

# Visions of Suffering and Death in Jewish Societies of the Muslim West

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My consideration of suffering, sickness and death will be historical, socio-anthropological and religious in nature. It is a formidable topic, a many-faceted interrogation.

For my part I shall focus only on issues affecting the North African Jewish world. Although all Jewish societies, whatever their origin, are agreed on the basic question – the centrality of religion and the literary substrate of the biblical and rabbinical tradition underlying the vision of sickness and death in the Jewish world – and are distinguished by a certain mythology, by an imaginary, by rituals and gestures, beliefs and practices that are determined to a greater extent by the socio-cultural, and even historical and geo-political, environment.

Indeed I have come across suffering and death, or rather evocations of them, throughout the study and research I have been conducting for over 30 years into the intellectual, social and religious life of Judaism in the Muslim west, that is to say the whole of traditional Jewish thought and its various modes of expression: rabbinical law, poetry in Hebrew, homilies and sermons, mystical writing and the kabbala, dialect and popular literature in Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Berber, seeking out the historicity of that literary creation, cultural universe and collective memory.

The management of death, and by association of suffering, their socio-religious and mystical environments, is to varying degrees dealt with in all these writings, as I have explained in two of my books.<sup>1</sup>

I now come to a few introductory remarks on the Jewish societies of the Muslim West. North African Judaism (historically of course) has close links with universal Jewish thought and its varying modes of expression, a special relationship as regards writing in Hebrew and classical and traditional literary creation, the Jewish humanities in fact. I must add at once that this Judaism is also the product of the North African soil from which it arose, flowered and thrived for almost 2000 years, cultivating an active solidarity with the environment in intimacy of language and simi-

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larity of mental structures: a considerable element of religious symbiosis and even syncretism.

The social imaginary and its most diverse representations are marked by the stamp of religion and magic, which both come together in ritual and give it its universal dimension as well as its local fit. These representations punctuate the most solemn moments of life, the special times that structure or cut across day-to-day existence, such as birth, marriage, death, etc., with the rites and ceremonies that go with them.

Each of these rites, each of these ceremonies is at one and the same time a manifestation of local popular imagination, active solidarity with the native North African cultural context, whether Arabo-Berber or inherited from the Hispano-Moorish world, and the expression of faithfulness to universal Jewish thought, a collective memory whose origins go back to historical and prehistoric times, biblical memory itself.

It is in this context that I will briefly approach the problematic of sickness, suffering and death as they were perceived in the Jewish world in the beginning, and have been seen later in the societies of the Muslim West that I know best.

### **Suffering and sickness**

The first time the advent of sickness preceding death is mentioned in the Bible is in relation to the patriarch Jacob.

'Jacob was told that his father was ill',<sup>2</sup> is what we find in the biblical text (Genesis 48.1). The author of the Zohar comments (Zohar II, 174b):

In ancient times, before the advent of Jacob, people lived quietly at home, in their houses. When the moment to die arrived, death came upon them by surprise, and they died without sickness. When Jacob came, he addressed this prayer to the Blessed Holy One:

'Master of the world, I beg you to bring it about that people fall ill for two or three days and do not join their ancestors (draw their last breath) till they have expressed their last wishes to their family and repented of their errors.' The Blessed Holy One agreed and granted his wish.

So people used to pass directly, so to speak, from life to death. They did not experience suffering and sickness.

Here it may be appropriate to mention the extraordinary privilege enjoyed by the town of Luz.<sup>3</sup>

### **The town the angel of death does not enter**

In the famous town of Luz, which is often referred to in biblical narratives, death had no power, and when one of its inhabitants reached a ripe old age, they left the town in order to grow weak and expire beyond its walls. A similar legend is known elsewhere, in Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

Luz has been identified with Bet-El in the land of Canaan, then with a town in

Hittite country and Lizan in Kurdistan. I should point out as well that the word *luz* means 'almond' in Semitic languages; but in Hebrew it also means a vital organ and more specifically the cervical vertebra, which is thought to be indestructible; it is with this little bone, called the Jew's bone, a bone that does not rot in the grave, that the resurrection of the body will begin when the time comes, according to a legend passed down by the literature of the Midrash (*Leviticus Rabbah* 18; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* XII 5), the Zohar (I 137a and III 122a) and Jewish, Christian and Muslim medical and theological writings from the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup>

In a fascinating text the Zohar says:

In the inhabited world there is a town where the 'exterminating' angel has no power, and which he is not allowed to enter; the people living there die only when they leave it . . . All its citizens die like other human beings, but outside the town. Why can the exterminating angel not exercise his power there? We might think it is not within his domain. Not a bit of it! In the Holy Land itself, where no other power is exercised, people die. Neither is it because of the sanctity of the place, since there is nowhere on earth a place more holy than the Land of Israel; and it is not because of the virtues of its founder since many other people have greater ones. R. Isaac says: 'Till now I have not heard anything on this question and I will not say anything about it.' They went to see R. Shim'on and asked him for an explanation. He told them: 'It is true that the place escapes from the empire, the influence of the Angel of death and the Blessed Holy One refuses to allow anyone ever to die there. And do not think people died there before the town was built. Not at all! The fact is that, since the world was created, the destiny of the place was fixed and it was proclaimed that no one would die there. It is an enormous mystery, the mystery of mysteries, for those who meditate on the mystery of Wisdom. Indeed when the Blessed Holy One created the world, He did so with the mysterious help of letters. They spread out before Him<sup>6</sup> and He created the world by drawing the Holy Name. They appeared before Him in different orders and various shapes, so that they could take part in creating the world, in revealing it and starting it up. The Blessed Holy One commanded that the start-up (*asiyah*) should end in the letter *yod*. The letter *tet* was then above that place (*Luz*), hanging in the air.

The letter *tet* is the light of life; which is why it is said to be a favourable omen for someone to see the letter *tet* in a dream; it is a sign of long life.<sup>7</sup> So it is because the letter *tet* remained hanging above that place (where the town of Luz would be built) that the angel of death was forbidden to go into action there.

As regards the (as it were) calm, direct transition from life to death, which I shall have occasion to mention again, we should remember the words the text uses, in this context, about great biblical figures: Abraham (Genesis 25.8), Ishmael (Genesis 25.17), Isaac (Genesis 35.29), Jacob (Genesis 49.33): 'He expired (or simply *declined*), died and was gathered to his father's kin', three sequences, three rapidly succeeding phases.

וַיִּגָּבַע יַיִם אֶל אָבִיו

The last phase, 'join or be gathered to his family, fathers, people', seems to be the main one. It is mentioned in relation to the death of Aaron and Moses in Numbers 27.13 and 32.50 and Deuteronomy 32.50.

The first time healing a sick person (of an individual, personal illness) is referred to, it is in relation to the prophet Elisha (Kings II 7) and the king of Judah, Hezekiah (Isaiah 38.2 *et passim*): 'when King Hezekiah fell gravely ill, he turned his face to the wall and offered a prayer to the Lord.' His prayer was answered, and God gave him fifteen more years of life (despite the prophet Isaiah's disturbing predictions).

