

## “From Time to Time I Dream Wondrous Dreams”: Esotericism and Prophecy in the Writings of Hillel Zeitlin\*

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### Abstract

This article discusses Hebrew and Yiddish writings on prophecy and visionary experience authored by the eastern European Jewish writer and religious thinker Hillel Zeitlin (1871-1942). These texts, written over several decades in the early twentieth century, comprise both theoretical studies of religious and visionary experience as well as detailed records of Zeitlin's own prophetic experiences, and reflect multiple objectives, such as articulating religious experience, defending the veracity of intuitive foreknowledge, and a turn to clairvoyance in response to social and political crisis. They likewise demonstrate the influence of two American writers, William James and Ralph Waldo Trine, who dealt with religious experience and the development of inner life. Whether directly responding to James or later formulating a system of intuitive clairvoyance inspired by Trine, Zeitlin utilized scientific language and esoteric systems of non-Jewish derivation such as mesmerism, New Thought, and parapsychology, which he integrated with hasidic and kabbalistic concepts. This article likewise analyses his enthusiastic reception of attempts by other Jewish writers to formulate scientific understandings of prophecy derived from parapsychology. Collectively, Zeitlin's writings point to the place of broader esoteric currents within Jewish intellectual life in early-twentieth-century eastern Europe, a topic not previously subject to scholarly attention.

Keywords: Jewish Thought; Hillel Zeitlin; Parapsychology; Dreams; Prophecy; William James; New Thought

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The Jewish writer and religious thinker Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942) wrote extensively about dreams, visions, and prophetic foreknowledge.<sup>1</sup> Zeitlin’s innovative discussions of these subjects reflect multiple objectives, such as articulating religious experience, defending the legitimacy of intuitive foreknowledge, and turning to clairvoyance as a response to social and political crisis. Taken together, these writings bespeak an extensive engagement with several prevailing intellectual and esoteric approaches to the mind and its powers, from the emergent psychology of religion to New Thought and parapsychology.<sup>2</sup> This article presents a diachronic study of three works penned by Zeitlin concerning prophecy and religious experience; the texts under consideration point to Zeitlin’s evolution from a theorizer of religious experience to a documenter of his own ensuing visionary experiences as he developed an approach to prophecy and clairvoyance informed by contemporary esoteric literature. Two American thinkers, in particular the philosopher and psychologist of religion William James (1842–1910) and the New Thought writer Ralph Waldo Trine (1866–1958), emerge as key influences in the formulation of his thought. The latter, alongside other esoteric writers, offered Zeitlin the possibility of an empirically grounded notion of prophetic foreknowledge that would give credence to his apocalyptic visions of the impending doom facing the Jews of eastern Europe and validate his visionary practices as a legitimate mode of Jewish religious expression.

I begin with “In the Secret Place of the Soul” [“ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah”] (1913), Zeitlin’s response to James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and the latter’s envisioned science of religions,<sup>3</sup> proceeding to the ensuing visionary

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1. For biographical information on Zeitlin, see Waldoks, “Hillel Zeitlin”; Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm and the Quiet*; Green, “Hillel Zeitlin: A Biographical Introduction.”

2. My use of the term “esoteric” follows Hanegraaff’s working definition of Western esotericism as “rejected knowledge.” Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*; Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 14–17. An important recent criticism of esotericism as a taxonomical category is Hammer, “Mysticism and Esotericism.”

3. Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah”; republished with substantial alterations as “ha-Havvayah ha-Datit ve-Giluyeha” in Zeitlin, *Al Gvul Shnei Olamot*, 9–44; translated into English in Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 119–62. On this work, see Waldoks, “Hillel Zeitlin,” 218–42.

and prophetic experiences he recorded in a dream journal, “Bordering Two Worlds: From the Notebook of a Dreamer” [“Al Gvul Shnei Olamot: mi-Tokh Sefer Reshimot shel Holem”] (1919),<sup>4</sup> and followed by the systematic treatment of prophetic intuition found in his essay “On the Hidden and the Concealed” [“Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam”] (1921), which would subsequently be incorporated into a religious manifesto issued in the late 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, I discuss Zeitlin’s reception of *Regarding Visions of the Future* [*Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*] (1935) by Shmuel Tsvi Cohen (1882–1933), a philosophical treatise on prophecy informed by parapsychology.<sup>6</sup> The former viewed this book as the groundwork for a “new science of the religion of Israel” formed out of the encounter between Judaism and the “finest of occultists.”<sup>7</sup> Collectively, these texts draw together psychology and parapsychology, New Thought and Hasidism, to form an innovative expression of prophecy and visionary experience that drew on the explanatory models found in contemporary esoteric currents in order to substantiate the possibility of prophetic foreknowledge for Jewish readers in early twentieth-century eastern Europe.

### Science of the Mind: Contextual Remarks

The advent of the psychology of religion and parapsychology (known in certain contexts as psychical research),<sup>8</sup> as well as other esoteric and metaphysical systems came to the attention of Jewish readers in eastern Europe in the

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4. Hillel Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot”; republished with alterations in Zeitlin, *Al Gvul Shnei Olamot*, 169–215. The publication history of “Bordering Two Worlds” is treated thoroughly in Meir, “The Book of Visions.”

5. Hillel Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam”; reprinted in Zeitlin, *Sifran shel Yehidim*, 16–27. These three essays have recently been reissued in their original form in Zeitlin, *In the Secret Place of the Soul*.

6. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*.

7. Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon li-Tsor Filosofiah Datit Hadashah.”

8. On parapsychology, see, among others, Asprem, “Parapsychology.” The terminological split between psychical research and parapsychology largely fell out along regional lines—the former prevailed in Anglophone contexts and the latter in Germany—until “parapsychology” was universally popularized by the American researcher J. B. Rhine in the 1930s. Jewish readers in eastern Europe were exposed to both terms; for purposes of consistency, I refer throughout to parapsychology, at the risk of anachronism.

closing decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> These had a considerable impact upon the rabbis, Jewish theologians, and other religious writers—among them Hillel Zeitlin—who read the literature of these various currents with great interest.<sup>10</sup> These religious writers, such as Ahron Marcus (1843–1916),<sup>11</sup> Fishel Schneersohn (1887–1958),<sup>12</sup> and Menahem Mendel Ekstein (1884–1942)—all, like Zeitlin, Hasidic Jews to varying degrees—produced a largely-neglected body of literature informed, at times only implicitly, by contemporary developments in psychology and esotericism.<sup>13</sup> Zeitlin, who read and discussed the writings of

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9. On esotericism and the occult in this period, see, among others, Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 257–495; Carlson, “Fashionable Occultism.”

10. The hasidic rabbi Joseph Shapotshnick (1882–1937), for instance, regarded modern psychology as bearing “particular proximity to the soul, itself a portion from above of God, may He be blessed and exalted,” Shapotshnik, *Sbas ha-Mashpia*, 245.

11. Marcus’s thick tome on Hasidism, *Der Chassidismus*, is littered with references to mesmerism, spiritualism, and discussions of the unconscious. Marcus, *Der Chassidismus*; Marcus, *Hartmann’s inductive Philosophie im Chassidismus*. On Marcus, see Boulouque, “From *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to *Geisteswissenschaft*.”

12. Schneersohn, a scion of the Habad hasidic dynasty who trained as a physician and psychiatrist, remained, like his friend Zeitlin, “hasidic-adjacent.” His magnum opus *Der veg tsum mentsh* (1927) was published shortly afterwards in German (*Der Weg zum Menschen*) and English (*Studies in Psycho-Expeditions*). A definitive Hebrew edition followed in 1942 (*ha-Derekh El ha-Adam*). In the book, he developed his method of the “psycho-expedition” as a means of treating “Psychical scurvy” and achieving psychological health. In this regard, he turned to both the “scientifically organized confessions of religious individuals” found in James’s *The Varieties*, as well as the hasidic notion of *devekut* [ecstasy], “a most prolific source of an immense healing soul-force,” *Studies in Psycho-Expedition*, 137, 170. A précis of Schneersohn’s system is found in Radosavljevich, *The Educational Significance of Schneersohn’s Psycho-Expedition Method*. See, as well, Freis, “Ecstatic Expeditions.” Schneersohn previously took part in the founding, between 1917 and 1919, of Kadimah, a short-lived “religious-cultural” movement informed by, among others, James’s approach to the psychological study of religion. Schneersohn served as the editor of the movement’s Hebrew journal *Kadimah: An Anthology Devoted to Philosophy and the Science of Religion*, of which only one issue appeared. In his opening article, “Echoes of the Age,” Schneersohn hailed the religious renaissance spearheaded by James, Henri Bergson, Hermann Cohen, and Émile Boutroux, Schneersohn, “Hed ha-Tekufah,” 5. On this organization and its program, see “ha-Tenu’ah ha-Religiyyozit-Tarbutit.”

13. Ekstein, a Galician hasidic émigré to Vienna, drew on notions derived from mesmerism and autosuggestion in his introductory guide to Hasidism, Ekstein, *Tenu’ei ha-Nefesh*. On Ekstein, see Reiser, *Imagery Techniques*, 250–317.

the above-listed figures,<sup>14</sup> is exceptional among them for the melding of both theory and experience found in his writings; he not only engaged intellectually with new understandings of the mind and soul, but also incorporated them into discussions of his own dreams and visions.

