realized ontic identity between every human and God, in this world Judah already overcomes that split to incarnate the divine. In describing the Judah archetype, who "is the name of God," Lainer states:

[H]e intends the depth of God's will, since he does nothing except what is God's will. And this is the meaning of *venisgav* "and he is lifted up"—that this action is beyond the reach of a person's grasp in this world. [Therefore] God sealed (or, signed) Himself upon this deed, which is very exalted...Therefore it is written, "I have given him My covenant of peace," for God has signed Himself upon him. (MHs, Vol. 2, Va'eira s.v. Vayikah)⁷⁰

God "signs" onto whatever the Judah archetype wills as an expression of divine empowerment. Human will is identified with the will of God, but in a way in which the human is affirmed and not effaced. This is not in any way what Weiss (1961) termed *mi'ut demutah shel 'asiyah enoshit*, a devaluation of human activism.

Regarding the king who, in MHs, is a manifestation of the Judah archetype, Lainer similarly states: "The essence of the king of Israel is great *tekufot*, so much so that whatever is in his heart he does, for anything that arises in his heart is certainly *retzon Hashem*" (MHs, Vol. 1, Vayeishev s.v. Vezeh). Judah personifies the preference for personal revelation over the law. The immediacy of personal revelation in the present overrides all preceding revelations of yesterday. Judah represents *'aliyah laregel* (ascending on foot to Jerusalem), understood by Lainer to mean transcending (*'aliyah*) the routine (*regel*) of the law. Lainer states:

The root of life of Judah is to always look to God in every action...and not to be guided [by precedent], even though he may have acted this way yesterday. Rather, he desires that God grant him a new revelation of His will. (MHs, Vol. 1, Vayeishev s.v. Vezeh)⁷¹

As the paradigm of "one who is drawn after the will of God," Judah is guided by *binat ha-lev*. According to Lainer, reaching this level is the inner intent of the covenant and the meaning of the declaration repeated by the Israelites at Sinai: "We will do and we will listen" (Exod. 24:7). "We will do" represents receiving and following the law while "we will listen" expresses reaching beyond the law to the specific will of God. In this sense, Judah is for Lainer the paradigm for the stage that every Israelite must eventually reach, as we will touch on further below.

Judah and the Democratization of Enlightenment

Lainer makes two key points about Judah that render his thought both radical and compelling. First, it is clear

that Judah, the incarnation of Unique Self, is not just a possible religious archetype; rather, he is Lainer's religious ideal. Second, this religious ideal is accessible to everyone, at least in potential. It even seems that, according to Lainer, achieving this ideal is incumbent on all those for whom it is possible. The ideal is not limited to an elite: not to the ancient institution of kingship, nor to the Hasidic institution of the *tzadik*. Furthermore, as is made clear in Lainer's (1988) grandson's text *Dor Yesharim* (pp. 9a-11a), Mordechai Joseph fully identified with the Judah persona.⁷² As noted above, Lainer's second key point about Judah is that the Judah archetype is not limited to any particular group. The idea that the human being participates in ontic identity with the will of God is found in Hasidism in regard to the *tzadik*; what is unique in Lainer is that he expands this idea beyond that narrow realm.⁷³ In effect, Lainer makes every person a potential *tzadik*. The passage that was adduced above in my discussion of will is really a description of the Judah archetype:

At every instant, every spirit in Israel *mikaton ve'ad gadol* from young to old knows what God desires now, and understands, based on the *binah* of their hearts, that this is the will of God, and not based on the general principles [law]. (*MHs*, Vol. 1, Balak s.v. Ka'eit)

Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the passages in *MHs* seem to be addressed to everyone—no distinction is drawn between groups of people and there is no limitation on who can be a Judah persona. Unique Self is a charismatic endowment of Spirit that potentially can be realized by every human being.

Part 8: Nondual Humanism in the Context of the Zeitgeist

Lainer and the Romantics

A key feature of Lainer's thought is the remarkable affinity between the fundamental intuitions of *MHs* and those of the Romantic movement, which was the dominant zeitgeist of Lainer's period along with European idealism (Weiss 1961, p. 441). The term *Romanticism* includes too many strands of thought and admits too many definitions to be helpful without some form of elucidation. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I have chosen one scholar, Charles Taylor (1989, pp. 368-390), upon whose authoritative, classic description of Romanticism I will draw in order to make the case for a strong affinity between the fundamental matrices of Romantic thinking and those of Lainer.