The great scourges the bible alludes to are not individual sicknesses. The plagues of Egypt, the great epidemics are collective punishments inflicted on the world's peoples, or his chosen people, by God, in specific circumstances.

The sufferings and torments of Job are an exception. They are a test which is the origin of the problematic of theodicy, the status of good and evil and divine justice.

The literature of the Talmud is far more familiar with human sickness and suffering.

The German Jewish doctor Yehudah Leib Katzenelsohn wrote a treatise in Hebrew entitled *The Talmud and the Science of Medicine*, a work that his son published in Berlin in 1928. The topics covered are: animals (and animal parts) unsuitable for consumption; the so-called *Trefot* problems; ritual examination and slaughter; haemophilia and pathological anatomy; description of the 248 organs, names of diseases, etc.

In fact the Hebrew term *Yessourim*, which fully expresses the idea of individual suffering and pain, appears only in rabbinical literature, which is later than the Bible: the Talmud, homilies and mystical texts.

In this literature it is said that these individual sufferings are caused by sin, and they purge and purify people of sin. This process of purification and expiation is described in detail in the Talmud treatises (more particularly *Berakhot* 5a, *Shabbat* 53b, etc.).

There reference is also made to suffering for love inflicted on the just, who are thus washed clean of their sins in this world. And suffering is seen as the ultimate form of purification leading to mystical union with the divinity (*Sanhedrin* 101a, *Ta'anit* 8a, *Baba Metsi'a* 83a, 84b, 85a).

In addition another Talmud text teaches us that knowledge, essentially the study of the Law, is acquired only through suffering and hardship, and that there is no royal road to learning and attaining knowledge.

It is possible to heal sickness by prayer, as we have seen in the case of King Hezekiah. Previously Moses had prayed that his sister Myriam might be cured of the leprosy she was struck with as a punishment (in this case because she spoke ill of her brother Moses).

The Mishnaic treatise *Abot*, the basic book of Jewish ethics (VI, 5), speaks in these words:

Studying the law is superior to the priesthood and royalty for, if royalty requires 30 virtues and the priesthood 24, acquiring knowledge requires 48, namely: attention and memory, intelligence, respect for the teacher, fear of God, humility, good humour, a pure life, communing with the wise, choice of fellow-students, assiduity, devoting little time to business, sleep, amusements, etc.

### Therapeutics in the Talmud and magic

The Talmud and Jewish books of medicine contain a large number of medical recipes whose ancient names have been well known since Maimonides. But this is not our subject. Here we shall focus on that therapeutic practice associated with what has been called the imaginary, the practical kabbala and magic. This therapeutic practice is aware of the virtues of herbs, fruits, minerals and other ingredients; it makes abundant use of incantations, the sovereign remedies provided by charms and spells, amulets and talismans.

MS. 8° 3865 in the University of Jerusalem National Library is a collection of texts from *Kabbalah ma'asit* 'practical kabbala' and astrology. The author is R. Hayyim Ben 'Attar, a Jerusalem rabbi originating from Morocco, who in the early 20th century was sent to work in his native land as an itinerant mendicant rabbi.

- So that a man who is suddenly struck dumb (May the Merciful One preserve us from that!) may get his speech back, he must have citron peel put in his mouth. There will be a marvellous transformation.
- Another way of curing this affliction is to take old willow leaves and a piece of *apiqomen*,<sup>8</sup> reduce all this to a very fine powder, mix with food and put in the sick person's mouth.
- The virtues of the *citron fruit* are many: its peel assuages all internal pains and strengthens the blood-vessel walls (and the nerves); the white pith on the skin invigorates; its bitter pulp refreshes the liver and quenches thirst; the pips it contains calm pains, facilitate digestion and sweating. The whole fruit is delicious; eating it gladdens the heart and revitalizes the body. It acts exactly like the 'theriac' [*sic!*], an infallible remedy for all illnesses. . . . Furthermore it is effective when children are infected with smallpox (eruptions of the skin).
- *Henna* firms the skin and has many virtues; its uses are manifold.
- The perfume called *alghalya*<sup>9</sup> in a foreign language is effective against eye infections, especially the one called *fsûd al-'inin* which presents as furious itching. The eyes must be rubbed several times with it, some say sixteen times. It is also successfully used to facilitate procreation by applying some to the 'crown' of the penis before marital relations.
- Another perfume called '*al-mask*' in a foreign tongue (a kind of musk) cures ear infections. It is diluted with rosewater and a few drops are applied inside the ear with a bit of cotton wool.

From this same Moroccan manuscript comes the magic square illustrated below, highly elaborate, whose function is to 'make one invulnerable to bullets, white weapons and various illnesses'.<sup>10</sup>



### The power of the holy names

The holy names inscribed on amulets and talismans and in therapeutic writings, invoked in incantatory prayers and many appeals and vows, belong to various onomastic orders and come from several sources: God's Ineffable Name and its many amplifications arrived at by various methods. All the texts of the Scriptures, particularly the Pentateuch and the Psalms, are likely to contain the sacred names of God. Furthermore there is a whole vocabulary relating to angels of which we can see the seeds in the biblical texts themselves, and which starts to develop in the Talmud, the Midrash and the Aggada and expands amazingly in kabbalistic literature, the Zohar, the great classics of Jewish mysticism and the more specialized books of a science that borders on the practical kabbala and magic. They all use cryptographic artifices and arithmological speculation, the language of the so-called 'letters' and their innumerable combinations, angels' alphabets and writing processes, secret handwriting, 'rounded letters', mystico-magical inscriptions whose origins are very ancient, going back to the early centuries AD: the *sefer ha-Razim*, *The Book of Mysteries*, etc.<sup>11</sup>

On p. 89 below are the graphic representations given by our manuscript of some seals of archangels, high princes in the angelologue, and their servant riders. They are in the following order: Raphael (1), Gabriel (2), Sama'el (3), Mikhael (4).

The name of the gravely ill person is also changed during the ritual, which contains recitation of psalms (Alphabetical Psalm 119 in particular).

Visiting the sick person is a religious and moral obligation of the highest importance. It was a responsibility that was laid on God himself, as a Talmud text related in commenting on the biblical narrative, when God visited the convalescent Abraham after his circumcision, at 99 years of age.



Caring for the sick is another obligation which was laid especially on specialized brotherhoods linked to those who visited the sick.