What was the intellectual background for Zeitlin’s writings on visions and religious experience? Put briefly, a new school of experimental psychology emerged in the 1890s in the United States which sought to examine the psychological phenomena of religious life. These scholars, prominent among them William James and Edwin Starbuck (1866–1947), sought to empirically investigate phenomena such as the process of conversion and religious experience.<sup>15</sup> In the spirit of the age of invention, scientific methods and academic scholarship were to be directed towards the improvement of religious and social life.<sup>16</sup> Prominent among these works was James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which sold over ten-thousand copies within a year of its publication in 1902 and was rapidly translated into other languages.<sup>17</sup> Basing himself on numerous testimonial accounts of religious experiences, including dozens sourced from Starbuck, James “provided . . . the first clear example—albeit perhaps an imperfect one—of the descriptive approach to religious phenomena.”<sup>18</sup> In this,

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14. See, for instance, Zeitlin’s review of Schneersohn’s *Der veg tsum mentsb*, Zeitlin, “Vegen di letste.” Zeitlin noted, as well, that Ekstein’s work bears “the strong influence of Rudolf Steiner” despite its ostensibly exclusive reliance on hasidic sources, Zeitlin, “Vi azoy men zukht haynt dos inerlikhe likht?”

15. Classic works from this school include James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*. See, as well, Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. For a revision of the latter, see Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 261–307.

16. This sentiment was well-expressed by Starbuck, who pointed to “the vague ideas which had been forming, that religion might be studied in the more careful ways that we call scientific, with profit to both science and religion,” Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, xi. See, as well, the utopian vision expressed in Shapotschnick, *Do You Know Yourself*, 3–4. On Starbuck’s and his colleagues’ efforts to utilize scientific methods for the advancement of religion, see White, “A Measured Faith”; White, *Unsettled Minds*, 134–57. On the interplay between the scholarship of religion and religious practice, see Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 11–13.

17. Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 291.

18. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*, 28.

he advocated for the formation of a “Science of Religions” which, “depend[ing] for its original material on facts of personal experience,” would classify and systematize religious phenomena within such categories as “healthy-mindedness,” “saintliness,” and, foremost for James, “mysticism.”<sup>19</sup> As we will see below, Zeitlin expressed great enthusiasm upon reading *The Varieties*, taking up James’s summons to partake in the formation of the science of religions. It must be noted, however, that, like many of his peers, Zeitlin’s understanding of science, more akin to the broader notion conveyed by the German term *Wissenschaft*, did not consist of laboratory investigations and the formulation of hypotheses, but rather an ordered and systematic presentation of a given subject—in this case religious experience—empirically supported by anecdotal evidence.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this image of science favored by Zeitlin was often at odds with the more sterile worldview of scientific naturalism, drawn as the latter was towards agnosticism, as well as other forms of critical scholarship. With that, various turn-of-the-century metaphysical systems utilized scientific language in an attempt to share in the reigning epistemic authority of science.<sup>21</sup>

The origins of parapsychology, meanwhile, are rooted in the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research, founded in England in 1882. Psychical researchers sought to apply scientific methods to the study of phenomena previously associated with the occult—such as spiritualism, apparitions, and clairvoyance—now conceptualized as the products of telepathy and other psychic forces.<sup>22</sup> The distinction between psychology and parapsychology, today divergent fields, remained quite muddled at the turn of the century as the former

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19. James, *Varieties*, 353, table of contents.

20. See Lewis, “How Religion Appeals to the Authority of Science,” 33. Concerning Zeitlin’s use of the word “scientific,” see Meir, “Hillel Zeitlin’s Zohar,” 146.

21. The popular American New Thought movement, itself derived from mesmerism with its quasi-scientific doctrine of animal magnetism, cast its teachings as “laws,” utilizing a legislative metaphor borrowed directly from scientific discourse. See Lewis, “How Religion Appeals to the Authority of Science,” 26–27; Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 12. See also Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 201–330.

22. Asprem, “Parapsychology.”

attempted to tighten its rather loose disciplinary borders. James, for instance, served as president of the Society for Psychical Research from 1894 to 1895 and was a founding member of the American Society for Psychical Research in 1884.<sup>23</sup> In Germany, as well, parapsychological research societies emerged alongside the institutionalization of psychology as a scientific discipline, and many eastern European Jewish writers at the time referred to the activities of parapsychologists in the same tones reserved for other scientific fields.<sup>24</sup> Elazar David Finkel, for instance, whose abridged Hebrew adaptation of the parapsychological classic *Phantasms of the Living* appeared in Warsaw in 1904, advertised his work as “founded upon the experiments and investigations of psychologists and philosophers specializing in the study of the psyche,” while his contemporary, R. Mordecai Nissenbaum, informed his religious readers in 1910 of the parapsychological research carried out by the “leading scholars and esteemed professors of France and England.”<sup>25</sup>

While parapsychology originated in many respects as an attempt to naturalize the supernatural, it was often co-opted by religious thinkers, such as Zeitlin and Cohen, for whom the scientific authority of parapsychology—with its reports of thought-transference, clairvoyance, and hidden forces, all cloaked in a scientific veneer—provided an empirical foundation for contested religious phenomena, foremost among them prophecy.<sup>26</sup> With that, Zeitlin’s path to developing his theory of visions and prophecy originated with James’s *Varieties* and the scientific study of religious experience, to which I now turn.

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23. Sommer, “Psychical Research and the Origins of American Psychology”; Sommer, “Psychical Research in the History and Philosophy of Science”; Knapp, *William James*. James’s writings on psychical research have been collected in James, *Essays in Psychical Research*. The active delineation of boundaries of scientific fields is discussed in Gieryn, “Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science”; Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science*, Collins and Pinch, *Frames of Meaning*.

24. See Sommer, “Normalizing the Supernormal.” On the development of German parapsychology, see Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science*.

25. Finkel, *ha-Hargashah me-Rahok*; “ha-Hargashah me-Rahok”; Nissenbaum, *Mosdot ha-Emunah*, 31.

26. Compare Asprem, “Parapsychology,” 634.

## “In the Secret Place of the Soul”: Hillel Zeitlin and the Science of Religions

Born into a devout family of Habad Hasidim in Korma in what is now Belarus, Zeitlin was swiftly recognized as a prodigy, and as an adolescent he underwent a year of study in the Habad hasidic court in Rechytsa. He later recalled this period as marked by ecstatic religious and visionary experiences:

But a while after I departed from Rechytsa I found myself *consumed by divine fire*. For more than half a year afterwards, when I was about thirteen, I was totally *subsumed within Infinity*. No one knew what was happening to me, since I was by nature a shy loner. Yet even today I recall with secret joy that wondrous time when I was almost able to see the “power of the Maker within the made” and to penetrate beyond the “physical, corporeal nature of things,” constantly seeing the “divine power flowing through them in each moment, without which they are naught.” I found myself in a state of ecstasy that I had not known previously and have never yet attained again. Usually people are in such states for minutes or hours in the course of a day. But I remained in that ecstatic state *all day and night*. *My thought was attached to Divinity with hardly a moment's interruption.*<sup>27</sup>

This juncture was short-lived, Zeitlin noted, and he soon found his faith undermined by works of modern literature and philosophy. Having shed his religious beliefs, his youthful period of religious experience was relegated to the past as he devoted himself to an autodidactic study of philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Established as a prominent writer and journalist, Zeitlin settled in Warsaw in 1907, where he authored a series of essays and monographs on hasidic and kabbalistic subjects, largely in a neo-romantic and existentialist vein.<sup>29</sup> Publishing several columns per week over the course of several decades in the widely circulated Yiddish daily *Der moment*, Zeitlin was among the most popular Jewish writers in Poland, his articles read by a mass audience.<sup>30</sup>

27. Zeitlin, “Kitsur Toldotai” (all emphases in original throughout unless stated otherwise); translated into English in Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 1-6. Translation adapted from *ibid.*, 5. Zeitlin’s account is couched in terminology borrowed from Habad hasidic writings.

28. Zeitlin authored the first Hebrew monographs on Spinoza and Nietzsche. Zeitlin, *Barukh Spinoza*; Zeitlin, “Friedrich Nietzsche.”

29. Zeitlin, “Shekhinah”; Zeitlin, “Yofi shel Ma’alah”; Zeitlin, “ha-Hasidut”; Zeitlin, “ha-Tsima’on”; Zeitlin, *ha-Hasidut le-Shitoteha ve-Zerameha*; Zeitlin, *Rabbi Nahman mi-Breslav*. On these works, see Meir, “Hasidut she-le-Atid Lavo.”

30. In a 1929 survey by the rival Yiddish daily *Unzer ekspres*, Zeitlin was ranked the third most beloved Jew in Poland, “Ot dos zenen di 10 oysdervelte, di 10 belibste yuden in poyln.”