What is immediately apparent is that one need not exert much effort in stating the case. At least eight major parallels between *MHs* and Romanticism are so clear and compelling that it becomes virtually impossible not to label Lainer a religious Romantic. All of this, however, should not efface the very real differences that separate Lainer's religious Romanticism from that of Herder, Fichte, or Schelling. In this regard, we need only note that he emerges out of and remains committed to a theistic tradition and that his conception of a post-egoic Unique Self incarnating the divine sharply distinguishes between the regressive self and the evolutionary self: that Unique Self only appears after disidentification with ego is very different than the Romantic, uncritical reification of every expression of selfhood. Having said that, the potential influence of Romanticism on Lainer is worth noting.

Taylor (1989) himself notes that Romanticism's possible influence on various religious revival groups, including Hasidism, needs to be considered. In the case of one of these groups, Wesleyan Methodism, he even suggests that Romanticism was a "crucial moulding influence" (p. 302). While Taylor is correct that the general emphasis on feeling and sensibility in the cultural zeitgeist in which Hasidism was born needs to be noted, no less noteworthy are some of the other features of Romanticism that find an echo in Hasidism, and are particularly sharply expressed in Lainer's theology.⁷⁴

Even in areas of close resonance between Lainer and the Romantics, it would be incorrect to suggest

that Lainer was simply influenced by Romanticism. As argued above, many elements of Lainer's thought, particularly Unique Self as the Judah archetype, emerge directly from the Jewish, particularly Kabbalistic tradition. However, it is possible to assert that Lainer's work is a uniquely evolved Kabbalistic mystical expression of the spiritual and intellectual zeitgeist of Romanticism, which dominated the Europe in which Lainer lived and breathed. Here I will enumerate eight features of Romanticism which have strong parallels in Lainer's thought.

The first feature of any description of Romanticism is almost always its radical emphasis on interiority. Romanticism is guided by what Laurence Sterne refers to as the "divinity which stirs within" (as cited in Taylor, 1989, p. 302). This is also Lainer's fundamental intent when he uses the term *binat ha-lev* (understanding of the heart).

Second, Taylor notes that this emphasis on heart and interiority did not remain abstract, but had very real normative implications (p. 370). Not only did the Romantics view nature as a divine moral source, they also viewed a person's evolution as connected to their ability to participate in the cosmic spirit running through all of nature (p. 314). This divine yet accessible nature was seen by the Romantics as a guide to normative human action.

Third, because of all this, Romanticism often had a distinctly antinomian sensibility. Romanticism taught that one need stand against normative frameworks and follow one's sense of inner conviction, what came to be known as one's "inner voice" (Taylor, 1989, p. 370). Thus, Romanticism, according to Taylor, is invested with an almost inexorable impulse to slide away from Orthodox theology, to depart from traditional ethical codes, and to dissolve the distinction between the ethical and the aesthetic (pp. 371, 373). One's new and fresh understanding of the good virtually always triumphs over the old and stale understanding of the good. In Taylor's recapitulation of the Romantic position, "Each of us must follow what is within and this may be without precedent" (p. 376). It is in this sense that all the great writers on Romanticism have framed it in terms of a rejection of neoclassicism. Whatever previous type of classicism existed—whether philosophical, hierarchical, or, in the case of Lainer, legal—it is overridden by the sensibility of the moment which reveals a higher law. This parallels closely Lainer's emphasis on *binat ha-lev*. The normative implications of this tendency manifest as antinomian sentiments.

Fourth, the Romantic tends to assert the primacy of will over intellect. The goal for the Romantic is the transformation of the human will. In Taylor's summation of the Romantic invitation: "Our will needs to be transformed... by the recovery of contact with the impulse of nature within us" (p. 372). For Lainer, the transformation is accomplished by the realization of the ontic identity of wills between the human and the divine. In a parallel manner, the Romantics identify not only with the natural within us, but seek to become united with "the larger current of life or being" (p. 377).

The fifth parallel concerns the radical uniqueness of the individual and its normative or antinomian implications. While the dignity of the individual was already a dominant theme in the Renaissance, it was Romanticism that highlighted the idea of originality.⁷⁵ Taylor (1989) writes:

This is the idea...that each individual is different and original and that this originality determines how he or she ought to live... Just the notion of individual difference is of course not new. Nothing is more evident or more banal. What is different is what really makes a difference to how we are called to live...[which] lay[s] the obligation on each of us to live up to our originality. (pp. 375-377)

What replaced the interlocking or hierarchical order of a classical worldview was the Romantic notion of a "purpose or life coursing through nature" (p. 380) that addresses each individual uniquely (pp. 369, 374-375). Similarly, Lainer's radical emphasis on individuality and originality is the source of the personal revelation

that guides a person's life, even when it flies in the face of Mosaic law itself.

Sixth, Taylor points out that the defining characteristic of the Romantic personality is freedom. Romanticism, with its law of divine nature that is beyond reason, becomes "the basis for a new and fuller individuation" (p. 375). I have already shown that freedom is a defining characteristic of Lainer's religious ideal.