Let us enter a space covering sickness and death. Two factors should be considered:

- (a) The duration of the sickness preceding death is significant. A Talmud text stipulates: 'Dying after a five-day illness is a normal thing, after four days a reprimand from heaven, after three days a severe punishment, after two days a hasty death, and after one day a brutal or apopleptic death.'<sup>12</sup>
- (b) The type of sickness also has a meaning: 'To die of an intestinal disease is to eliminate one's sins, which comes to the just.'<sup>13</sup>

### Death, religion and magic

Death, the death that comes accidentally or following an illness, gives rise to a considerable number of rituals both orthodox and heterodox. It is the occasion of a ritual obeying the rules and prescriptions in the *Halakhah* (Hebrew law in general) and various codes, more particularly the one in force in North African and Mediterranean societies, the Code of Joseph Qaro, *Shulhan Arukh* (*Yoreh De'ah* and Maimonides' code, the *Mishneh Torah*). It is the universalist Jewish aspect of this ritual, confessional, religious and legalistic, that presents others arising from the social, local and native imaginary, local folklore and magic, with a cult and ceremonial in which the Arab-Berber, Jewish and Muslim groups, who have similar mental structures, meet, come together and acknowledge one another. In this special space that is death, as indeed in others such as birth and marriage, there is manifested a cultural symbiosis, or even a syncretism at the religious grassroots that is expressed in the same beliefs, the same gestures, the same incantatory formulas, sometimes the same cries and wails at the precise moment of death.

Indeed it is in that cultural space that encounters take place between Jewish mysticism and Muslim mysticism.



With regard to the links between Muslim Sufism and the Jewish kabbala more specifically, it is impossible to understand, or even to conceive of, the existence of a Jewish spirituality and esotericism, such as that of Bahya Ibn Paquda, Abraham Abulafya, Abraham Maimonides, his son Obadya and many other mystical writers of the Jewish faith, without their Muslim esoteric environment and familiarity with Sufi mysticism.

Whatever form the kabbala assumes, in speculative texts, in contemplative mysticism as well as the turn towards the practical kabbala and magic, in all these facets it represents the reflection of a society, a mode of expression that is closely bound up with other modes of expression of thought (*halakhah*, *d rasha*, poetry and music, exegesis of texts, etc.). Thus it forms a cultural universe that is a valuable, almost unique source of history, the mirror in which the community looks at itself.

### **Jewish and Muslim miracle-workers: *talmid-hakham* and *talib Hazzan* and *marabout*, *khettat* 'scribe'**

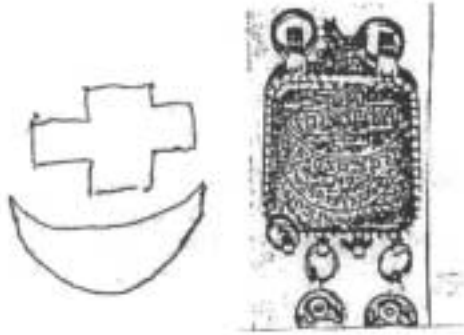
For the classes of Muslim society among whom magic is practised, what is alien is magical. And in North Africa there are two groups of people who live a separate life, Jews and Christians. They are the supreme sorcerers; people believe the Christians acquired magical practices from Jesus because he 'brought the dead back to life', and that the Jews possess a portion of the power of their prophets, some of whom, like Solomon, are true mythical magicians in Muslims' eyes, and traditionally familiar with science and magic; the same beliefs used to circulate in ancient Arabia, where the magicians were mainly Jewish scribes and Christian monks.

However, Jewish and Muslim miracle-workers, *talmid hakham* and *talib Hazzan* and marabout, *khettat* 'scribe' of both faiths, all operate in accordance with the same principles, use the same practices, in the name of God or Allah. Here more than elsewhere, in the domain I have called the social imaginary and its popular representations, the element of syncretism is greater, more obvious, as is attested by the thousand and one recipes, incantatory formulas, sayings, themes and motifs that are used indiscriminately by both groups, in the same language or the two different languages, Arabic for the Muslim, Hebrew and Arabic in Hebrew characters for the Jew, with a clientele from either faith, the Muslim making use of the wisdom of the Jewish *hazzan* and the Jew trusting in the Muslim marabout's *baraka* or *karama*, 'divine grace'.

T. Schrire points out that certain North African Jewish amulets bear the raised hand, the crescent and the disc, the 'sign of Tanit', which represent Baal and his wife and belong to the Phoenician mythology and pantheon.<sup>14</sup>

There are other Jewish amulets from Morocco whose makers, cultivating ecumenism and practising a high degree of syncretism, depicted, engraved on the metal (most frequently silver plates), both the (Christian) cross and the (Muslim) crescent, two designs whose lines contain the traditional Hebrew magic inscriptions: SMRKD, a sacred Name formed from the last letters of the first five verses of the biblical book of Genesis (1.1–5); YWHK, the last letters of Psalms 91.11; another divine name, *Shadday*, etc.<sup>15</sup>





### Funeral rites associated with the burial ceremony

Here we should note two significant rites: the first is specifically Jewish, the second bears the mark of a North African Judeo-Muslim and Berber-Arab cultural symbiosis:

- In laying out the deceased it is the custom in Jewish societies to place the thumb in the hollow of the hand so as to make, together with the fingers, one of the names of God or rather one of his attributes *Shadday* 'All-Powerful', made up of the letters *shin* (three uprights), *dalet* (one) and *yod* (a point); the hand is extended to signify that it is renouncing all this world's goods.
- In Muslim societies, the person laying out covers the deceased's genitals with a piece of their burnous; this remnant of the garment is kept as a relic in which it is believed the virile strength and *baraka* of the dead father has taken refuge; carefully preserved in the family, it is placed on the daughters' heads on the night when their marriage is consummated in order to pass on to them the paternal *baraka*. The corresponding Jewish usage, which was observed in several families I knew in Mogador and Casablanca, is to tear up the deceased's last shirt and distribute the pieces among the family members, who guard them preciously so that they may each receive their share of the dead father's or grandfather's blessing.

### Circumambulatory rites and chasing demons; gold pieces

Immediately the party reaches the graveyard there begins the circumambulatory ritual of the *haqqafot*, seven turns round the coffin in a tight circle of ten people holding hands and reciting a special liturgy. The author of *Nahalat Abot* says that this is a *tiqqun*, a 'ritual of reparation' intended to chase away evil spirits, for it is said: 'Around him (the deceased) there prowl impious ones' (a reference to Psalms 12.9).

The *mittah* or 'funeral bed' is taken to the grave. When it is a well-known rabbi or

a man renowned for his great piety, the lowering of the body is sold to the highest bidder; the money collected is paid into a fund for the poor or some other charitable cause. At the four corners of the grave people throw in a few pieces of gold thus evoking an episode from the life of the patriarch Abraham recorded in this text: 'To the sons of the concubines Abraham had had, he gave gifts . . . and he sent them away eastwards, to the land in the east, out of his son Isaac's way' (Genesis 25.6). In Fes people still think (as above) of a potential offspring's jealousy, represented here by evil genies that have to be appeased with a portion of the family heritage (*ha l-irusha dyalkum* 'Here is your share of the heritage', they say to them in Judeo-Arabic). People also say *ka idahhbu es-sitanim* 'They chase away the satans', punning on the word *dahhaba*, which means both 'chase away' and 'gild' in the local patois.