During the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Zeitlin underwent a gradual process of religious renewal, forming an eclectic religious identity as a modern hasidic Jew positioned between the reactive traditionalism of hasidic Orthodoxy and secular Jewish modernity.<sup>31</sup> He envisioned a prophetic revival already at this time, calling in 1909 for a “new religious current” whose spirit would consist not of:

...“a national ethic,” nor “*Wissenschaft des Judentums*” and meager pedantry, nor economic socialism, nor even what they call art (in the ordinary sense . . .), but rather the spirit of *prophecy*. The prophecy which departed from Israel will return once more. The religious fire which roused Moses, the religious fire which roused Ezra and the Great Assembly—this religious fire will be revealed and seen once more in the life of Israel, even if in a different appearance . . .<sup>32</sup>

This prophetic spirit, Zeitlin wrote elsewhere that year, would consist of a “particular world-creation and worldview” which encompassed yet transcended the bounds of emissarial rebuke, universal ethics, and lyrical aesthetic spirit.<sup>33</sup> If his calls for “a new religious current” resembled the advocacy for religious reform put forward by the American psychologists of religion, his complex religious identity as a past participant in religious experience now found at a distance likewise accorded with the biographies of psychologists such as Starbuck, whose short-lived adolescent conversion would later prompt his scholarly investigation of religious phenomena.<sup>34</sup> This complex identity would, in part, prompt Zeitlin

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31. This process is described as a “religious renewal” in Zeitlin, “Der lebens-veg fun di belibteste yuden in poyln.” Zeitlin’s identity as a “repentant” is a long-standing trope in biographical studies published in the years following his death. See, for instance, Lipkin, “Yeridah le-Tsorekh Aliyah.” This trope has recently been challenged by Bluman, “On the Characterization of Hillel Zeitlin as a Penitent.” On Zeitlin’s self-identification as a hasidic Jew throughout his life, see Zeitlin, *Vos ikh hob yets tsu zogen*, 31. For a critical portrayal of hasidic traditionalism in interwar Poland, see Piekarz, *Ideological Trends*.

32. Hillel Zeitlin, “She’elot,” 15, 25.

33. Zeitlin, “Yugend-Shtimen”; republished with minor alterations in Zeitlin, *Der alefbeyts fun yudentum*, 69–72; translated into Hebrew in Zeitlin, *Alef Bet shel Yabadut*, 54–57. Zeitlin’s remarks were aimed in part at the conception of prophecy put forward by the Zionist ideologue Ahad ha-Am, discussed in Schweid, *Prophets for Their People and Humanity*, 44–65.

34. White, “A Measured Faith,” 433–34.

to issue his response to James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1913 in the literary anthology *Netivot* as "In the Secret Place of the Soul."<sup>35</sup> As an individual both near and far from religion, "in whom the flame once burned; the fire has now been extinguished, but 'a whispering coal is still aglow beneath the heap of ashes,'" Zeitlin viewed himself as uniquely qualified to author such a "Varieties of Jewish Religious Experience."<sup>36</sup> This work, Zeitlin later recalled, was an expression of "the strengthening and fortification" of his religious renewal in those years.<sup>37</sup> "In the Secret Place of the Soul," then, was not a work of detached scholarship, but rather an attempt to articulate his own burgeoning religious experiences. It is here that Zeitlin declared his wish to present a scientific study of prophecy.<sup>38</sup>

Upon its publication in Russian in 1910, *The Varieties* aroused great interest among Russian Orthodox readers, some of whom took issue with the book's nearly monolithic Protestant orientation.<sup>39</sup> Like many Christians, Zeitlin identified with James's call to initiate a science of religions while seeking to issue a corrective to his work, in this case from the standpoint of Jewish, predominantly hasidic, religious experience.<sup>40</sup> He expressed great esteem for James's work, noting that "only one proper attempt has been made in this field [of the science of religions]. That is James's wondrous book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James is almost

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35. Zeitlin, "ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah." The essay received mixed reviews, see Kabak, "Netivot"; S. Rosenfeld, "be-Safrut u-be-Hayyim"; Brenner, *Ketavim*, 1087. For a more extensive, receptive review, see Friedman, "ba-Mish'olim."

36. Zeitlin, "ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah," 206; translated adapted from Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 123.

37. Zeitlin, "Der lebens-veg fun di belibteste yuden in poynl."

38. Zeitlin already sought to produce scientific studies of religious topics prior to reading James. See the table of contents of *Safrut* 1, no. 3 (1909-10), in which the words "A scientific work [*sefer mada'i*]" are appended to the title of his article on Hasidism.

39. Etkind, "James and Konovalov."

40. Compare a similar Russian Orthodox critique published in 1911, N. Shemelin's *The Religious-Philosophical Views of W. James in Connection with the Mystical Currents of Contemporary Life* [Russian], discussed in *ibid.*, 172-73.

the only person who has found the scientific key to unlock religion's gates."<sup>41</sup> With that, he declared that *The Varieties*, with its Christian focus, had opened only the outer gates of religious experience. The inner gates—leading to the distinct religious experiences of Judaism—were the subject of Zeitlin's study. Borrowing James's descriptive methodology, Zeitlin took as his raw material the depictions of encounters with the Divine found in the biblical books of the prophets and early hasidic texts. Adapting the former's pragmatic mode of evaluation, he delineated various categories of Jewish religious experience (wonder, astonishment, and revelation, respectively), transforming the descriptive content of these passages into a phenomenological map of the landscape of revelation.<sup>42</sup> James, in short, provided Zeitlin with the analytical lens to develop an innovative hermeneutic for reading Jewish, in particular hasidic, texts as testimonial accounts of religious experience, of "this hidden, deep, yet natural feeling [of] an otherworldly awe, a fear of God that cannot be contained, that they have seen *beyond* the border, that they have *touched* God."<sup>43</sup>

"In the Secret Place of the Soul" draws to a close with a discussion of revelation. "People," Zeitlin observed, "always think that 'revelation' is the lot of just a few exemplary individuals among human beings, 'prophets,' the most highly elevated of people. This error, shared by almost all superficial believers,

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41. *Ibid.*, 208 [126].

42. See Zeitlin, "ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah," 206 [122] for an affirmative discussion of James's pragmatism. Zeitlin's categories of religious experience are, in all likelihood, the unacknowledged basis for the early chapters of Abraham Joshua Heschel's *God in Search of Man*, which describes the progressive notions of "The Sublime," "Wonder," and "The Sense of Mystery." See Waldoks, "Hillel Zeitlin," 230–31, 313n89; Green, "Three Warsaw Mystics," 33.

43. Zeitlin, "ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah," 224 [146–47]. It is worth noting, as well, the reform aims of Zeitlin's work, shared with the American psychologists of religion. See *ibid.*, 207: "They [those qualified to construct the science of religions] gaze at [religion] and study its principles and foundations; they can determine what is essential to its very being and what of falsehood and ugliness has become attached to it." Compare Starbuck's 1902 letter to James cited in White, "A Measured Faith," 433: "A multitude of superstitions and crudities are doomed to fold their tents ... People will be living in a new era of religious experience before they know it."

is rooted in a misunderstanding of revelation's true nature."<sup>44</sup> Following a lyrical depiction, interwoven with extensive biblical and rabbinic imagery, of the ineffable experience of revelation accessible to every person, he states:

The various appearances and revelations that happen to *everybody* at certain times are beyond categorization or definition. They can never be placed within borders, about which you say: "These are exactly what they are, and here are the signs by which to know them. These are the authentic revelations; 'see them and pronounce them holy.'" But to the degree that it is possible to find some sense of order among these things, this is how it seems to me . . .<sup>45</sup>

Zeitlin's categories of common revelatory experience number, in ascending order: (1) the voice of God within nature; (2) symbols; (3) hints sent by God to particular individuals; (4) dreams and visions of the night; (5) the voice of conscience and thoughts of repentance; (6) desolation of the soul and cosmic longings; (7) the inner voice; (8) a feeling of divine closeness; (9) events in one's life such as poverty, illness, and human suffering; and (10) ascent of the soul.<sup>46</sup> These, however, were but initial categories to be continued in a study encompassing "higher forms of revelation," akin to what James referred to as "exceptional mental states."<sup>47</sup> The next chapter of "In the Secret Place of the Soul" would comprise, per Zeitlin's program, "(1) *voices*, a *maggid* [speaking angel], *bat kol* [divine echo], and others like them; (2) *the holy spirit*, with its various manifestations and properties; and (3) *prophecy* of various types and manifestations," explicated in a study of "their nature, essence, origins, signs, foundations and special moments—as well as all I have described above, attested to not only by great religious teachers and poets of faith, but by the witness of thousands of people who lived in various times and epochs."<sup>48</sup>

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44. *Ibid.*, 227 [151].

45. *Ibid.*, 230 [155].

46. *Ibid.*, 230-35 [155-61].

47. Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States*.

48. Zeitlin, "ba-Hivyon ha-Neshamah," 235 [161-62].

This subsequent chapter, a Jamesean study of prophecy and other higher forms of revelation in the Jewish tradition, was ultimately shelved. Presented as the first chapters of a larger book, “In the Secret Place of the Soul” was not completed as originally planned, perhaps owing to the outbreak of the First World War, a disruption which led to a sea change in Zeitlin’s own relation to religious experience and prophecy. While James and the envisioned continuation of “In the Secret Place of the Soul” would come to play a role in the publication of his dream journal, Zeitlin’s subsequent theoretical writings on prophecy and visionary experience would bear the mark of another American thinker, Ralph Waldo Trine. Having initially viewed himself as uniquely qualified to scientifically *study* the manifold variations of religious experience—culminating in prophecy—the trauma of the First World War would transform Zeitlin, in his own telling, into a seer himself. Henceforth, Zeitlin’s writings on visions and prophecy would be directly intertwined with his own experiences.

### “A Higher Solution to this World-Riddle”: Visions and Premonitions

The unprecedented violence and loss of life inflicted by the First World War permanently altered the landscape of east European Jewry. Situated between the warring German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian armies, the Polish countryside was ravaged by invading and retreating forces, leading to the widespread destruction of rural Jewish communities and the mass migration of refugees to urban centers.<sup>49</sup> Warsaw, in particular, was subject to the violent attacks of retreating Russian forces, as well as the ravages of hunger and disease ever-present throughout the subsequent German occupation, and Zeitlin found himself cast into a maelstrom of death and destruction.

