Preface

God says to man, as He said to Moses, *Put off thy shoes from thy feet* – Put off the habitual which encloses your foot, and you will know that the place on which you are now standing is holy ground. For there is no rung of human life on which we cannot find the holiness of God everywhere and at all times!

Jewish mystery, or the spirit of Judaism, begins in the Bible. The *Torah* revealed the Biblical rules and the laws given by God to the ancient people of Israel. In the revealed *Torah*, Jewish scholars and rabbis explained God’s recorded Biblical words. The mystery and the esoteric found in the Bible was later recorded and explained in the *Kabbalah*.

In the Bible we can discern two types of Jewish mystery. First, let’s examine the rational or disciplined Judaic mystery that recorded the dealings of mankind with God. The first appearance of such a Judaic rational mystery appears in the first verse of *Genesis*:

*In the beginning God created heaven and earth... and the spirit of the Lord moved upon...* (Gen. 1:1).

Here for the first time in the ancient world an audience meets God and his spirit. The spirit of the Lord is not a separate entity but is seen as a vital part of God. God and Spirit. Spirit and God. These two entities are seen as being one and the same. And if we examine the genders being used in these lines from *Genesis*, we discover that the Creator appears in the masculine form while the spirit appears in the feminine form.

The second Judaic mystery type in the Bible is the practical mystery. This mystery helps believers cleave to God and to experience a profound union with him. This revelation for those chosen by God appears in various hidden forms throughout the Bible. It appears as a ‘burning bush’, for example, or in a cloud, or in the glory of a multitude of angels filling a temple and surrounding God. Angels appearing in the Bible’s first twenty-three books are not named. Those early Biblical angels appear as ‘good people’ who bring God’s tidings to Abraham, Hanoch, Elijah, and others. However, in the *Book of Daniel*, angels are named for the first time. Michael and Gabriel are named as highly influential angels. Michael is the great Prince assigned to protect the people of Israel. Gabriel is the angel charged with interpreting the visions and dreams of mankind. Some of the angels are among those who execute God’s will, such as destroying Sodom and Gomorrah and inflicting great tribulations on the Pharaoh.
Then, in the Psalms, these words appear:

He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. (Psalms 78:49.).

We are not told the specific acts God demanded of these particular angels, but it seems likely that they were instructed by an angry God to bring misfortune to humanity. Satan appears in the Book of Job as an evil entity who has direct contact with God. All Satan has to do to create evil in the world is to torment Job in the name of testing God’s word and in testing man’s faith in God.

In 1Kings, the prophet Micaiah says:

I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, ‘Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?’ And one said on this manner and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord and said: ‘I will persuade him.’

(1Kings 22:19-21.).

Satan is the spirit who ‘came forth’ and volunteered to ‘persuade’ mankind, and Satan is a spirit and a prosecutor of God’s court who possesses the power to manipulate human activities. This spirit has the strength to cause man to sin. God assists mankind by offering prophecies. And God’s spirit presents the words of God to mankind so that each erring human being can find his or her own way back to God. In the ‘burning bush’ the words of God are revealed in a fire. Speaking out of a small fire in a bush, God reveals to Moses that the ground all humans stand upon is holy because God alone created the earth. When God spoke through a ‘burning bush’ to Moses, God intertwined the material and the immaterial. God’s second hidden revelation occurs in the great fire in Mount Sinai. And a third hidden divine revelation occurs within fire when Elijah ascends to heaven:

…behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire.

(2Kings 2:11.).

The prophets present the Biblical mysteries as the words of God, and they are presented to mankind with ‘the Torah of the heart’, meaning that these mysteries are presented with the spirit of the heart and reveal the inner meaning of the Law.
Jewish interpreters were very intrigued by the ‘voice’ Elijah heard in Mount Horeb. They wanted to understand the full meaning of the ‘still small voice’, *qol d’ma-ma daq-qa*. For them, this was not just a simple phrase but something with a special meaning. They also drew parallels between Moses’ experience and Elijah’s in God’s mountain. They also named Moses the redeemer of the People from Egypt and they named Elijah as the redeemer of the People from their worship of idols. But our attention is given to the intellectual struggle of the early Jewish scholars for their complete understanding of the ‘Phenomenon of the Voice’.