### 'Your bones will flower again like grass'

Before leaving the graveyard people pick blades of grass and throw them backwards over their heads to show their grief, but also to express hope in the resurrection and the advent of the messianic era, for it is said: 'Your bones will flower again like grass' (Isaiah 66.14) 'and the towns shall see their inhabitants grow like the grass of the fields' (Psalms 72.16). People wash their hands without wiping them on a cloth, letting them drip dry. This, according to a text from the Midrash, is to chase away the spirits which cling more determinedly to impurities on the hands, but also, adds the author of *Nahalat Abot*, to affirm and show that 'our hands did not shed this blood' (a reference to Deuteronomy 21.7) and that they are not responsible, etc. There are some who also wash their faces while repeating this verse: 'God shall wipe away the tears from every face' (Isaiah 25.8). When there is little or no water (for instance, in the case of a caravan in the desert), people follow a custom borrowed from Muslim society which consists of performing the ritual ablutions by rubbing one's hands with sand (*tayammûm*) or earth (*'istijmâr*).

The beliefs and ideas about death are those put across by Jewish biblical or rabbinical writings (Talmud, Midrash and legends, Zohar, etc.) or by an oral, popular, dialect literature, the great works of which belong to the collective memory of the Mediterranean Semitic world, which collects multiple, varying versions of them, created more often than not on the basis of a written version.

We should remember that in Jewish thought death, for individuals, is a particularly important problem, since it marks the moment of reckoning for a life, 'the day of judgement and calling to account' (*Yom ha-din, Yom din ve-heshbon*), the moment when once and for all the nature of eternal existence is to be decided, whether they are to be eternally punished or saved; nevertheless it is not the essential problem since it is subordinate to that of redemption and salvation. Death is a moment of deep emotion and great exhilaration, too, for believers who are detached from the things of this life, indifferent to the banality of earthly existence. For them it is the open door to a new world, 'the future world' (*'Olam habba*), the route to the blessedness to which every being with faith and religion aspires.<sup>16</sup>

### Agony and the time for confession<sup>17</sup>

The *teshubah*, 'turning in on oneself', and repentance.

Before the final moment the dying person should 'turn completely in on themselves', repent in order to die innocent, and recall King Solomon's words: 'Everything goes to the same place. Everything is dust and it all goes to dust.' This is the moment to entrust one's soul to the Blessed Holy One, out of love, in order to do the will of one's creator, remember that one is no better than the ancestors, that the soul is leaving the shadows for the light, servitude for salvation . . . At the moment when a human being takes leave of this world, their actions pass before them one by one and say to them: You did this or that, in such and such a place, on such and such a day; and the person replies yes and signs, as it is said: 'with their hand all humans sign in recognition of their action' (Job 37.7 paraphrased); they accept the divine sentence and acknowledge that God is right in his justice.

### Beliefs and legends, usage and custom: refusing to die

Though the death sentence, once pronounced, is irrevocable, accepting it is very often difficult for the person responsible. It is said that the patriarch Abraham refused to let his soul be taken by the angel Michael. Moses refused to hand over his to Sama'el. Rabbi Hiyya did not give in to the angel of death until the angel had tricked him by dressing as a beggar. Sometimes God has to intervene to overcome the resistance of renowned Talmud heroes. Thus Joshua ben Levi snatched the sword away from the angel of death and through *Bat-Qol*, the celestial voice, God had to shout to him: 'Give him back his weapon, the sons of men have need of it.' With regard to the ritual of birth, we have noted a story in the same vein, the exploit of this master of the kabbala 'who had conquered the female demon Lilith who had been responsible for the death of Jewish male children in Baghdad; he grabbed her deadly sword and gave it to his family where it is still carefully kept'.

Blending with the legends whose Jewish sources are known there are many others of Arab origin or belonging to a cultural substrate common to both societies. One of these says: 'Forty days before death a leaf falls from the Tree of Life that stands under God's throne, into the arms of Azrael (the angel of death according to the Muslim literature of homilies), thus announcing a human being's end.'

Another tells: 'When a just person dies, Azrael appears before them accompanied by a legion of good angels bearing the perfumes of Paradise, and makes the soul leave the body like a drop taken from a bucket of water.' It is also said that when people overdo their lamenting and weep excessively over a person's death, Azrael, standing at the door of the house, declares: 'Why this lamenting and weeping? I am only God's messenger, executing his orders. If you rebel against him, I will come back and take another from among you in this house.'

### The *Qaddish* and its redemptive power

The word *Qaddish* is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *qadosh*, 'holy'. It designates a crucial part of the Jewish liturgy, a public doxology (anthem to the glory of God) that has to be recited in the presence of the *minyán*, the quorum of ten believers who are adult in religious terms (13 years old) and who respond *Amen*. This prayer, composed in Aramaic, the vernacular of the Babylonian communities, except for the ending and a few responses in Hebrew, exalts, magnifies and sanctifies the Name of the Eternal and pleads for the Messiah's swift arrival, the advent of the Kingdom of God, redemption and universal peace. But there is no reference to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (by the Romans), which might give an indication as to its more ancient origin. There are several versions of this composition, all of which contain a common section augmented by additional elements according to circumstances, especially in the Rabbis' *Qaddish* (*qaddish de-rabbanan*) and the *Qaddish* of the Dead (or the Orphans).

In a *midrah* ('*Otiyot de Rabbi Aqiba*) dating from the Gaonic period (the High Middle Ages), it is said that with the advent of the Messiah God will sit down in paradise and will comment in a sermon on the '*New Torah*' before the assembly of the saints, the pious and the angels. At the end of the sermon Zerubabel<sup>18</sup> will rise and recite the *Qaddish* in a voice that will be heard from one end of the world to the other, and all humanity will respond *Amen*. All the souls, of both Jews and Gentiles (*goyim*), will say *Amen* as well. Then God's compassion will be aroused and he will give to Michael and Gabriel the keys of Gehenna whose 40 gates will open at the Archangels' command . . . All those redeemed from Hell will come forth from there to be led into Paradise.

### Rabbi' Aqiba and the woodcutter

According to a later *aggadah* 'legend' (*Seder Elyahu Zota*) Rabbi Aqiba saved the soul of a dead person from the punishment of Gehenna by getting his son to learn and recite the *Qaddish*. Here is the text of that legend:

One day R. Aqiba met a spirit (a soul) which appeared in the guise of a man carrying on his back some wood that was intended to feed the fire of Gehenna where he burned every day as a punishment for the ill treatment he had inflicted on the poor in his lifetime, when he was a tax collector. He would be spared that terrible torture, he added, only if his son could recite the *Qaddish* before a gathering of the faithful. So, hearing the man had completely neglected his son's religious education, R. Aqiba went off to look for the son, found him and undertook to teach him to read the Torah; one day the son was able to get up in public and recite the *Qaddish*, thus saving his father from hellfire.

### The *hillulah* or the joyful commemoration of death

The anniversary of Moses' death is celebrated on 7 *Adar*. That of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohay, who is traditionally supposed to have composed the Zohar, is marked on *lag ba'omer* (the 33rd day of 'Omer), which is 18 *Lyyar*, and that of Rabbi Me'ir, the 'master of miracles' (*ba'al ha-nes*), the 14th of the same month. The commemoration of these two Palestinian saints' deaths has become the occasion for festivities, illuminations on the sites of their graves at Meron and Tiberiad, and in all the Mediterranean communities. In Morocco local saints and holy men are celebrated as well, with every kind of miracle-worker and illustrious North African masters ('Amram Ben Diwan David Ad-Dra', David Al-Ashqar known as Moulay Ighghi, etc.), by making seasonal pilgrimages and what is called here and elsewhere the *hillulah*, whose dramatic and spectacular character should be noted.