Rumors of the brutal acts of violence enacted by Russian troops against defenseless Jewish communities during the spring of 1915 had a profound psychological effect upon Zeitlin. According to his own account, upon receiving

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49. See Wodziński, “War and Religion.”

“blood-curdling reports” of expulsions, murders, and other indiscriminate acts of violence, he “roamed during those days as a madman.”<sup>50</sup> Seeking a “higher solution” to the global conflagration, he “unceasingly studied kabbalistic literature, [his] mind and heart given over completely to esoteric thoughts.”<sup>51</sup> “I entered within myself entirely,” he recalled, “I isolated myself as much I could, I uttered a silent prayer in my heart nearly unceasingly, I reviewed every esoteric work I had previously studied, I sought always, in my constant study of them, a solution to the great riddle before me—the puzzle of entire nations given over to life and death.”<sup>52</sup> Zeitlin’s feverish study of kabbalistic texts and contemplation of the cataclysm spurred, per his testimony, the return of the visionary consciousness of his youth. He remarked years later:

The picture of my inner life (and that is most of my life) would not be complete or accurate if I did not mention, at least briefly, the growth in my life of faith since the day the war broke out. In it and all that has happened since I see the “messiah’s footsteps,” meant not metaphorically, and not simply referring to our national rebirth, but truly the footsteps of Messiah son of David. In the years 1914 and 1915, I was enveloped in almost the same state of ecstasy in which I had found myself when I first encountered Habad [Hasidism]. I nearly achieved the state of “beholding visions” [*boz'eh bizyonot*] ... All of my spiritual life in these years is the fruit of that wonderful ecstasy.<sup>53</sup>

Zeitlin was transformed during the winter of 1914–1915, he claimed, into a clairvoyant visionary with a near singular focus on divining the fate of the long-suffering Jewish people. Subject to lucid dreams and waking premonitions, he dutifully recorded his experiences beginning in the fall of 1915 in a journal he referred to as his “Book of Visions,” noting succinctly within that “from time to time I dream wondrous dreams.”<sup>54</sup> Zeitlin attributed great importance

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50. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 520. For a description of these incidents, see Blobaum, *A Minor Apocalypse*, 139–40.

51. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 529, 541.

52. Zeitlin, *Demamah ve-Kol*, 18.

53. Zeitlin, “Kitsur Toldatai,” 1–2; translation adapted from Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, 5.

54. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 505. Zeitlin discussed the chronology of his journal in a

to documenting and disseminating his experiences; these aims will be discussed below. A short selection from this work, comprising dreams and visions from the early war years up to the summer of 1917 alongside reflections on current events, was published in 1919 in the Hebrew literary journal *ha-Tekufah* as “Bordering Two Worlds: From the Notebook of a Dreamer.”<sup>55</sup>

Zeitlin emerges from the pages of his journal as a writer possessed by a certain prophetic consciousness. Believing himself to be graced with clairvoyant precognition, he turned to his dreams and intuitions to inform him of developments in the war, events in Palestine, and even the end of days.<sup>56</sup> Notably, many of the dreams allude to Zeitlin’s study of Kabbalah; certain dreams are stimulated by the study of a particular kabbalistic book prior to sleeping, while other times esoteric kabbalistic teachings are revealed to Zeitlin in the dream itself.<sup>57</sup> The following entry, from April 15, 1917, is representative:

As the last days of Passover commenced, in the afternoon, I sat at the table in my house. I was exhausted and began to drift off. I fell asleep leaning on my hand. I slept and awoke, and I say to the members of my household, “You should know that in recent days the British have captured cities in the Land of Israel.” I do not remember if I saw anything in my dream or had been told, but I knew with great clarity that this was the case. I am inclined to consider it to be a true dream, for it was extremely *clear and certain*.

In this light, I recall now a similar event: I slept one Sabbath afternoon and awoke with the clear awareness that great and awful deeds would soon take place near Pinsk. At that time the Russian front was quite advanced, and the Germans were so distant from Pinsk that it would never occur to anyone that they, the Germans, would reach that city. As for myself, I had not thought of Pinsk at all during those weeks, nor had it even *crossed my mind*. And suddenly—it is Pinsk . . .

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1938 letter to Shmuel Yosef Agnon. Hillel Zeitlin to Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Archive of Shmuel Yosef Agnon, 401599 Correspondence, Folder 5:2276, The National Library of Israel.

55. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot.” On *ha-Tekufah*, see Katz, “ke-Avor Tekufah.”

56. *Ibid.*, 508, 523, 541. Zeitlin declared, on the basis of a dream and further kabbalistic speculation, that the final redemption of the Jewish people would transpire by no later than 1970.

57. *Ibid.*, 505, 509, 510, 512.

I knew then with great clarity that the German army would reach Pinsk. And indeed it was so: several months passed and as the German army advanced it captured Pinsk, and the fight over the city was very great.

A great destruction was wrought upon that city and thousands of its residents now wander across the land, hungry, naked, and barefoot. The delicate and spoiled among them now toil in hard labor, and the rich and wealthy have but a loaf of bread. The Lord has exhausted all of His fury upon that city and its residents. Who can know for what and why? The residents of Pinsk are no worse off than the rest of Israel!

But, “who can fathom the spirit of the Lord?” (Isaiah 40:13) “Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains; Thy judgments are like the great abyss.” (Psalms 36:7) Alas, the awful abyss which swallows up millions upon millions of people! Will this abyss not seal up its mouth? Why, oh Father, Father! Why? Why?

At this moment, as I write these words, I hear a voice calling forth from the depths of my soul: In the first days of the month of Tammuz [July 1917] there will be a change.

I shall wait.<sup>58</sup>

Zeitlin was not alone during the war years in professing clairvoyant foreknowledge. Throughout Europe, thousands of self-declared prophets predicted the outcome of impending battles, the fate of particular soldiers, as well as when the war would finally draw to an end.<sup>59</sup> Zeitlin himself was aware of these professed prophets and took their forecasts seriously. When one such seer, a young Jewish man, prophesied in Warsaw in late 1917 that the war would end the following spring, Zeitlin was reported to have invited him to his house, while, in a series of entries, he ruminated on the possibility of the war ending by March 17, 1917, as proclaimed by “a seeress in Paris.”<sup>60</sup> He likewise related his own visions to popular occult modes of clairvoyance. In one entry, he dis-

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58. *Ibid.*, 523.

59. See Davies, *A Supernatural War*, 16-53.

60. Toleroz, “Natur un vunder”; Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 510, 513: “The day has passed, the 17th of March, the day when the seeress in Paris prophesied with great confidence that the world war would end, and even I had such a feeling—and we have not been saved. Nevertheless, one cannot say that this vision was completely false, for although peace itself has not come, the events *enabling* peace have occurred.”



avowed any familiarity with the “‘astral’ visions spoken about by non-Jewish occultists,” yet noted that he himself had experienced such an “astral vision,” in which, employing kabbalistic terminology, he relates that he was accosted by a red cat formed of fire which emerged “not from the side of holiness.”<sup>61</sup>

The majority of Zeitlin’s dreams and premonitions were concerned with forecasting the fate of the Jewish people and the international order, and this seems to have been the chief aim of his divinatory practices. Yet his clairvoyance extended to more immediate matters, as well. In an undated entry from the spring of 1917, he related that he suffered from a nightmare in which a gang of thieves attempted to anesthetize him with chloroform; his wife, too, dreamed that night of an attempted robbery. He noted, with astonishment, that “these dreams held a sort of warning and second sight, for that very day two men in the guise of poor beggars attempted to harm my wife and steal all of my possessions while I was not home.”<sup>62</sup>

Zeitlin was ambivalent about the prophetic nature of his dreams. On February 7, 1917, he equivocated:

I do not yet know if these dreams are of any substance or worth. “Dreams speak falsely . . .” (Zech. 10:2), and “Dreams bear no importance for good or ill.” Although it says, “I will speak with him in a dream,” (Num. 12:6) such words were not uttered about people like me . . . On the other hand, the heart believes in accordance with its wishes, in the subject of its desire, its longings. And who does not yearn now for peace, for a respite, for an end to the suffering, the likes of which have never been seen from the day God created the earth and man upon it?<sup>63</sup>

With that, a week earlier he recorded a description of a nocturnal ascent to heaven, propelled, in his dream, by the repeated recitation of Ezekiel 1:1, “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar that the heavens were opened, and I saw

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61. Zeitlin, “Al Gvul Shnei Olamot,” 523–24.

62. *Ibid.*, 537–38.

63. *Ibid.*, 508.

visions of God . . .”<sup>64</sup> It appears, then, that Zeitlin sought to emulate the prophetic vision revealed to Ezekiel, appropriating the biblical account of the latter’s initial theophany as a mantra so that he might attain a similar revelatory experience.