The seventh parallel between Lainer's thought and Romanticism is the affirmation of the ontological dignity of desire. When stripped of its dross and reduced to its unvarnished essence, desire is the great guide towards interiority and heart (pp. 372, 411, 412, 417). The affirmation of the ontological and normative status of redeemed desire is a core feature of Lainer's theology.

The eighth area in which Romantic concepts are reflected in Lainer's thought is his understanding of the idea of ongoing revelation. Silman (1999) suggests three core models for revelation in Jewish thought, basing himself explicitly on Arthur Lovejoy's (1936) well-known categories of the Romantic and the classical. He identifies the first two models as classical and the third model as Romantic.

Silman calls the first model the "total model," which assumes that the totality of revelation was received on Sinai and given to Moses (see pp. 21-88). The second model, which he terms the "revelatory model," assumes, like the first model, that the entire Torah was given on Sinai. However, this revelation was not actual, as the first model assumes; much of it was only in potential. Thus, the first two models share the belief that the process of revelation was completed, and that our purpose as receptors of this revelation is restorative: the remembering or reclaiming of all the wisdom that was either explicit or implicit in the original voice of Sinai (pp. 89-118). The third model is far more empowering than the first two. It assumes that the first revelation was incomplete, both actually and in potential. In this model, revelation is not only technically ongoing, but also ontologically necessarily so. Time reveals not only what was implicit in the original voice, but also what was totally unknown to the original voice (pp. 119-149).⁷⁶ Lainer, as we have seen, presents a particularly radical formulation of this third model.

These eight areas present striking parallels between Lainer's theology and the worldview of Romanticism. One key difference between Lainer and the Romantic school is that Lainer does not fall into what Wilber (1998) has called the "Romantic pre/trans fallacy" (pp. 90-102). The Romantics, according to Wilber, failed to distinguish between primal, pre-rational human experience and far more subtle, moral, and evolved transrational human experience. Lainer's process of *berur* is his safeguard against this fallacy (i.e., his concept of being beyond conscious will is very much a post-*berur*, trans-rational notion).

Conclusion

In this article, I endeavored to uncover a rich strain of nondual humanism within the Hasidic expression of Kabbalistic sources. This strain is radical in that it asserts the primacy of the individual as a source of divine revelation. I argued that this primacy is ontological and not merely methodological, with the revelation of the individual, mediated through the clarified prism of Unique Self, overriding all past revelations. In effect, the core identity between the law and the will of God, which is the locus of classical Jewish religious orthodoxy, is broken—the will of God is incarnate in the Unique Self of the clarified individual.

The potential antinomian implications of this teaching are partially attenuated by Lainer's requirement of *berur*: the careful clarification of ego to assure that the individual is acting from Unique Self and not from the contractions of separate self. Nonetheless, the revolutionary character of the teaching remains in effect, opening the possibility of a profound nondual humanism rooted in the mystical realization of Unique Self.

NOTES

¹ This is explicated further in the integral context in my forthcoming book, *Your Unique Self: The Future of Enlightenment* (In press b).

² A more detailed history of the Hebrew lineage of Unique Self can be found in Gafni (In press a). More broadly, Scholem (1965b) discusses the nature of evolutionary emergence in relation to earlier precedent and authority.

³ A popular statement of this erroneous claim can be found in Kamenetz (1977). For a disputation of this claim, consult Integral Institute (2007).

⁴ Again, this is far from a given in Jewish scholarship on Kabbalah and deserves to be the topic of a separate monograph. Lainer himself consistently uses the Hebrew translation for enlightenment (*He'arah*), and his Judah archetype is clear a description of an enlightened being. I made this suggestion in reference to Lainer and the Kabbalistic masters in general in a dialogue with Prof. Moshe Idel and Ken Wilber (Integral Institute, 2007). Idel, perhaps the foremost Israeli scholar of Kabbalah, agreed and elaborated on this intuition in the dialogue.

⁵ Various terms deployed for this enlightened state are analyzed in Elior (1994), Jacobson (1978), and Ish-Shalom (1978).

⁶ See the extensive list of works cited in the footnotes of Idel (1982).