It is a sort of fair that is both religious and secular, comparable to the Islamic custom of *mousslem*. On the site of the Rabbi's and saint's presumed grave a ritual takes place which the pilgrims generally perform after they have made a vow at a special event or after a promise freely made to the Rabbi to visit his grave from time to time or on a set date. The ritual of *hillulah* and the pilgrimage contain special liturgies associated with great brotherhoods. Prayer and chanting of the psalms are accompanied by substantial meals, generous libations of eau-de-vie and wine, dances and songs, great bonfires, folk and popular events that come close to heresy and which the rabbinic orthodoxy frowns on but cannot prevent.

It is also the occasion for fertile literary creation in Hebrew and the local dialects. As regards hagiographic poetry, we find here the two hierarchical levels of Jewish knowledge: on the one hand Hebrew scriptural knowledge with *piyyutique* compositions for the occasion, and on the other poems with verses in Judeo-Arabic (or more rarely Judeo-Berber). The long chanted *qasâ'id* or *qisas* recount the saint's extraordinary life, a life filled with fabulous events, miraculous interventions, prophetic signs and visions. The shorter pieces, of one or two verses, which are laudatory and unrestrained, or individual acts of grace, are generally improvised; they are sung while performing one of two gestures won at special auctions: the right to light an oil lamp or candle dedicated to the saint and Rabbi, and the right to raise and drink the glass of eau-de-vie in his honour and as an act of grace.

The mystical doctrines, and the Zohar in particular, see the day of death as a day to celebrate (*Yoma de-hillulah*) and the author of a biblical text (Ecclesiastes 7.1) says that 'the day of death is better than the day of birth', which the Midrash interprets thus: 'death tells of the meritorious life of the deceased . . . It is also like the boat that comes into the harbour full of merchandise' (*Exodus Rabbah*, 48). 'And the great of each generation have to die to make way for their successors', we read elsewhere.

### The graveyard and the cult of the dead

The *hillulah* is celebrated in the synagogue; but the ceremonial and festivities take place more particularly in the graveyard, which is also visited on Mondays and Thursdays, and on the eve of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Kippur*, taking great care not to go twice on the same day to the same grave.

This visiting the graves of the dead on the eve of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Kippur* is explained by the author of *Nahalat Abot* in the following way: 'On that day God is getting ready to judge the world. So the souls of the dead beg for divine mercy for the living, to whom they announce in a dream the decision affecting them, once this has been made by the heavenly court.' And so the living come here to pray to the dead to intervene on their behalf.

Sick people and barren women sometimes come and stay in the graveyard, close to the saints and local holy men, in small rooms specially reserved for this purpose, spending three or seven days at a time there begging and praying for a cure and for their wishes to be granted.

Among Muslims the graveyard is habitually a place for taking a walk; women and children go there on Fridays and drink tea while they chat. On the 27th day of *Ramadan* and more especially on the feast day of the *Ashura*, people carry out a general purification on the graves, which are literally drenched. Nothing here reminds us of the sadness of Christians' mournful visits and the Day of the Dead.

### Judeo-Muslim pilgrimages

The same grave may be a Judeo-Muslim pilgrimage destination, a compromise space where one can often witness manifestations of cultural symbiosis, or even religious syncretism, which may seem surprising, with Jews and Muslims seeking intercession and protection from the same saints, performing the same practices and gestures, making the same offerings, using the same invocations, the same forms of prayer. From their visit to the same saint both groups go back rich in imagination of all the good things they hoped for from the success of their pilgrimage, returning home filled, at the very least, with additional faith and hope.

### Eulogies and funeral orations

Elegiac poems, which are generally collected in anthologies with the title *El Sefod*, 'time of lamentation and weeping', attract our attention first because of the considerable part played by the 'lament' in funeral rites and the importance of the place occupied by the *qinah* 'elegy' in the liturgy of the seven days of mourning and the three great ceremonies of remembrance. Furthermore, this kind of literature, because of the content of the pieces themselves and the indications the author writes at the beginning, gives us information, which in some respects is valuable, about the deceased and the circumstances of their death, a considerable biographical and historical document.

The funeral orations composed by Jacob Aben Sur, a 17th/18th-century Moroccan author, and the notes at their head, inform us about Jewish society of his time, of Fes and Meknes more particularly, the relations between that society and the Muslim environment and the authorities, both central and local, the lay dignitaries who ruled the community, the senior magistrates and rabbis who legislated and supervised its members' moral and spiritual health. Himself the principal judge in the Fes court and an eminent preacher, Jacob Aben Sur was also required, because of this and as part of his functions, to deliver funeral sermons.

Fundamentally these elegies are veritable funeral orations and homelies. Expressions of grief and regret, enumeration of the deceased's qualities and titles, are associated with meditations and reflections on problems of faith, variations on the theme of death, truisms about the ephemeral nature of life and the 'fragility of the world', the precarious character of the body compared with the immortality of the soul, the delights of the 'world to come' promised to the just and wise who sit, crowned in glory, at the foot of the heavenly throne.

### Dying with a kiss<sup>19</sup>

Dying at a venerable age is a blessing; dying young or in the flower of life is a misfortune and a curse (in this respect compare the biblical texts of Genesis 15.15 and Isaiah 38.10). One dies because of the original sin, that of Adam eating the forbidden fruit. Also because of the individual's personal sins. However, rabbis quote the names of heroes and saints who died without committing any sins but by the primordial serpent's poison.

People die in various ways, peacefully or violently, after a long or short agony, each according to their merits. There is 'death with a kiss' (*mitah be neshiqah*); it is like a hair taken off a glass of milk or a drop taken from a bucket of water, passing from life here below to the one beyond without suffering; it is thus that the just, the *saddiqim*, die; it is thus that Moses died, 'by the mouth of God' (Deuteronomy 34.5). That is how his brother Aaron and his sister Myriam died. According to Maimonides (Chapter 51 of the third part of the *Guide for the Lost*), the phrase 'dying with a kiss' means the deaths occurred when the three people concerned felt the pleasure caused by sensing God: they died because of the strength of their love *eros*, *hesheq* (Hebrew), *'ishq* (Arabic), whose object is God.

### Entering into death with eyes open

This is the lot of the just, who are called directly to God, entering into death with their eyes open, or as a Judeo-Arabic saying from Morocco puts it, 'entering paradise with eyes open'. In Muslim society these blessed ones are the barber who circumcises children, who are thus purified by this Abrahamic rite, and the man who bakes the bread and liberates his soul in exposing himself throughout his life to the flames of his oven. In Jewish society this is also the fate of the humble who have had pious functions and difficult work.



### The announcement of death: shadow and dream, the angel of death and the doctor of the Law

Losing one's shadow, dreaming of relatives and friends, seeing a roll of the Law (*sefer torah*) in a dream are prior signs of forthcoming death and they also announce the arrival of the angel of death.