As mentioned above, an excerpt from Zeitlin’s diary appeared in the Hebrew literary journal *ba-Tekufah* as “Bordering Two Worlds: From the Notebook of a Dreamer.” What initially led Zeitlin to seek to publicize his visions? One of his colleagues later alleged that he was inspired by the wave of prophecy that swept across Europe,<sup>65</sup> yet from an undated letter to the Hebrew writer and editor Fishel Lachower, it emerges that Zeitlin’s decision to record and publicize his dreams and experiences was at first closely bound to the planned completion of “In the Secret Place of the Soul:

I would be very grateful if you could sway [the publishers David] Frishman and [Avraham Yosef] Stybel to publish my visions. Following reflection, I have decided to present them as a second part to “In the Secret Place of the Soul.” I will complete the first section with numerous testimonials and demonstrations from the experiences of others, while the second section (the Book of Visions), will consist of my own experiences.<sup>66</sup>

If he had initially intended to delineate the “nature, essence, origins, signs, foundations and special moments” of appearances of otherworldly voices, the holy spirit, and prophecy, “attested to . . . by the witness of thousands of people who lived in various times and epochs,” he now wished to supplement the study with his own first-hand experience.<sup>67</sup> While Zeitlin had at first been inspired by James to gather testimonial accounts of religious experiences, he had since parted ways from the latter in turning to his own experiences.<sup>68</sup> Yet the dream journal did not ultimately appear within the framework of such a study.

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64. *Ibid.*, 507.

65. Toleroz, “Natur un vunder.”

66. Hillel Zeitlin to Fishel Lachower, Archive of Fishel Lachower (16), Genazim Archive, Document 11038/12 (cited in Meir, “The Book of Visions,” 151).

67. *Ibid.*, “ba-Hivyon ha-Neshamah,” 235 [161–62].

68. Christopher White argues that James, who personally struggled to gain access to the inner emotions actuated in religious experience, found “vicarious satisfaction” in the testimonies of others, White, “A Measured Faith,” 443–44.

As noted above, “Bordering Two Worlds” chronicles Zeitlin’s experiences up to 1917 yet did not appear in press until 1919. A review of Zeitlin’s other publications from the intervening years reveals his growing interest in Trine, one of the leading writers of the New Thought movement, which enjoyed enormous popularity across America and Europe at the turn of the century and well into the interwar period. New Thought, with its radical doctrine of “mind over matter,” granted supremacy to mental states, which were viewed as the true determiners of reality.<sup>69</sup> While Zeitlin was already familiar with Trine’s work in 1913—an anecdote from *In Tune with the Infinite* appears in “The Secret Place of the Soul” as an exemplification of “the inner voice”<sup>70</sup>—he began in 1918 to publish a Yiddish translation of Trine’s book. This incomplete translation of two chapters from *In Tune with the Infinite* appeared in *Hilel tseytlen’s bletlekh*, a short-lived Yiddish periodical edited by Zeitlin devoted to “contemporary and eternal questions.”<sup>71</sup> Tellingly, one of passages he translated describes the malleability of the mind upon waking, the very hour in which Zeitlin noted in his journal that he experienced many of his dreams.<sup>72</sup> *Hilel Tseytlen’s bletlekh* ceased publication after only two issues, and the Yiddish translation of *In Tune with the Infinite* was shelved.<sup>73</sup>

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69. Hanegraaff, “New Thought Movement”; Braden, *Spirits in Rebellion*. On Trine, see *ibid.*, 164–69; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 394–97. See Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 260, for a list of the many New Thought clubs active in Germany between 1890 and 1936.

70. Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah,” 233 [159]. Zeitlin praises Trine here as “Emerson’s senior and wondrous disciple.” *In Tune with the Infinite* is cited by James in *The Varieties* and it is possible that Zeitlin learned of Trine through reading *The Varieties*. See James, *Varieties*, 83, 94, 305.

71. Trine, “Der nayer onhoyb”; Trine, “Di harmonye mit dem unendlikhen.” The sections translated by Zeitlin originally appear in Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 131–34, 11–15. From a comparison of editions it is apparent that Zeitlin read the Russian translation of *In Tune with the Infinite* (Saint Petersburg, 1907). I am grateful to Jonatan Meir for bringing the second issue of *Hilel tseytlen’s bletlekh* to my attention.

72. Trine, “Der nayer onhoyb,” 6. Zeitlin exercised creative license in his translation of the passage, appending a sentence of his own which reads: “We can [upon waking in the morning] infuse our mind with a lucidity full of song and inner thought, endowing it with a direction which is desirable for us.”

73. Zeitlin continued to cite *In Tune with the Infinite* as late as 1934. Zeitlin, “le-Herzl ve-ad Herzl . . .”

When “Bordering Two Worlds” ultimately appeared in *ha-Tekufah* in 1919, it was preceded, then, not by the originally planned Jamesean study of prophecy and visionary experience, but rather by Zeitlin’s translation of Trine’s programmatic work with its call to gain “perfect inner vision” by tapping into the “inexhaustible reservoir” of the “Infinite Spirit of Life.”<sup>74</sup> The published dream journal, with its bold claims of clairvoyance and lyrical depictions of lucid dreams, strayed far from the standard fare of Hebrew letters and was ill-received.<sup>75</sup> Zeitlin’s work was panned by critics—one reviewer deemed it a “wondrous blend . . . of true religiosity and manic hallucinations,” while another denounced its “bizarre prayers, strange tone, dreams of nonsense, and sickliness.”<sup>76</sup> In response, he issued a rejoinder presenting his theory of clairvoyance and precognitive dreams. This rebuttal, issued in defense of his dreams and premonitions, demonstrates Zeitlin’s reliance on Trine and other esoteric writers in order to present dreams and visions as a legitimate source of prophetic foreknowledge.

### “On the Hidden and the Concealed”

Zeitlin’s response appeared two years later in a brief article titled “On the Hidden and the Concealed.” The essay, Zeitlin’s most thorough treatment of precognitive dreams and clairvoyance, consists of two sections, “Hidden Senses” and “Dreams.” Zeitlin disclosed his aim in publishing the piece in a footnote appended to the beginning of the article:

I present here two chapters from my book *On Esotericism [Al ha-Mistorin]* both on account of their theoretical value in their own regard, and inasmuch as they serve as a proper response to those who criticize my book of visions, the beginning of which was printed in the fourth issue of *ha-Tekufah* as “Bordering Two Worlds.”<sup>77</sup>

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74. Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 14–15, 39.

75. On the reception of “Bordering Two Worlds,” see Meir, “The Book of Visions,” 153–54.

76. Koplowitz, “Sifrei ha-Tekufah”; Kimhi, “Reshimot Bikoret.”

77. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 472. This footnote is omitted in all subsequent printings.

“On the Hidden and the Concealed,” then, formed the beginning of a larger study on higher forms of revelation, possibly a revision of the shelved continuation of “In the Secret Place of the Soul.” Now titled *On Esotericism*, it was published with the express aim of legitimating Zeitlin’s experiences and encouraging others to develop visionary faculties, as well. In the essay he formulated a theory of clairvoyance revolving around the reductive category of intuition as a conceptual alternative to the worldview of scientific materialism—which Zeitlin regarded with mocking derision—in order to impress upon his colleagues the validity of higher sources of knowledge. To that end, he mustered support from traditional religious texts, appealed to presumed widely-held personal experience, and drew widely on contemporary non-Jewish esoteric literature.

“On the Hidden and the Concealed” opens with an argument for the existence of an inner array of senses analogous to the five recognized faculties of sense perception. Having delineated the external sensual cognates of cognition—organized around the kabbalistic schema of perception consisting of the rungs of *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, and *Da’at* [wisdom, understanding, and knowledge] as sourced in biblical and later kabbalistic texts—Zeitlin asserted that “the innermost psychic states, as well, correspond precisely to the external senses.”<sup>78</sup> With this correspondence established, he asserted that:

Every inner revelation, every inward gaze, every submergence into the depths of the self, every glimpse beyond the screen of consciousness, every sudden spiritual emergence, all that we call “intuition”—this is in fact a hidden sense corresponding precisely to the external faculty of vision.<sup>79</sup>

Zeitlin borrowed this notion of intuition directly from Trine, who in *In Tune with the Infinite* posited that all of reality is but a manifestation of the “Spirit of

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78. This assertion is substantiated by a lengthy excerpt from the German Romantic writer Friedrich Schlegel. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 473, citing Friedrich von Schlegel, *Philosophische Vorlesungen*, 176-77; translated into English in Schlegel, *The Philosophy of Life*, 451-52.

79. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 473.

Infinite Life and Power,” whose essence is shared by all of humanity.<sup>80</sup> Coming to a realization of our oneness with the divine inflow of this “Infinite Life,” Trine argued, “make[s] it possible for the higher powers to play, to work, to manifest through us.”<sup>81</sup> The individual who succeeds in doing so receives “the inner guiding we call intuition.”<sup>82</sup> Zeitlin translated into Hebrew a lengthy passage from Trine, whom he referred to as “one of the greats of American philosophy”:

Intuition is to the spiritual nature and understanding practically what sense perception is to the sensuous nature and understanding. It is an inner spiritual sense through which man is opened to the direct revelation and knowledge of God . . . It is, we repeat, a spiritual sense opening inwardly, as the physical senses open outwardly; and because it has the capacity to perceive, grasp, and know the truth at first hand, independent of all external sources of information, we call it intuition. All inspired teaching and spiritual revelations are based upon the recognition of this spiritual faculty of the soul, and its power to receive and appropriate them . . . Conscious unity of man in spirit and purpose with the Father, born out of his supreme desire and trust, opens his soul through this inner sense to immediate inspiration and enlightenment from the Divine Omniscience, and the co-operative energy of the Divine Omnipotence, under which he becomes a seer and a master.<sup>83</sup>

Appropriating Trine’s definition of intuition, Zeitlin brought it to bear on visionary experience to the effect that:

Intuition is generally revealed . . . as an inner *feeling*, as an inner truth which has no need for sight, as a *thought* or a *representation*. However, there are those, and these are very few, to whom intuition is exposed as an *image* or *vision*. That which others merely think or feel these ones *see* as though with their actual external eyes. That which comes to others as an abstraction or a hazy feeling, comes to these ones *as something fully formed or coming into being in fine detail*.<sup>84</sup>

Intuitive vision, Zeitlin noted, constitutes a hidden sense which allows one to “behold the ultimate, inner, hidden truth, as well as deeds distant in both

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80. Trine, *In Tune with the Infinite*, 11

81. *Ibid.*, 16-17.