The *Midrash* expresses its view that the *voice* is ‘a sound of gentle stillness’ but it also emphasizes that God waited for three hours for Elijah to entreat God’s mercy for the People and Elijah did not comply. One of the Sages explained that God appears to Moses with the ‘voices’, *qolot*, in order to remind the people that it was the might of God that saved them from slavery. For this reason, Moses is seen as being greater than Elijah. The Aramaic translation does not present any new image to the phrase. It interprets the phrase. In this translation, the meaning is ‘a voice praising God secretly.’ Indeed, the Aramaic word *ha-shai* means ‘secret’, as we find it in the *Talmud* (*BPs*. 56a), or it means ‘whispering’, as it is found in *BZeb*. 88b. It is in this early period that the ambiguity of this word first intrigued the interpreters. In the Middle Ages, the interpreters were still being overwhelmed by this phrase. Rashi follows the *Targum* and suggests that it was a ‘voice…(a) silence for praising’ and by using a French word, he inserts the meaning of ‘no certain voice’. Another scholar from the Middle Ages suggested that this phrase consists of ‘a voice’ and of ‘silence’. In the twentieth century, Professor Tur Sinai, followed the *Targum* and suggested that *d’ma-ma* is a ‘whispering voice’.

In the sixteenth century a great poet, mystic, and theologian by the name of San Juan de la Cruz was in search for the true meaning of love and for the mystical experience of Elijah. As a member of the Carmelite Order, he was also a companion of the famous Santa Teresa, whom he met for the first time in 1567. She was also a member of the Carmelite Order. This Christian order, which was established in the thirteenth century, maintained a great attraction and interest in the Holy Land. This was probably due to the fact that the Crusaders’ kingdom at that time was centered in Jerusalem. During this century a group of monks found a cave on Mount Carmel where they settled. Yet, sometime before these monks arrived at this place, which today is the city of Haifa, this cave was known as a sacred place. The Phoenicians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans, all considered this place as holy. It is also known that the Roman Emperor Vespasian offered a sacrifice there. In the Hebrew tradition, the Prophet Isaiah...
made this mountain powerful, as he presented it as a metaphor for abundance:

I shall blossom abundantly and rejoice even with joy and singing the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it the excellency of Carmel and Sharon they shall see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God. (35:2.).

In Biblical poetry this place is a metaphor of beauty, and some have interpreted it as an expression of the Messianic Era. But this mountain is also associated with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba’al who were murdered by Elijah. In the tradition of the Carmelite order, which traced its spiritual ancestry to the Hebrew Bible, the Mubraqa, near the village of Daliat al Carmel, is the site where this event took place. In 1868 this order built their monastery there to celebrate the victory of Elijah, as it was told in the Bible. Here we should pay attention to the sound Elijah heard, as it is described in 1Kings 18:44:

And it came to pass at the seventh hour that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea like a man’s hand and he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, prepare thy chariot and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

He hears the sound of the rain, which begins with the little cloud that resembled a man’s hand. The mystery of this cloud, which is a sign of the coming rain, was associated for years with the Virgin Mary, who was the patron of the Carmelite Order. This association establishes the connection between the Virgin Mother and Elijah.

With the fall of the kingdom of Jerusalem into the hands of the Muslims, the Carmelite monastery in Palestine was also abandoned.

For the Carmelite Order, and for San Juan de la Cruz and his contemporaries, Elijah’s sufferings were interpreted allegorically. The Carmelites were thus considered a community which devoted itself to this figure. In many ways, the well-known book, Liber, was a work which continues the relationship between the OT and the NT. Here it is an important point that must be made. In his poetry, as well as in his theological essays, San Juan continues the devoted, contemplative life which originally was the life of the members of the Carmelite order. They wished to imitate the life of Elijah, according to their custom, which had been established in the thirteenth century (1210). He and Santa Teresa separated themselves from the old order and became more independent. His work, The Ascent of Mount Carmel, and his theological works, draw the focus of his readers to the ‘place’ where God does the choosing and where God selects His chosen people. As we find in David Lewis’ 1922 translation of The Ascent of Mount Carmel, San Juan says,

The third kind are certain special places which God has chosen that men may there call upon Him to serve Him. Such a place was Mount Sinai where He gave His Law unto Moses. Such also was that place which He
showed unto Abraham where the patriarch was to sacrifice his son. And such, too, was Mount Horeb whither He commanded our father Elias to go, and there He was to show Himself unto him.

In his poetry he follows the main perception of the Church and of the Jewish interpretation of the *Song of Songs*. His commentary speaks about the ‘mystical journey’ and, within it, about the ‘spiritual marriage’. Indeed, these two traditions, Judaism and Christianity, view these *Songs* a bit differently, as the Jews viewed it as a relationship between the People of Israel and God, while Christians viewed it as one between Christ and the Church. And these two concepts, along with concept of the soul and God, all appear in the western mystical tradition. In Colin Thompson’s work we find,

*It is this tradition which explains why the poetic voice of San Juan’s verse is so often the feminine “esposa” in dialogue with her “esposo”.*

It is the same ‘dialogue’ found in the *Book of Songs*.