In a hagiographic poetic piece in Judeo-Arabic recorded at Tinghir (High Atlas) and published by me elsewhere,<sup>20</sup> a number of ideas and beliefs are set out, together with all kinds of notions dear to the writers of the kabbala or even those of the Halakhah, and closely reflecting the attitudes of the Jewish people of those communities from the Atlas (and North Africa in general), and their local traditions and folklore: the world of death and its myths, paradise and the heavenly court, the extraordinary power of the saints' intercession, funeral rites, the duty to teach one's child the Torah, obligations between friends. I have found all these ideas expressed in texts I know well, for example Zohar I, 217b–218a, of which I translate a page below:

One day, R. Isaac was sitting at R. Judah's door, plunged in deep sorrow. R. Judah came out and, finding him in this condition, said to him: 'What in particular is the matter today?' [R. Isaac] replied: 'I have come to ask you three things: when you are studying the Torah and happen to quote some of my words, you must say them in my name and mention their author; you will do my son the service of teaching him the Torah; every week you will go and pray on my grave.' R. Judah asked: 'What tells you that you are about to die?' The other man replied: 'My soul has been leaving me every night (recently) but I was not illuminated by a dream as before: and what is more, when I bow at *Shomea Tefilla* during my prayer, I do not see my shadow on the wall; so it means that the messenger has gone to announce (my death), for it is said: "It is by his shadow that man walks" (Psalms 39.7) and "Our days on earth are a shadow"' (Job 8.9) 17. R. Judah said: 'I will do all you ask provided you keep (lit. choose) a place for me beside you in the other world; that way (we shall be neighbours) as we are in this one.' R. Isaac wept and said: 'Do me the favour of not leaving me any more.' Then they went to R. Simon's house and found him busy studying the Law. Looking up, R. Simon saw R. Isaac; the angel of death was running and dancing before him. He went to take R. Isaac's hand and said: 'I order whoever normally comes in to enter; and whoever is not accustomed to coming in should not enter.' R. Isaac and R. Judah went in; the angel of death was forced to stay outside. R. Simon looked at R. Isaac and saw that his hour had not yet come. He still had till the eighth hour of the day.

He asked him to sit down and they studied together. R. Simon said to his son Eleazar: 'Sit by the door and do not speak to anyone, and if someone wants to come in, you will command him not to.' Then he said to R. Isaac: 'Have you seen your father's image today (in a dream)? For, as we have been taught, at the hour when a human being leaves this world, their father and close relatives are by their side, they see them, recognize them along with all the people they were close to here on earth; they all gather round and accompany their soul to the place that has been allotted to them.' R. Isaac answered: 'Up to now I have seen nothing.' At once R. Simon rose and said: 'Master of the Universe! R. Isaac is well known to us, he is one of the seven eyes<sup>21</sup> here below. I have him, leave him to me.' Then a voice spoke out and said: 'The throne of the master [R. Isaac] is near the wings of R. Simon. There, he is yours, you shall bring him with you the day you come to sit on your throne.' Then R. Eleazar saw the angel of death going away saying: 'There is no place for

the master of great works where R. S. bar Yohay' is to be found.' R. Simon said to his son: 'Come and support R. Isaac, I can see he is afraid.' R. Eleazar came in and took (the hand) of R. Isaac while R. Simon returned to his study of the Law.

R. Isaac fell asleep and saw his father (in a dream) who said to him: 'My son, your share is good in this world and in the world to come for, among the leaves on the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, there rises a tall tree "powerful in both worlds" and it is R. Simon bar Yohay. He holds you (he shelters you) in his branches.' R. Isaac asked him: 'Father, what is my fate there?' The father replied: 'For three days they "covered" your room, putting in open windows so that you should get light from the four sides of the Universe [four cardinal points]. I am glad when I see your place and I say: "Your share is good; however your son has not yet learnt enough of the Torah up to now."' R. Isaac said to his father: 'Father, how much time am I granted (to live) in this world?' The father answered: 'I am not permitted (to tell you). It is a thing that is never revealed to humans. But at R. Simon's *Hillula* it will be your job to put up his table.'

Here I should add another idea from the Zohar: when the judgement hour approaches for a person, a new spirit enters them, and because of that they perceive what they could not before, the divine Presence (*shekhinah*), because they are leaving this world. Indeed if it is written: 'No one may see Me and live' (Exodus 33.20), that is in life; but it is permitted at the time of death.<sup>22</sup>

Here are two texts taken from *Hesed le-Abraham*, whose author is Abraham Ben Mordekhai Azulay (Morocco/Palestine, 17th century). I have translated and analysed them in my book *Kabbale, vie mystique et magie*, pp. 238–41, where other writings by this author are listed: *Or Ha-Hammah*, Jerusalem 1876, Przemysl 1898; *Zohare Hammah*, Venice 1655; *Hesed le-Abraham*, Sulzbach 1695, Amsterdam 1685.

(1) The sensitivity of the dead; Luz, the resurrection bone; the secret of the shroud and the linen garments. The supernatural virtues of the white linen robes of the Pharaoh and the High Priest (IV/52).

The Talmud and the Zohar teach us that there always remains a relationship, a bond after death, between body and soul once they are separated and the soul has withdrawn from the body; this bond continues even when the worms have penetrated the bones and got a hold on them, but it is reduced to relations with that indestructible 'little bone', which is comparable to leaven in dough and is destined to play a pre-eminent part at the moment of the body's resurrection. That bone is housed inside the skull at the rear in the lower section, below the brain; it is, so to speak, independent of the other bones in the skeleton. Its size is the same as a grain of barley, shaped like a little cube rounded at the corners. It has running through it a network of blood vessels like a spider's web whose threads cross and interweave in a complicated tracery. It brings together within it the nerves of the five vital senses, the very ones on which almost all of the human body's activities rely . . . Unlike the other bones it does not putrefy but keeps, together with the soul, a solid link until the day of the resurrection, when it will be required to restore the body and assist return to the mystery of origins . . .

You should know further that there is a mystery connected with linen garments; this material possesses a supernatural power that is beneficial for living and dead, children and adults. When a human being leaves this world covered in a white linen shroud, even if their death occurs on 'foreign territory' (elsewhere than holy ground), the accusing angels

come to confound the person are silenced and immediately replaced by other gentler ones who take up the deceased's defence. The magic power and marvellous and exceptional virtues attached to these garments of pure linen, without any kind of admixture, have been examined, verified, tested in every situation, even in cases of a newborn, whom the demon Lilith normally threatens, another evil genie or another spirit from the left. By virtue of his superior wisdom the Pharaoh knew the virtues of this kind of garment. Wearing white linen he paraded, haughty and superb, proclaiming he was God in person before his scholarly magicians and the great ones of his empire, all of whom were thunderstruck, ignorant as they were of the power and charm of the garments their monarch was wearing. Instructed by the Holy Spirit, Joseph managed to penetrate their secret. He discovered that white linen clothes warded off from whoever wore them every kind of scourge and calamity, those originating in the 'evil eye', those stemming from spells, charms or the workings of witchcraft, all those forces of evil associated with wicked genies, will o' the wisps and spirits, execrated of course by the Creator and Master of the universe. However, it must be said in addition that those clothes do not save people from natural disasters caused by water and fire, cold and heat, stone and iron, etc.