82. *Ibid.*, 39.

83. *Ibid.*, 39-40; cited in Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 474.

84. *Ibid.*

place and time, *in living images*, sometimes in allegory, and sometimes—in *the true essence of apperception*.”<sup>85</sup> The entire passage makes extensive use of rabbinic and kabbalistic expressions, essentially translating New Thought doctrine into a language of Jewish visionary experience.

Intuitive revelation, Zeitlin informed his readers, is manifest in gradations ranging from dream-states to prophecy (“the true vision of the God-seer”). This lowest rung, the predictive dream, is the subject of the second part of the essay, apparently intended to be followed by further chapters on prophecy. In his argument, he appealed to personal experience (“Has it never occurred to you in all of your days to behold a certain fortunate or injurious matter in a dream, to put it out of your mind, and then be cast into a state of wonderment when days or years later the subject of the dream comes true in all of its details?”) as well as the litany of prophetic dreams which litter the historical record. Zeitlin was aware that biblical narratives of precognitive clairvoyance were no longer persuasive for “the modern intellectual”; he availed himself of testimonial accounts of presumably greater credence, namely, those reported in modern esoteric literature. In this vein, he drew on an assortment of esoteric writers, most notably Justinus Kerner (1786–1862) and Carl du Prel (1839–1899), both of whom documented instances of oneiric prophecy within their respective mesmerist and early parapsychological milieus.<sup>86</sup> He rendered into Hebrew accounts related in their works, namely Kerner’s *Seherin von Prevorst*,

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85. *Ibid.*, 475. Trine was not the only authority on intuition cited by Zeitlin. See Zeitlin, “Kadmut ha-Mistorin be-Yisrael,” 302–03, for a discussion of Henri Bergson’s notion of intuition in the context of kabbalistic epistemology. Zeitlin elsewhere regarded Bergson as drawing closest among contemporary Jewish intellectuals to the true path of faith, Zeitlin, “Der seyfer un der soyfer.”

86. The German physician Justinus Kerner (1786–1862) achieved fame during the Romantic period for his mesmerist experiments conducted upon the somnambulist Friederike Hauffe (1801–1829), the eponymous Seeress of Prevorst. On Kerner, see Hanegraaff, “A Woman Alone”; Hanegraaff, “Kerner, Justinus Andreas Christian.” On Carl du Prel, see Kaiser, “Zwischen Philosophie und Spiritismus”; Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science*, 33–82; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 29–55; Sommer, “From Astronomy to Transcendental Darwinism”; Sommer, “Normalizing the Supernormal,” 19–23.

*Blätter aus Prevorst*, and *Magikon*, and du Prel's *Die Magie als Naturwissenschaft*, with the intent of convincing skeptical Jewish readers of the reality of precognitive dreams.<sup>87</sup> The reports cited from Kerner, for instance, range from that of a businessman who resolved an accounting discrepancy thanks to a nighttime vision to a prominent doctor whose most effective methods of treatment were received in his dreams. From du Prel, Zeitlin quoted the case of the polymath occultist Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), who, du Prel related, was endowed with literacy overnight by a young lad in his dream.<sup>88</sup> These cases were placed alongside comparable accounts found in works of Jewish literature such as Menasseh ben Israel's *Nishmat Hayyim* and several descriptions of clairvoyant dreams recorded by the Italian bible scholar Samuel David Luzzato (1800–1865).<sup>89</sup>

If Zeitlin evinced regard for esoteric writers such as Kerner and du Prel, another contemporary theorizer of dreams, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), was the subject of fierce criticism. Turning to Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* [*Die Traumdeutung*], Zeitlin sought to identify the shortcomings of the former's work. Freud, he wrote, sought to produce a “physiological-psychological solution to all dreams,” one in which dreams originated not from a higher, external source, but rather within the unconscious of the dreamer.<sup>90</sup> “When superficial science does not blind our critical inner eye,” Zeitlin charged, three cracks in Freud's theory emerge: (1) Freudian analysis does not account for many critical details; (2) Freud's interpretations are oftentimes unconvincing and have little relation to the dream itself; (3) Freud selectively singled out material supportive

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87. Kerner, *Seberin von Prevorst*; Kerner, *The Seeress of Prevorst*; Kerner, *Blätter aus Prevorst*; Kerner, *Magikon*; du Prel, *Die Magie als Naturwissenschaft*. For a discussion of the latter work, see Andriopoulos, “Psychic Television.”

88. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne'elam,” 478, citing du Prel, *Die Magie als Naturwissenschaft*, 2:263–64.

89. Ben Israel, *Nishmat Hayyim*. Luzzato's correspondence with his fellow Italian maskil Samuel Hayyim Loli appears in *Otsar Nehmad*.

90. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne'elam,” 478–79. Zeitlin read the fourth edition of *Die Traumdeutung*, which, it is worth noting, included discussion of the “brilliant mystic du Prel.” Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 48n2, cited in Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 179.



of his theory, while leaving out dreams that refute or challenge his mode of interpretation, and this despite the fact that the latter dreams are recorded in the same collections from which Freud sourced the material on which he based his analysis.<sup>91</sup> Having done away with *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Zeitlin concluded:

We see, then, that despite the unquestionable immensity of the unconscious, it nevertheless does not suffice to account for all the various dreams which so interest us. We therefore need to accept as an axiom that dreams do not always originate in the conscious and the *unconscious*, but, at times, *in that which transcends or lies outside of the conscious* . . .<sup>92</sup>

If we recall the polemical context in which “On the Hidden and the Concealed” appeared, it emerges that Zeitlin was presenting the theoretical underpinnings of his *own* dreams. He located his account of his prophetic visions within the literary canon of Western esotericism, alongside Kerner’s studies of somnambulism and du Prel’s investigation of the transcendental subject.<sup>93</sup> Both of these thinkers, who treaded the line between religious supernaturalism and the natural sciences, served Zeitlin in his efforts to formulate a theory of prophecy palatable to the modern Jewish reader. Much like Kerner, he sought, in his investigation of dreams, to undermine dogmatic rationalism and provide an empirical basis for higher forms of knowledge, while pointing to the existence of precognitive dreams as indicative of a transcendental psychology, à la du Prel.<sup>94</sup> Zeitlin, then, like a long line of early-twentieth-century thinkers, appealed to the alternative scientific doctrines oftentimes associated with esotericism—in his case, parapsychology, Trine’s system of intuition, and their mesmeric antecedents—in an attempt to develop a natural theology that might counter a disenchanting materialism and countenance prophetic foreknowledge.<sup>95</sup>

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91. Zeitlin, “Al ha-Kamus ve-ha-Ne’elam,” 479.

92. *Ibid.*

93. That he likewise maintained that such an association would placate his critics speaks to the epistemic authority Zeitlin believed these esoteric writers enjoyed among his educated Jewish readership.

94. See Hanegraaff, “Kerner,” 660; Wolfram, *The Stepchildren of Science*, 35.

95. See, among others, Turner, *Between Science and Religion*; Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 225-232; Asprem, “Parapsychology,” 634. Other esoteric systems of thought make appearances throughout Zeitlin’s vast oeuvre, as well. Earlier in the 1920s, Zeitlin had favorably compared

*On Esotericism*, like many of Zeitlin's literary projects, was never completed, leaving "On the Hidden and the Concealed" as a fragmentary testimony to a larger system of thought. It likewise received little attention in the press, critical or otherwise. Yet its two chapters and their appeals to the significance of dreams and visions would play a role in Zeitlin's responses to the political and social crises confronting the Jews of eastern Europe in the interwar period. Zeitlin occupied himself during the 1920s and '30s with quixotic attempts to form elite religious fraternities organized around various social and spiritual aims.<sup>96</sup> Zeitlin's efforts in this regard were chiefly literary and he articulated his aims and strategies in a number of booklets and articles. The two chapters of "On the Hidden and the Concealed" were incorporated into one of these programmatic texts, *The Book of the Elite: Profound Secret, Clear Thinking, and Guidance and Deed for the Lone Souls Longing for World Salvation in these Years of the "Messiah's Footsteps"* [*Sifran shel Yehidim: Omek Raz, Zakh Mahshavah ve-Kisharon Hanbagah u-Ma'aseh le-Nishamot Bodedot ha-Metzapot le-Yishu'at Olamim be-Shanim Eilab shel "Ikvatah de-Meshiba"*] (1928).<sup>97</sup> Zeitlin sought in this book to "train" a cadre of spiritual elites from among the Jewish people to serve as "world-redeemers" by first redeeming their own internality; this inner transformation would subsequently enable them rectify the ills of the world.<sup>98</sup> In this new messianic context, Zeitlin's theory of dreams and visions served a distinct social and political role in response to the crises enveloping the Jewish people and the world. Few, however, heeded

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theosophical and kabbalistic doctrines concerning the structure of the soul, appealing to the concept of the astral body held by the "occultists and theosophists. See *ibid.*, "Maft'e'ah le-Sefer ha-Zohar," 290, 293-97. See, as well, Zeitlin, "Vegen an'originelen pruv" for a discussion of Kerner, the astral body, and various occult healing methods. Zeitlin likewise took an interest in the spiritual writings of the German artist and mystic Bô Yin Râ (Joseph Anton Schneiderfranken) (1876-1943), particularly the latter's *Das Buch vom lebendigen Gott* (1919). See Zeitlin's Dec. 7, 1922 letter to the Hebrew publisher Simon Rawidowicz, then residing in Berlin, beseeching the latter to send him several of Bô Yin Râ's books, "Hakdamat Sefer ha-Zohar," 39.