⁷ We need to be very careful in describing Lainer's nondual humanism. There are three elements at play in the nondual one-letter realization. In general, these three elements are at play in every genuine nondual realization. First is the finite individual; second is the finite whole (the sum total of all finite things, the whole manifest world); and third is the dimensionless infinite. If we say that the finite individual, the part, is one with the whole of finite things, then we have pantheism. What a genuine nondual realization is saying is two things: 1) in relation to the individual as part of the finite whole and 2) in regard to the relation of the individual to the infinite. The individual is inextricably interwoven as part of the whole world of manifest things. It is not separate. And each finite thing is the total infinite. It is totally the whole itself and is therefore present and influential in the totality of the whole. This is a critical distinction because in the pantheist version common in New Age thinking—where Gaia is equated with Spirit—if Gaia is destroyed, then Spirit is destroyed. So when referring to the one-letter realization, I mean that the individual incarnates his letter in the Torah. One's letter in the Torah is all if infinity itself is present in his individual letter, which is interwoven and inseparable from the whole of the Torah. It is for this reason that according to Lainer, the individual who intuitively grasps the word of God, based on their living letter in the Torah as it speaks in the present moment, is obligated to follow the commanding quality of the infinite whole and not contract into the revelation of yesterday. That is, the letter is not just the letter, and its not just part of the whole—it is also the infinite; it is also the ground of the whole. A similar expression in Zen thought is found in the Avatamsaka Sutra, which is held to be one of the most sophisticated philosophies in the Chinese pantheon. It maintains that there are four fundamental principles: *shih*, which means a finite individual thing; *li*, which means infinite principle or ground or foundation; *shih li wu ai*, with *wu* meaning “no” and *ai* meaning “obstruction” or “boundary”; and *shih shih wu ai*, meaning between finite things there is no boundary.

⁸ I term these *levels of consciousness* (Gafni, In press a, Chap. 9). The first level is ordinary consciousness, while the second level represents enlightenment seekers. The latter two constitute levels of enlightened consciousness, at the level of realization I have called *True Self*, where one attains “Shabbat consciousness,” to use Lainer's framework in which human activism is nullified. At the level of Unique Self, one attains what can be described in Lainer's vocabulary as “temple consciousness,” in which human activism is restored as the expression of divine will. Lainer indicates these two states by reference to images, laws, and figures associated with each one (e.g., references to temple consciousness or Unique Self often involve the image of King Solomon, who, of course, built Solomon's Temple).

⁹ A broad understanding of the *Baal Shem Tov* or *Besht* can be gained from Etkes (2005).

¹⁰ Menachem Mendel, known as the Kotzker rebbe, also delineated his own enlightenment lineage based on a rigorous idea of truth (Heschel, 1973).

¹¹ This is important because virtually none of these mystic teachings have a notion of structures of consciousness or altitude. So what we see with this notion—that the individual becomes Torah—is the beginning of movement beyond amber altitude (or blue vMeme or mythic membership) into a proto-worldcentric stance. Divinity is no longer mediated by an historical revelation at a particular time, but in effect every individual becomes Torah.

¹² *Ego* is an imprecise term; it means so many things. But there are two fundamental root things that *ego* means, and

one of them is completely negated or destroyed, and one of them is preserved. The one that is preserved is the ego as a conventional self-system, and the one that is transcended is the ego as a self-contraction (i.e., the exclusive identification with the self, the finite self-system).

¹³ Nullification, or *bitul*, is a common theme in other Hasidic masters, but its use here is only by way of analogy. One of the striking features of Lainer's corpus is that he does *not* use the term *bitul* for the process of transcending the ego, but rather the term *berur* (clarification).

¹⁴ I believe that Weiss (1961) understood—even if he was not willing to acknowledge it—that many Lainer texts run counter to his exaggerated claim. Therefore, he makes a statement that marginalizes that which I argue is central; namely, the place of the individual in Lainer's theology: “Although the concept of personality as setting a rhythm for individual lifelong acts is not elaborated in the teachings of Mordechai Joseph, nevertheless he does not entirely exclude this as one element in his works” (p. 145). Weiss acknowledges that the notion of personal *mitzvah* does occur in *MHs*, although he adds that “it does not stem from him” (p. 146), suggesting that this notion is extraneous to Lainer's thought.

¹⁵ This work, which was the core of my dissertation, is being published in the first of a three-volume set (In press a). This article is largely drawn from that volume, focusing on the sections that are most helpful in elucidating the basic concept of Unique Self.

¹⁶ See the chapters on Judah (Gafni, In press a).

¹⁷ A fuller discussion of the distinction between ego and Unique Self can be found in my other article in this issue (Gafni, 2011).

¹⁸ *Perat nefesh Yisrael* literally means a unique Jewish spirit. In Lainer's limited acosmism, a distinction is drawn between the Jew and the non-Jew. This paradoxical position is a function of genuine nondual realization being refracted through an ethnocentric prism. Here and throughout we will take Lainer's teachings as being applicable to any individual on the path to enlightenment.

¹⁹ See *MHs* (Vol. 2, Yitro s.v. Va'esa 2), which is quoted in Part 6 of this article.