You should also know that no one is exposed as much to the greatest dangers as the High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) when he enters the Holy of Holies, on the day of *Kippur*, in order to perform the 'divine ritual' described in the *Seder ha'bodah* 'Order of service'. No one other than him is permitted to enter, neither human nor angel. . . . And in order to ward off the jealousy, rivalry and hostility of the inhabitants of earth and heaven, the Blessed Holy One advised him to wear white linen before setting foot in that sacred place. . . . Coming back to Pharaoh and Joseph, when Egypt's sovereign saw Jacob's son, his first minister and new confidant, dressed in white linen, he was seized with concern; suspicion and fear took hold of him; that is why 'he put a gold chain round his neck' (Genesis 41.42), in order to counteract the charm of his white linen garments, abolish and annihilate the power attached to them. At that moment Joseph did not show any surprise so that Pharaoh should not realize he knew the secret. When he got home he took off the chain.

(2) Seven tests await human beings when they die: they correspond to seven significant moments that follow one another from the instant of the separation of soul and body to the time of redemption and reincarnation (V/1).<sup>23</sup>

The first, hard, test is the one that is undergone the moment the soul leaves the body; it punishes them both for the errors committed through an active collaboration between them, in association so to speak. The next test occurs when the funeral cortege is being led from the deceased's home to the graveyard. During the whole journey the person's actions and words go before them, accuse and publicly humiliate them, proclaiming *urbi et orbi*, for each of the transgressions they have committed in this world, for each crime and offence, their nature, the sentence and punishment that they incur and which await them in the world to come. The third test is the one the deceased goes through when they enter the grave, which is seen as the exit door from this world and the threshold of another. . . . The fourth test is inflicted on them in the grave itself, immediately after burial, which rabbinic literature calls *hibbut haqeber*, 'the flagellation of the grave'.<sup>24</sup> The angel of death, assisted by the one called *Dumah*, who rules over the world of 'silence', beats the corpse violently with metal chains. . . . The next and fifth test is going through Gehenna, hell; it is intended in particular to purify the soul, to 'whiten' it in a way. During the sixth test the body is given over to vermin which take it over and devour it; while the soul grows sad and mourns, the body suffers atrociously, as it is said: 'the bite of the worm is as painful for the body of the deceased (for their corpse) as the prick of the needle can be, stuck into

the flesh of a living person.<sup>25</sup> The soul's exile is the seventh and last test; this is its continual migrations and transmigrations, successive incarnations and reincarnations; it is condemned to wander and roam hither and thither, without the slightest respite, till the end of its long, painful journey, which is terminated by its final redemption, its redemption paid for in the course of its wanderings and transmigrations, by carrying out the tasks it had to accomplish in this world.

Out of all these tests the first is the one that has here detained Abraham Azulay the longest; it is the most disputed and argued over. The author devoted a lengthy essay to it, composed of ingredients borrowed, naturally, from the Talmud, the Midrash and the Aggadah, from the many works of Jewish ethics (*musar*) known in his time, but still more plentifully from the Kabbalistic literature with which he is familiar and which he privileges.

The first test, inflicted at the supreme moment when the soul leaves the body, is painful, hard and difficult; the separation may be gentle and light as well, 'as easy as taking a hair out of a glass of milk' (Berakhot 8a, Baba Barra 17a). The operation is carried out by the angel of death, who is allowed on this occasion to punish and inflict suffering in proportion to the gravity of the transgression; to the actual degree that the person had 'persisted' in the fault, the executant of high offices is permitted to exact his due.<sup>26</sup>

With the legends whose Jewish sources are known are mingled others of Arab origin or belonging to a cultural substrate common to both societies. All these rites, uses and customs, together with the legalism and the imaginary underlying them, bear witness to a judicious balance between the specificity of identity and the universality which are both characteristic of the Jewish vision of suffering and more especially death in the societies of the Muslim West. And it is the mark of the whole religious and ritual life of these societies which have upheld, into the 20th century in the case of Morocco, a civilization, way of life and culture their ancestors had known for many centuries, if not a millennium, with a varying degree of particularity and universality, the latter dominating at certain liturgical moments, for instance *Yom Kippur*, where one of the main ritual items is that prayer called *Seder haAvodah*, a group of texts in rhyming prose and in verse describing in detail the 'sacred ritual', the gestures the High Priest used to perform on the Day of Atonement in the Temple at Jerusalem in ancient times. We should note the universalist tone of that prayer, an epic hymn in which, curiously enough, there appears neither the image of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, nor that of the Jewish society living there, but in which are expressed nostalgia for a time gone by, desire and hope of finding again the immemorial times of a distant glory . . . In the Jewish religion the archaic scenario of the periodic renewal of the world has been gradually historicized while preserving something of its original significance. The restoration movement is aiming at the return and resurrection of a situation that is past and gone but still felt to define the ideal. The movement is backward-looking, focused on the history of origins insofar as these are recognized as an ideal in the imaginary and memory of a whole people. Experience is attached to the past by virtue of a desire to restore the original state of things and the 'life of the ancestors'.

Returning to the topic that concerns us, 'the vision of suffering and death' in the

societies we are studying, we may conclude our exposition with this question: can modern medicine conceive of a return to that mythic situation I described at the start of my article, and find, by other routes and means, the time of origins when passing from life to death occurred peacefully, 'joining one's ancestors' as the Bible text expresses it, to signify expiring and dying, without pain, suffering and sickness, concepts that do not appear till late on in the societies whose history I have been relating?

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### Notes

This text is a revised and augmented version of my lecture given in the context of a round table on 'Suffering, sickness and death' at the Fourth International Conference on anti-cancer chemotherapy, which took place in Paris in February 1993 and brought together researchers and doctors.