96. On these groups, see Green and Mayse, "The Great Call of the Hour."

97. Zeitlin, *Sifran shel Yehidim*, 16-27.

98. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Zeitlin's call in his lifetime, and each of his fraternities were disbanded shortly after their founding.<sup>99</sup>

The turn to prophecy in response to crisis is evident from another work published that same year bearing the curious title: *A Word to the Nations: A Vision Concerning Nations and Wars, the Principles of the Noahide Laws and Prayer-Songs for World Peace and the Return of the Divine Presence to Her Place* [*Davar la-Amim: Haẓon al Goyim ve-al Mamlakbot, Ikarei Torat Bnei-Noah ve-Shirot-Tefilot al Shalom ha-Olam ve-al Shivat ha-Shekhinah le-Mekomah*]. Here Zeitlin published prophetic calls for world-wide repentance in the wake of the destruction of the First World War. In his introduction he disavowed any delusions of prophetic grandeur, yet somewhat disingenuously asserted that “were the prophets to rise today from their graves . . . the *outer revealed, understood* content of their message, I believe, would be the same as my *A Word to the Nations*.”<sup>100</sup> He likewise delivered public lectures in which he called for a return to the prophets and published several reviews of contemporary scholarly and religious works on prophecy.<sup>101</sup> He was particularly taken by one book, *The Vision of Life* [*Haẓon ha-Hayyim*], a self-declared “modern commentary on Daniel” which elucidated the biblical book in order to predict upcoming conflagrations such as the Second World War, forecast by the author to transpire in the years 1937–1938.<sup>102</sup>

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99. For a firsthand account written by a young member of one of these short-lived fraternities, namely, the “Association of Saviors,” see Collection of Polish Jewish Autobiographies: Record Group 4, Autobiography #3752, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York. This autobiography is discussed in Waldman, “A Hasid Turns Modern.” Several self-styled neo-Hasidic groups active in the post-war period were directly inspired by Zeitlin's vision, such as Havurat Shalom (Fellowship of Peace) founded in Somerville, Massachusetts in the United States in 1968 and Irgun Shalhevet-Yah (Organization of the Divine Flame), active in the Israel in the 1950s. Green and Mayse, “The Great Call of the Hour”; Bergman, “Reshafim.”

100. Hillel Zeitlin, *Davar la-Amim*, 2. See Tor, “Bein Ge'ulah le-Teshuvah,” 55, for an insightful analysis of this disavowal.

101. Zeitlin, “Naye ‘nevies’ fun yerushalayim”; Zeitlin, “Vi azoy kumt men tsu rayner sotsialer gerechtigkeit.” See, as well, the lecture announcement preserved in Magazyn Druków Ulotnych (DŹS IK 2f), Biblioteka Narodowa, The National Library of Poland,

102. Shevili, *Haẓon ha-Hayyim al Sefer Daniel*, 70–78. Zeitlin's review appears in Zeitlin, “Vi azoy konen di nevies fun daniyel.”

Zeitlin's prophetic dream states proceeded unabated throughout these years, all diligently recorded in his journal. Towards the late 1930s, he corresponded with a number of leading members of the Hebrew literary intelligentsia in an effort to publish the continuation of his "Book of Visions."<sup>103</sup> In a 1938 letter to the Hebrew writer and future Nobel laureate S. Y. Agnon, Zeitlin described his journal as "a book of great interest to the Kabbalist, scholar, psychologist, poet, and any reader in search of God and in search of justice." Zeitlin cast himself here as "a modern man who likewise maintains constant intercourse with *distant, higher worlds* . . . and alongside that knows to *analyze and critique* every transcendental phenomenon and lives at once in the most secular of worlds, taking part in every universal and Jewish social movement."<sup>104</sup> Much to his chagrin, the Hebrew literary community responded to his proposals with disinterest. Having published his earlier writings on religious experience and clairvoyance in leading Hebrew literary periodicals, he now found himself pushed out, his visions and dreams regarded as the ravings of a madman. His journal, written over more than two decades, was lost in the destruction of the Holocaust, leaving the small selection published in "Bordering Two Worlds" as the sole record of his prophetic experiences. While Zeitlin never developed a systematic approach to prophecy beyond "On the Hidden and the Concealed," he located the nucleus of a more complete system in a contemporary work of biblical scholarship published in the final years of his life. An examination of this work, Shmuel Tsvi Cohen's *Regarding Visions of the Future*, demonstrates the possibilities esoteric currents, in this case parapsychology, offered to interwar Jewish religious intellectuals in search of a prophetic paradigm. Zeitlin's appraisal of the book, meanwhile, speaks to the prominence he granted to esoteric systems in promoting a novel theory of prophecy for his day.

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103. This correspondence is collected in Meir, "The Book of Visions," 156-70.

104. Correspondence of Hillel Zeitlin to Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1938).

***Regarding Visions of the Future: “A New Science of the Religion of Israel”***

On August 23, 1935, Zeitlin published a book review in the Warsaw Hebrew weekly *ba-Derekh* under the headline, “Regarding an Attempt to Create a New Religious Philosophy” [“Al Nisayon li-Tsor Filosofiah Datit Hadashah”].<sup>105</sup> The publication reviewed, Cohen’s *Regarding Visions of the Future*, appeared posthumously earlier that summer in Jerusalem, brought to press by friends of the deceased.<sup>106</sup> Cohen, a child prodigy born into a rabbinic family in Latvia, spent several years studying at the University of Bern prior to immigrating to Palestine in 1913, where he worked as a teacher up until shortly before his death in 1933. A peripheral member of the circle surrounding R. Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), Cohen independently pursued biblical scholarship alongside Kabbalah and philosophy.<sup>107</sup> He took a keen interest in German parapsychology, which he wielded as a weapon in his polemical struggle against the claims of biblical criticism; the latter all but nullified the possibility of prophetic precognition, writing off biblical prophetic accounts as works of literary fiction authored after the fact. *Regarding Visions of the Future*, written with great intellectual sophistication and accompanied by extensive footnotes, sought to demonstrate the scientific underpinnings of prophecy as a real phenomenon and thus restore legitimacy to the biblical prophetic writings. Cohen put forward his central question in the book’s opening lines:

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105. Hillel Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon li-Tsor Filosofiah Datit Hadashah.” Reprinted with substantial omissions as “Al ha-Hazon le-Atid.”

106. These were the scholars Benjamin Menashe Levin, Jacob Nahum Epstein, and Moses Seidel. These three became acquainted with Cohen during their years studying at the University of Bern, where they formed the Tachkemoni student association.

107. Biographical information on Cohen may be found in Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, v–xvi. I am grateful to Cohen’s son, Menachem Cohen, for graciously providing further information regarding his father’s activities and relationships. An *ilan* scroll, an arboreal kabbalistic diagram, previously in Cohen’s possession is preserved in Ms. Heb. 4°200.2, The National Library of Israel. A broadside announcing Cohen’s death has likewise been preserved in the Haifa City Archives Collection, The National Library of Israel. On Kook, see, among others, Mirsky, *Rav Kook*. For a reassessment of Kook’s circle, see Meir, “Lights and Vessels.”

Is there foreknowledge? May the future be predicted in advance by means of a spiritual sense? Is the belief in true dreams (dreams which prove accurate), premonitions, spiritual expectation, and visionaries in possession of the power to uncover the future a mere figment of the imagination, or does it have a basis in reality?<sup>108</sup>

This question, Cohen posited, had suffered a “strange fate”—precognition, having been acknowledged by all the ancient and medieval authorities, was firmly rejected by the ideologues of the European enlightenment, embraced once more by the German romantics (Cohen pointed favorably to the writings of Franz Anton Mesmer and Kerner), only to be once more rebuffed by the mid-nineteenth-century proponents of scientific materialism.<sup>109</sup> By the late nineteenth century, he asserted, the dialectic pendulum had swung once more, as parapsychologists and various psychical research societies co-opted the materialists’ staunch empiricism in order to investigate the “dark corners of the soul with the sophisticated tools of modern science,” substantiating the veracity of precognitive visions.<sup>110</sup>

Cohen presented his parapsychological model of prophecy as a continuation of classic Jewish approaches to the subject. To that end, his account is prefaced with a brief survey of the various understandings of prophecy found in the writings of medieval Jewish philosophers and kabbalistic texts, alongside an exposition on the chief philosophical quandary brought up by prophecy, namely, the threat to free will raised by the possibility of prophetic foreknowledge.<sup>111</sup> With that, his approach to prophecy was strongly informed by two contemporary studies, Max Kemmerich’s *Prophezeiungen: Alter Aberglaube oder neue Wahrheit? [Prophecies: Old Superstition or New Truth?]* and Emil Mattiesen’s *Der Jenseitige Mensch: Eine Einführung in die Metapsychologie der mystischen Erfahrung [The Otherworldly Man: An*

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108. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 1.