²⁰ In this article, all citations to Lainer's *Mei haShiloach* (*MHs*) are presented in this fashion (i.e., chapter titles are included, but specific page numbers have been omitted). Classic Hasidic texts are not organized around page numbers, but around the various *parshiyot* (sections of biblical text that are studied by practitioners each week and read in public prayer in a repeating annual cycle) and the short commentaries in each *parsha*, in which the first word of the commentary is usually bolded. Often there are several of these short commentaries on a given page, making classic pagination not the reference form of choice.

²¹ The word *dimension*, although not the usual translation of *helek*, captures more accurately what's being said by Lainer. One letter implies not only being part in the sense of being one letter in the total alphabet, but rather being the formless ground of the letter and alphabet.

²² The human being is divinity, the whole, and not just part of the whole of finite things. The human being is a unique part of the whole, including the finite and the infinite which are co-extensively one. That means that in every finite individual, 100% of the infinite is present.

²³ On *le'atid* as a synonym for ontology, see *MHs* (Vol. 1, Tzav s.v. Ha-makriv; Ekev s.v. Vehayah; Balak s.v. Vihineih; Hukat s.v. Vayomer; Ki Teitzei s.v. Zakhor; Ecclesiastes s.v. Semah).

²⁴ For example, see *MHs* (Vol. 1, Psalms s.v. Elokim, Toldot s.v. Ahi, Toldot s.v. Vayeira, Mikeitz s.v. Vayehi; Vol. 2, Korah s.v. Vayikah, Joshua s.v. Unetatem, Isaiah s.v. Va'asim).

²⁵ *Tikkun* is not just a major motif of Lainer, but is a core concept of Kabbalah. To a certain degree, *tikkun* has become common parlance, and is generally understood as meaning “fixing,” “repair,” or “emendation.” This usage is most likely based on Lurianic writings, or possibly on the Talmud, where the phrase *tikkun olam* is used to describe rabbinic edicts that were not necessarily based on *halakha*, but rather to ensure the general well-being of society. In the *Zohar*, however, the meaning of *tikkun* is generally quite different (although there are instances of the more familiar usage). Particularly in the epic Sifra deTzniuta, Idra Rabba, and Idra Zuta sections, there are lengthy discussions on the *tik-*

kunim of Atiqa Kadisha, the Holy Ancient One, who is the first and most elevated manifestation of the godhead (who is perfect unto Himself and certainly not in need of repair).

²⁶ This character, however, is implicitly undermined. See *MHs* (Vol. 1, Yitro s.v. Vayehi; Matot s.v. Vayedaber; Vol. 2, Behaalotekha s.v. im Yihyeh).

²⁷ We can understand this in terms of similar distinctions drawn in contemporary social science between pathological hierarchy, which is a tool of domination, and holistic hierarchy, which affirms uniqueness as an essential demarcating characteristic of reality.

²⁸ See, for example, *MHs* (Vol. 1, Vayeishev s.v. Vayeishev; Mikeitz s.v. Tishma').

²⁹ The word *metzuyan* (excellent) can also have the sense of "special," which is how Lainer is interpreting it here. Thus Zion, pronounced *Tziyon* in Hebrew, stands for the special (i.e., specific or unique commandment related to each individual).

³⁰ See, for example, *MHs* (Vol. 1, Mas'ei s.v. Kein Match 2; Vol. 2, Psalms s.v. Ashrei, 1 Kings s.v. Ein).

³¹ On the specific term *divrei Torah kelalim*, see *MHs* (Vol. 1, Mas'ei s.v. Kein Match 2). On the relation of the *kelal* to the *perat* in Torah, see also *MHs* (Vol. 2, Ki Teitzei s.v. Ki Teitzei), where Lainer teaches that only after the *kelal* is internalized in one's heart can one access the revelation of the *perat*.

³² The relation between Judah and enlightened individuality in the context of union is a major motif of *MHs*. On Judah and *perat nefesh*, see *MHs* (Vol. 2, Behaalotekha s.v. Im Yihyeh). Regarding the idea that revelation in and to the *peratim* (i.e., in the unique situation and to the unique individual) reflects the deep will of God and allows the human being to have *tekufot*, see *MHs* (Vol. 2, Ketubot s.v. Darash Bar Kapra). The best translation of *tekufot* might be postconventional audacity.

³³ On revelation to the individual, see *MHs* (Vol. 2, Kedoshim s.v. Vayedaber; Pinhas s.v. Vayomer; Birkat Hamazon). On the use of *perat* and *perat nefesh* in the context of personal revelation, see *MHs* (Vol. 1, Vayehi s.v. Vayehi), where Lainer interprets the classical term *hashgahah peratit* (providence) in terms of the *perat* actually participating in the divine.

³⁴ See also the parallel passage in *MHs* (Vol. 2, Pesachim s.v. Bayom), where Lainer states that this consciousness is available in this world as well through the vehicle of *mitzvah*, and in particular, the commandment of *sukkah*.