1. *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982 (1998 under the title *Deux mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*, with additions and a new postscript), in which the vision of death and the associated cult, rituals and beliefs were exhaustively examined. As for the mystical speculations on death and the therapies from the practical kabbala, which I found in North African Jewish kabbalistic writings, they are included in some of the chapters from my book (1986/1996) *Kabbale, vie mystique et magie*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose.
2. English quotations from the Bible are from the New English Bible (2nd edn, 1970), slightly adjusted where necessary (translator's note).
3. See *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*, p. 99. The town is frequently mentioned in the Bible (Genesis 28.10; 35.6; 48.3; Joshua 16.2; 18.13; Judges 1.23 and 26), where it is identified with Bet-El in the land of Canaan, then a town built by a refugee from Bet-El in the country of the Hittites (Judges 1.23–6). The legend itself is recounted in the Talmud (*Sotah* 46b, *Sukkah* 53a), the Midrash (*Genesis Rabbah*, on Genesis 28.19). See also Zohar I 137a.
4. 'Ireland in the Middle Ages' in *Jewish Quarterly Review* VI, p. 336.
5. See also *Kabbale, vie mystique et magie*, pp. 54, 162, 206, 238.
6. See Zohar I 204a.
7. It is impossible here to give the text from the Zohar referred to above with its many commentaries. It will merely be noted that it says that the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, whose creation preceded that of the world, appeared before God in various shapes and combinations resulting from the permutations defined by certain rules; one of those shapes is the presentation of the letters in reverse alphabetical order from *taw* to *alef*, with each begging for the creation of the world to start with itself. The Creator decided that this task should be performed by *Bet* . . ., the expression of Wisdom, *sefirah Hokhmah*, and that the completion of creation should be carried out by *yod*, the expression of *sefirah Malkhut*, the sovereignty of God over the earth. Furthermore, following speculation on the structures and functions of the four worlds (*Asilut*, *Beri'ah*, *Yesirah*, *Asiyah*) and the ten *sefirot* that make up each of them, we get to the fact that each *sefirah* corresponds to a particular space, and so Jerusalem is part of the heritage of *Malkhut*, the tenth *sefirah* and the letter *yod*, while Luz belongs to the ninth *sefirah* represented by the letter *tet* and called *yesod*, which means the attribute *hay 'olamim* 'the Eternal Living One'.
8. Citron fruit and willow branches are two of the four species that make up the ritual bouquet (*lulab*) for the feast of *Sukhot* (see *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*, pp. 253–5). The *apiqomen* is the half *massah*, the symbol of the Paschal lamb eaten at the end of the meal on the eve of *Pessah* (*ibid.*, p. 241). Apart

from its mystical symbolism inherited from the many exegeses carried out on the Song of Songs over 2000 years, the pomegranate fruit is also a miraculous remedy. All its parts (skin, seeds) and its various species (there are sweet and bitter ones, cooked or raw) are thought to have virtues and special qualities in the area of magic therapies. It is the fruit '*par excellence* that can delight the heart', as our manuscript emphasizes (p. 24).

9. According to Doutté, quoting an Arab author, *Magie et religion*, pp. 73–4, this is one of the fifteen perfumes with the most effective magical properties. In fact it is a preparation with a musk base that contains cinnamon, honey, gallnut, wallflower. According to other sources it is also a creamy perfumed paste, black in colour, based on musk, amber and *bân* 'cassia' oil or a mixture of musk and civet (see *Littératures dialectales et populaires juives en Occident musulman*, p. 107, n. 15). In Morocco and Algeria people know the seven perfumes used for the *sab'bkur* 'seven fumigations': *al-jawi al-khel* (black benzoin), *al-jawi la-byad* (white benzoin), *bkhur as-sudan* (ebony resin), *al'ud-al-qmayri* (aloe wood), *al-qesbur* (coriander), *al-luban* (incense) and *al-mi'a* (myrrh). Others are known too, such as *al-hramel* (harmel) and *al-ruta* (rue), which enjoy a high reputation, as do saffron, camphor, myrtle, alum and salt.
10. Deciphering of and commentary on this talisman are to be found in my book *Kabbale, vie mystique et magie*, pp. 392–5.
11. See *Kabbale, vie mystique et magie*, pp. 361–413.
12. *Mo'ed Qatan* 28a.
13. *Erubin* 41b, *Shabbat* 118b.
14. *Hebrew Amulets*, London, 1966, p. 56.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
16. Here we should note that, for Jews as for Muslims, death is not the end of life. It is a threshold opening onto eternity.
17. In addition to my personal experience and my own evidence there is, in this chapter on death, information borrowed essentially from the ritual *Nahalat Abot*, 'the fathers' legacy', published in Livorno in 1808, in which a rabbi from Mogador, Isaac Qoriat, collected the liturgical texts for the days of mourning and an account of the funeral rites performed in Morocco.
18. It was Zerubabel who brought the exiles from Babylon into Judea after Cyrus's decree authorizing their return (539/538 BC).
19. This concerns the idea that some just people, and Moses in particular, had the privilege of being exempt from the sufferings of death and of leaving this world in a state of quietude and ineffable gentleness, with a divine kiss. Two texts from the Zohar develop this notion (II, 124b and 145a/b). This spiritual relationship is one of union suggested to mystics by the *Song of Songs* 1.2: 'He will kiss with kisses from his mouth.' So a person whose soul leaves 'with a kiss' belongs to another spirit from which they are never separated; their spirit has been part of the divine spirit. In the first text the Zohar expresses it as follows: 'I will send my angel before you . . .' (Exodus 13.20). Rabbi Isaac began his speech thus: 'May he give me a kiss with his mouth' (Hymn I, 2). The Community of Israel says: 'May he give me a kiss from his mouth.' Why does it not say: 'May he declare his love for me'? We are taught that it is because, by kissing, friends exchange spirits and in that way become a part, unite one with another. And that is why the kiss is placed on the mouth, the source of the spirit. When two friends' spirits meet in a kiss, mouth to mouth, they do not leave one another ever again. Hence death with a kiss is so desirable. The soul receives a kiss from the world above (the divinity) and unites with the Blessed Holy One, nevermore to be parted. That is why the Community of Israel says: 'May he give me a kiss with his mouth; its spirit unites with His and will never again be parted.'
20. See Haïm Zafrani, *Littératures populaires et dialectales*, pp. 164–84.
21. According to Derek Emet (marginal glosses in the Zohar, ed. De Wilna, 1895) this refers to the seven companions of the Zohar legend, symbols of the seven eyes that together watch over the world; see the end of the *Idra de Nazir*, fol. 144a.
22. Watching Alain Corneau's film *Nocturne indien* I could not help comparing this idea from the Zohar with one of the episodes from the film. Talking to an Indian philosopher, the narrator refers to a character who said these words in the last moment of his life: 'Give me my glasses.'

23. See Zohar I, 245a; III, 54b and 126b. See also M. Idel and R. Yehudah Halewa (1984) and his *Safenat Pa'aneah*, in *Shalem*, Year IV, Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, pp. 131–4. In this unpublished work, which M. Idel briefly analyses here, we have the original opinion on this familiar theme from the kabbala of another Moroccan kabbalist, from Fes, who emigrated to Palestine in the first half of the 16th century.
24. *Berakhot* 18b.
25. *Ibid.*
26. 'There are 903 ways of dying, the most painful and the hardest is dying by suffocation as caused by croup; the gentlest is the death that occurs with or via a kiss' (*Berakhot* 5a). People die peacefully or violently, each according to their desserts (see *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*, p. 97). Like many other just people, e.g. Aaron, Myriam and the patriarchs, Moses died with God's kiss, according to an interpretation given to Numbers 33.38 and Deuteronomy 34.5 (Deuteronomy *Rabbah* XI, 10; *Yalqut* 787 and *Baba Bara* 17a). In Muslim society it is said, in reference to the commentary on the Koran by Al-Baydawi (surah 79, 1), that 'when a just person dies, the Angel of death . . . makes sure he takes their soul as one takes a drop of water out of a bucket'.