109. *Ibid.*, 1-5. On the rise of scientific materialism as a dominant worldview in the nineteenth century, see Turner, *Between Science and Religion*, 8-37; Gregory, *Scientific Materialism*, Aspren, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 50-89.

110. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 6. Cohen’s account of the history of parapsychology is taken from Oesterreich, *Grundbegriffe der Parapsychologie*.

111. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 11-28.

*Introduction to the Metapsychology of Mystical Experience*].<sup>112</sup> Kemmerich, a popular writer on occult subjects, collected in his work numerous accounts of fulfilled prophecies culled from the historical and literary record; these provided Cohen with the historical evidence he cited in support of prophecy. Mattiesen’s tome, spanning over 800 pages, was an ambitious attempt to integrate paranormal phenomena, chief among them instances of telepathy and clairvoyance, into the study of religious experience; Cohen rooted his understanding of the nature of biblical—and contemporary—prophecy in the former’s metapsychology, a competing paradigm of parapsychology more prevalent in French circles.<sup>113</sup>

In Cohen’s assessment, prophetic visions are renderings of precognitive messages stemming from the subconscious. The subconscious, he asserted, does not owe its omniscience to its link with the unconscious, as argued by Eduard von Hartmann, nor to a connection established with the transcendental sphere, as posited by du Prel in his discussions of the transcendental subject, but rather to a telepathic reception of the thoughts of God, thus instantiating the biblical designation of the prophet as the one who (literally) “knows the mind of the Most High” (Numbers 24:16).<sup>114</sup> Cohen’s theory of prophecy bears great resemblance to that of Maimonides as explicated in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, with the latter’s Aristotelean metaphysics exchanged for Mattiesen’s metapsychology. He admits as much, conceding that “the spiritual overflow which an individual might receive from the Active Intellect according to medieval philosophy is essentially the same thing we are representing with telepathy.”<sup>115</sup> His project, then, was in a certain sense a continuation of the medieval philosophical tradition, translated into contemporary scientific terminology, yet it differed in a key respect. The

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112. Kemmerich, *Prophezeiungen*, Mattiesen, *Der Jenseitige Mensch*.

113. I am grateful to Eberhard Bauer for sharing with me unpublished material on Mattiesen and his work. On the distinctions between the French *Métapsychique* and German *Parapsychologie*, see Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 334–49.

114. Cohen, *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 35–47. Hartmann presented his system in Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten*; Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*.

115. *Ibid.*, 45n1. On Maimonides’s notion of prophecy, see Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 148–315.

neo-Aristotelian worldview embraced by many medieval Jewish philosophers, among them Maimonides, enjoyed intellectual supremacy in its day, while the scientific paradigm put forward by parapsychology—one that granted credence to the paranormal—struggled against the prevailing scientific agnosticism of the early twentieth century.<sup>116</sup> With that, *Regarding Visions of the Future* was not the only Jewish study of prophecy to address parapsychology. Jacob Kaplan's *Psychology of Prophecy* (1908) and *The Mind of the Prophet* (1919) cite studies published by the Society for Psychical Research, while one receives an impression of the pervasiveness of parapsychology in scholarly studies of prophecy from Abraham Joshua Heschel's declaration, in the introduction to his doctoral dissertation on prophecy, that he did *not* consult any parapsychological literature.<sup>117</sup>

Turning to Zeitlin's review of *Regarding Visions of the Future*, one is struck by how greatly Cohen's scholarship excited him. The very title of the book, he wrote, "attracted me considerably, for the problem of prophecy—in particular visions of the distant days of the future down to the exact time and location in which such and such events will transpire—has enticed and enchanted me from the days of my youth."<sup>118</sup> While Cohen had harnessed biblical scholarship to parapsychology for a particular polemical purpose within his field of interest, namely, to legitimate the prophetic accounts related in the Bible, Zeitlin perceived the book as heralding something far greater. *Regarding Visions of the Future*, he declared in his review, was no less than the "construction of a . . . new science of the religion of Israel." Furthermore, Cohen had unequivocally located his project within the parameters of biblical scholarship; in a 1921 letter to his brother, he avowed that he "has a few other things to say concerning biblical scholarship, and they are, in my opinion, of great importance," and the

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116. See Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 289–316.

117. Kaplan, *Psychology of Prophecy*, 122; Kaplan, *The Mind of the Prophet*, 15; Heschel, *Die Prophetie*, 4. In a fascinating connection, Heschel's doctoral advisor was Max Dessoir, one of the founders of German parapsychology. Kaplan and Dressner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, 103.

118. Zeitlin, "Al Nisayon."



biographical note appended to the work stated that he had recently “resigned from his [teaching] position and dedicated himself entirely to the study of the Bible.” Zeitlin, however, rejected this account, asserting instead that “it was not the study of the Bible for its own sake which brought [Cohen] to his investigations and conclusions regarding prophecy, but rather *the clear desire to create a new Guide of the Perplexed in accordance with the new philosophy and sciences.*”<sup>119</sup>

Zeitlin, it appears, projected upon Cohen his own unrealized ambitions to articulate a theory of Jewish religious experience revolving around the phenomenon of prophecy, going so far as to identify Cohen as a kindred spirit whose “*approach to the solving the problem of visions of the future is very close to my approach.*”<sup>120</sup> Zeitlin drew attention in his review to Cohen’s use of James—this despite the fact that Cohen only mentions James twice in passing throughout his book.<sup>121</sup> Zeitlin’s characterization of James here speaks volumes to his shift in orientation since he first wrote about *The Varieties* two decades earlier. James, whom Zeitlin had earlier applauded as “almost the only person who has found the scientific key to unlock religion’s gates” was now listed alongside du Prel as “the finest of occultists.”<sup>122</sup>

In Zeitlin’s eyes, *Regarding Visions of the Future*, with its application of parapsychological findings to age-old philosophical and metaphysical questions, amounted to a revolution in Jewish thought akin to Maimonides’s *Guide of the Perplexed*, and he went on to conjecture that “the book, *Regarding Visions of the Future*, is only a part of the great work he thought, so it appears, to produce; a work which would encompass the laws of the Torah, and the depths

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119. Cohen, *Al ba-Hazon le-Atid*, ix, xi; Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon.”

120. Ibid. See, as well, a 1962 letter written by R. Hayyim Zevulun Harlap in which Harlap relates that Zeitlin turned to his father, R. Yaakov Moshe Harlap (who later married Cohen’s widow, Devorah), for information about Cohen, “for, in [Zeitlin’s] words, the two of them were of one mind.” Archive of Hillel Zeitlin (237), Document 1150-A, Genazim Archive. I am grateful to Jonatan Meir for directing my attention to this source.

121. James is discussed by Cohen in *Al ba-Hazon le-Atid*, 34n, 43.

122. Zeitlin, “ba-Hevyon ha-Neshamah,” 208 [126]; Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon.”

of the essence, breadth, greatness, and flourishing of the religion of Israel.” While Cohen gave no indication of such intentions, another accolade offered by Zeitlin lay closer to the mark. Cohen, he surmised, “read and carefully studied my book ‘In the Secret Place of the Soul,’ published in the literary anthology *Netivot*, as well as other articles of mine such as “On the Hidden and the Concealed.”<sup>123</sup> Zeitlin was not a systematic thinker and his thought underwent many changes over the years as his interests shifted. With that, if one views the rhetoric in his review of *Regarding Visions of the Future* alongside his earlier writings on prophecy and religious experience, one catches a glimpse of an envisioned synthesis of Judaism with esoteric currents such as parapsychology and New Thought.

### Concluding Remarks

The texts presented in this article reflect Hillel Zeitlin’s decades-long concern with dreams and prophecy. His writings, both theoretical and disclosing his own experiences, bespeak the importance he granted to visions and clairvoyance, whether as a form of religious expression or in response to political and social crisis. These texts, I argue, reflect a significant attempt on the part of an early-twentieth-century Jewish thinker to articulate and explain visionary and prophetic experience through engagement with contemporary esoteric and psychological frameworks. For all of his exceptionality—and he was exceptional in many ways—Zeitlin was not an outlier. The early-twentieth century was host to an array of theories of the mind and its powers which caught the eyes of Jewish writers in eastern Europe. As this examination of Zeitlin’s writing has aimed to demonstrate, esoteric paradigms and systems of thought—parapsychology and New Thought in the case of Zeitlin—played an important role as explanatory models within Jewish religious thought in the early decades of the twentieth century (Cohen’s study, feted by Zeitlin as heralding the future of religious

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123. Zeitlin, “Al Nisayon.” Cohen’s familiarity with “On the Hidden and the Concealed” may be deduced on the basis of an erroneous citation of Samuel David Luzzato’s dream correspondence identical to a corresponding erroneous citation in Zeitlin’s work. *Al ha-Hazon le-Atid*, 4.

philosophy, is a fine example). Other rabbis and Jewish theologians engaged in their writings with mesmerism, spiritualism, theosophy, autosuggestion, and religious readings of hypnosis, among other ideas ranging from the occult to early popular psychology. This fruitful period, largely erased from collective memory by the subsequent horrors of the Holocaust, produced numerous original yet largely forgotten thinkers, such as Zeitlin, worthy of further scholarly attention.

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