³⁵ For example, Kabbalah scholar and teacher Miles Krassen (personal communication, March 11, 2003) related that he assumed this reading to be correct, as did the other teachers of *MHs* that he knew.

³⁶ The eye of the mind experiences as paradoxical the deeper truths of the eye of Spirit: when the mind looks at Spirit it can only understand it through dualistic opposites, which are essentially both true. A paradox is different than a contradiction in which there are two statements, one of which is true and the other is false. Paradox is when two statements disagree with each other yet they are both true. Wilber has termed this form of paradox *mandalic logic* (personal communication, February 1, 2011).

³⁷ *Binah* (understanding) is the *sefirah* in the Kabbalistic system, often referred to as the higher *Shekhinah* (divine feminine presence), which is also also termed *'olam ha-ba* (world-to-come) or *hayyim* (life) (Scholem, 1991, p. 176). In the passage cited, however, Lainer is talking about an actual human process, rather than a hypostatic reality beyond the human being. Yet he carries the association of the eschaton from the Kabbalah, along with the idea that *binah* is beyond conscious apprehension.

³⁸ Lainer's radical chauvinism is rooted theologically in a substantive metaphysical abyss that separates the Jewish from the gentile spirit. Yet in this passage, *teshukah*, which is an essential if not the essential life force, is in exile among the nations of the world. Lainer never explains how it is that the nations hold this primal life force, which, according to Lainer's theology, is related essentially only to Israel.

³⁹ See, for example, *MHs* (Vol. 2, Pesachim s.v. Lamah, Vayehi s.v. Vayehi).

⁴⁰ Lainer's concept of *hisaron* is bound to his theory of Unique Self. Essentially, each person has a unique *hisaron* granted to them by God. Healing one's *hisaron* is a spiritual process unique to each person, and is accomplished through *berur*. One's unique flaw shows the path to one's Unique Self. See Gafni (In press a), especially the chapter

“Hisaron and Uniqueness.” My development of the notion of Unique Shadow, which is a distortion of Unique Self, is drawn from these texts in Lainer.

⁴¹ In the midrashic passage, Lainer is commenting on Eleazar’s marriage to a woman of Judah, which is seen unfavorably by everyone. This marriage, however, inspires him to act with the audacity normally ascribed to Judah. The beginning of the passage explains that God wanted Aaron to taste the portion of David, therefore Aaron married someone from the tribe of Judah, setting the precedent for Eleazar.

⁴² On the relationship of name and ratzon, see *MHS* (Vol. 1, Beshalah s.v. Hashem ish milhamah; Shabbat s.v. ‘atidah; Vol. 2, Ecclesiastes s.v. Mah Yitron 2).

⁴³ Traditionally, Solomon is understood to be the author of Proverbs.

⁴⁴ Lainer cross-references the commentary on Yitro to the one on Ruth. The quote is drawn from both passages.

⁴⁵ This line, coming from Ecclesiastes, is according written by Solomon, who is a paragon of the Judah archetype—of one who has realized their Unique Self.

⁴⁶ Sperber begins the article with a citation from Zusia of Onipol expressing the one-letter tradition and then uses the unique *mitzvah* tradition as its source.

⁴⁷ The source of this correspondence between interpretations and letters predates Luria. See Nahmanides’ (1963) sermon, where he states: “Creation was with differing faces to the extent of six hundred thousand, and this number included all opinions, and they said, it was worth receiving the Torah in order that all the opinions be received” (1:162). See also Idel (2002, p. 518, n. 75).

⁴⁸ Scholem himself refers to this text without citing it (1965a, p. 65, n. 1). See Luria (Sefer ha-Kavvanot, 1620, 53b). More on this topic is in Vital (1863, 17b); Shapira (1637, 1x); and Bacharach (1648, 42a) cf. Scholem (1965a, p. 65, n. 1). The remaining citations from Vital on pp. 129-131 of this article refer to these sources.

⁴⁹ The four levels of interpretation parallel the four spiritual worlds of the Kabbalah (Scholem, 1932, 1965a; Idel, 2002, p. 661).

⁵⁰ Because Hebrew wisdom comes from an interpretive textual tradition, it is based on perspective. In other words, its complete Unique Self interpretation means its complete perspective, which is why for example the Buddhists are actually much more sophisticated and nuanced than the Kabbalistic texts when they talk about subtle-state experiences, and the Jews naturally are more sophisticated when they talk about perspective.

⁵¹ See also Elimelekh of Lishensk (1960, 1:3b), who discusses the “root” of a generation.

⁵² In this respect, I disagree with Magid’s (2003, pp. 205, 255) characterization of the nature of Lainer’s antinomianism. While it is true that Lainer does not reject law in its entirety, he does break the fundamental identity between law and the will of God.

⁵³ On Luria’s guidance of his students in terms of identifying their unique spirits, see Vital (1963); the important material adduced by Benayahu (1967, pp. 156-157); and Fine (1987, p. 75).

⁵⁴ See also Idel (2002, p. 96, n. 75), who cites a different passage in Azulai on the nexus between the number of letters in the Torah and the number of Israelites. In regard to the inability of anyone to reveal that interpretation to others, see Bacharach (1648, p. 41), adduced in Idel (2002, p. 96) and in Scholem (1965a, p. 65, n. 1).

⁵⁵ I have chosen to deploy the word *spirit* as an appropriate translation of Lainer’s use of the Hebrew words *nefesh* and *neslama*, which are usually translated as “Spirit.” I have done so to avoid confusion, as there is also a sense in Western theistic traditions in which “soul” is actually a sort of first level, post-egoic clarification in the subtle realm. In general, the term *soul* is very confusing, as it is used in many different ways in theistic traditions. Soul sometimes means the nondual core of infinite essence or emptiness that incarnates individually in each person. Sometimes, however, soul means an evolved ego in the subtle realm. In a similar sense, references to *unio mystica* in classical sources can refer to realization or union with the ground of *ayin*, *sunyata*, nothingness, or in a very different sense it may refer to union with the subtle realm where deity images can emerge.

When Lainer speaks of the unique soul, he sometimes refers to both usages of soul (i.e., to soul as the unique perspective of soul, and at times also to the more limited usage of soul). This is one of the difficulties scholars have

when reading theistic sources on the Unique Self doctrine—that is, we need to always distinguish the Unique Self, expressed sometimes as soul, from the more limited subtle-soul doctrine, which is more prevalent in the West.

⁵⁶ For example, see the Musar school (Ross, 1986).

⁵⁷ In essence, Lainer breaks the exclusivity of enlightenment by moving it from the very narrow elite—usually the Hasidic master and some anonymous saints—to include in potential, “every person in Israel.” This is a radically expansive and daring move. When I teach these democratizing passages in Lainer’s thought, I read “all of Israel” to mean every human being. This is the clear sense that emerges from Lainer’s nondual humanism, which by definition must include all human beings. However, in honest evaluation of Lainer, I must point out that one of the places where the integral distinction between structure-stages and state-stages comes most dramatically into play is with historical pioneers who founded the great schools of Spirit (i.e., they have a very highly developed sense of states of consciousness). Ken Wilber (personal communication, February 8, 2011) remarked when reading this material: “It is clear that Lainer is touching genuine nondual states of enlightenment.” But at the same time their frontal personality, that is to say their level of consciousness from a structure-stage perspective, is at least in part limited by their structure-stage of development, which is often linked to their cultural, religious, and historical milieu. In other words, a large portion of their frontal personality is still arrested at amber altitude (i.e., ethnocentric interpretations). Wilber remarked to me in discussing this issue in Lainer, “I was really struck by a conversation with one of the scholars at the Integral Christianity Seminars who said that the historical Jesus was really very ethnocentric. When Jesus talked about saving souls, it would appear historically that his intention was mediated through his ethnocentric perspective; he was really talking about saving all the souls that live inside of a very narrow circle” (personal communication, February 8, 2011).

In terms of Lainer’s thinking, in passage after passage he limits his statements to Israelites. Read from the perspective of worldcentric or Kosmocentric consciousness, these passages are jarring at best. For me personally, they were shocking. In fact, these passages catalyzed my own move beyond the exclusively Jewish consciousness that defined my formative years. One is struck in Lainer by the arbitrary nature of the limitation, a limitation which obviously violated the nondual perfume of Lainer’s own writing and consciousness. Often within one passage, one finds a gloriously realized nondual humanism only to be followed in the very next phrase of the same passage by a starkly ethnocentric framing.

A different fissure in Lainer’s chauvinism is found in his assumption, drawn directly from his Lurianic sources, that a spirit can transmigrate from a Jew to a non-Jew and back again. This would seem, both for Lainer and Luria, to significantly blur the distinction between Jew and non-Jew (see, e.g., *MHs*, Vol. 1, Matot s.v. Vayiktzof). However, Lainer, and to the best of my knowledge, Luria, do not develop the more liberal potential inherent in this doctrine of transmigration. For further remarks on Lainer’s chauvinism, see Gafni (In press a). It is for reasons such as these that the “conveyor belt” notion is critical in the development of Integral Spirituality (see DiPerna, In press).

⁵⁸ See also *MHs* (Vol. 1, Hayyei Sarah s.v. Vayosef, Toldot s.v. Vaye’ehav; Vol. 2, Hayyei Sarah s.v. Ve’eileh).

⁵⁹ For example, see Idel’s (2002) discussion of *unio mystica* (pp. 59–73).

⁶⁰ In Lainer, *kodem* almost always refers to unique *hisaron* (e.g., see *MHs*, Vol. 1, Bereishit s.v. Vayitzmah; Vol. 2, Isaiah s.v. Vehayah). It is clear in this passage, and many like it, that according to Lainer, one can move beyond the *mitzvot* even in this world. Indeed, that is the desired goal of service in this world. As described above, *‘olam ha-ba* refers to a state of consciousness and not a particular future time. In Faierstein’s (1989) words, “A person who has completed his own clarification can be said to be living in the messianic period. In effect, the messianic and pre-messianic periods are not absolute temporal opposites but relative to each individual” (p. 96).

⁶¹ See, for example, *MHs* (Vol. 1, Proverbs s.v. Mayim ‘Amukim).

⁶² King David and his line are descended from Judah.

⁶³ See *MHs* (Vol. 1, Balak s.v. Ka’eit).

⁶⁴ On nondual acosmic humanism and *tekufot*, see also *MHs* (Vol. 1, Balak s.v. Ki lo Nahash; Vol. 2, Shelah s.v. Ne-sakhim; s.v. ‘al ‘Inyan).

⁶⁵ It is important to note here how I am using the word *archetype* not in the Jungian sense of mystic forms nor in the

precise Platonic sense of the first form of manifestation. Rather by archetype I refer to the model of nondual realization in which the ontic identity of wills between man and source is achieved, which is the core of Lainer's vision of enlightenment.

⁶⁶ For discussion, see *MHS* (Vol. 2, Ki Tavo s.v. Arur Makleh aviv Ve'imo).

⁶⁷ The Judah-Joseph contrast has much older roots in classical Jewish sources (see Magid, 2003). Lainer's interpretation, however, is highly original in both its antinomian and democratic character. For comparisons to Levi, see *MHS* (Vol. 2, Ki Tavo s.v. Arur Makleh aviv Ve'imo; Ki Tavo s.v. Arur Ha-ish).

⁶⁸ See, for example, *MHS* (Vol. 1, Vezot Haberakhah s.v. Kol).

⁶⁹ See *MHS* (Vol. 2, Va'era s.v. Vayedaber).

⁷⁰ Here the Judah archetype is embodied by Aaron's son Elazar, who marries someone from the tribe of Judah.

⁷¹ See also *MHS* (Vol. 1, Shabbat s.v. Amar Rav).

⁷² See also Magid (2003, p. 337, n. 8), who critiques Tishby for ignoring the messianic arousal in Kotzk, Izbica, and other places.

⁷³ In fact, the classical Hasidic concept of the *tzadik* plays virtually no role in *MHS*. For discussion, see Faierstein (1989, pp. 77, 81).

⁷⁴ The Musar school of Israel Salanter and his students may have also been influenced by the Romantic zeitgeist. See Ross (1986, pp. 60-64, 217-218). Although the Musar school affirmed the suprarational element already inherent in Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena and reflected in Lainer's *lema'alah mida'ato*, it retained normative and rational safeguards to ensure the ethical nature of the suprarational will.

⁷⁵ It seems on this point that both Luria and Lainer, even if not directly influenced, were at least in part informed by the zeitgeist of their respective times. While there is a move beyond law in Luria's system, namely, in his elaborate system of *kavanot* (mystical prayers), these intentions and unifications accompany and deepen normative performance but in no way override it. Lurianic individuals, like Renaissance individuals in general, may be unique and significantly anomian, but they are virtually never antinomian. For Lainer, however, the individual stands—at least ideally—outside and even against the system.

⁷⁶ Silman unknowingly cites Lainer in his third model when he presents a Tzadok Hakohen text that Tzadok prefaces with *shama'ti* ("I have heard"). The phrase *shama'ti* in Tzadok's work, according to an old tradition, always indicates an idea that he heard from his teacher, Mordechai Lainer.

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MARC GAFNI, Ph.D., earned his doctorate from Oxford University and is a lineage holder in the Kabbalistic tradition. He is an ordained rabbi, spiritual artist, teacher, and leader in the emerging World Spirituality movement. Marc is a co-founder of iEvolve: The Center for World Spirituality, the director of the Integral Spiritual Experience, a scholar at Integral Institute, and a lecturer at John F. Kennedy University. The author of seven books in Hebrew and English, including the national bestseller *Soul Prints* (Simon & Schuster, 2001) and *Mystery of Love* (Simon & Schuster, 2002), Marc's teaching is marked by a deep transmission of open heart, love, and provocative wisdom. Marc's forthcoming books are *Unique Self: The Future of Enlightenment* (Sounds True) and *Unique Self and Nondual Humanism: the Teachings of Hasidic Master Mordechai Lainer of Izbica* (SUNY Press).