Biblical themes appear frequently in san Juan’s poetry. The Exodus from Egypt is one of his main topics. He points out the episode where Moses speaks to himself in the cleft of the rock (*Ex*. 33:20.). In the Jewish tradition, the belief is that a person cannot see God and still live. But in his work he also discussed some other Biblical figures. For example, he appreciates the father Elias (Elijah) who is, as this tradition suggests, is the founder of the Carmelite Order. Elijah is portrayed as having had his own vision of God, which he experienced in the ‘*still small voice*’.

However, the allegorical interpretations of the *Song of Songs* began first in the time of Philo, during the first century C.E. From this Jewish domain, we also find Origen, in the third century, had accepted the Jewish interpretation that the *Songs* are representative of the ‘groom’ as being God and of the ‘bride’ as being the Church, or as being the ‘New Israel’. It is clear that San Juan read these *Songs*, which he interpreted as being divine poetry, and which he then expounded upon in his interpretations.

San Juan also tried to deal with the Jewish tradition’s concept that “no man shall see God and live”. That notion was presented in the Biblical narrative, but, in his poetry, San Juan discusses two events.

One event that San Juan explored is focused on when Elijah heard “the still small voice” but then “wrapped his face and went out.” (10:13.). The second event he examines is focused on when Paul heard the “unspeakable”. Then, in his theological writings, he continues to deal with the verse of the ‘bride’ singing in her “voice of sweet”, which he interpreted as being akin to the “whisper of the amorous gales.” He suggests that readers consider two words: *gale* and *whis-
per. The gale is understood to mean “to blow amorously when it strikes deliciously”, while whisper signifies “the substantial intelligence”. Elijah, in his vision, experienced God in a thin, delicate whisper of air that Elijah heard while he was in the cave. The “still small voice” is understood to be a “whispering of gentle wind”, since,

Knowledge is begotten in the understanding by a subtitle and delicate communication of the spirit.

The same is with Paul, when he related to the great event of the revelation that he experienced. He did not say, ‘I perceived the secret words of God’ but, instead, he said,

…I heard unspeakable words which it is not doubtful for a man to utter. (2Cor. 12:4.).

Both Paul and Elijah experienced God through the “whisper of the gentle air”. Juan concludes his presentation of the parallelism between the spiritual experience of Elijah and the one experienced by Paul by stating that,

…the intelligible truth cometh by spiritual hearing.

Elijah covered his face in the mountain upon hearing God’s voice, just as Moses had done. On this particular act we find Paul stating:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the thing which God hath prepared for those who love Him. (1Cor. 2:9.).

These two phenomena in Judaism, the one where Moses encountered God on Mount Sinai, and the second event, when Elijah encountered God’s voice, each emphasizes that when these two prophets felt the presence of God, each had covered his face. In Moses’ case it is said:

And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look upon God. (Ex. 3:8.).

and Elijah is the one who covered his face only after he heard God’s voice. In both cases, there is a disconnect between the spiritual and the sublime and of what existed in the reality of the prophet. This disconnection from the prophet’s reality is shown in both cases, as Moses ‘hid’ his face and Elijah ‘wrapped’ himself inside his mantle. But the question is: What was that ‘voice’ each had heard? The Jewish and Christian perception is that the ‘voice’ these two prophets heard was a ‘whispering’. But in the narrative of Elijah, we read that after he heard the “still small voice”,

And it was so when Elijah heard it.
So, the question becomes, What did Elijah hear? Did he hear the ‘whisper’, or, ‘susurrus’, or, ‘the spirit of God’, as it passed over him? And what had Moses heard? The ‘voice’ Moses heard tells him,

...put off thy shoes...

and the ‘voice’ Moses heard had trembled.

If we turn our attention to Job, Eliphaz describes the ‘divine voice’ by saying,

...there was silence, and I heard a voice.

What is the meaning of these words? Is there a disconnection, or a break, here as we find in the episodes of Moses and Elijah? Maybe this is a very powerful, mystical experience that the ‘voice’ gives to its listeners. Perhaps this mystical feeling is related to the listener being in a disconnected state from his own world, from his own reality. This sense of disconnection is in the ‘silence’. But perhaps another view is correct in stating that the text presents a deep and great expectation. And to experience this great expectation, then one should reach the state of complete submission to God. To experience and to reach this special ‘silence’, or, d’ma-ma, one has to give up one’s essence, as it is found described in the Book of Psalms:

le-kha du-my-ya te-hil-la

The Aramaic text translates this verse as,

Before you silence is considered praise.

In Rashi’s interpretation of this verse, he shares,

The silence is a praise for you since there is no limit for praising you.

The same perception is shared by another interpreter, who says:

Silence is considered for you a praise since there is no way to limit your praise.

The King James’ version translates the Hebrew verse above as,

O thou who hearest prayer.

The Hebrew text, in fact, suggests that silence is equivalent to praise. Since we are examining two nouns here, then the noun du-my-ya, is the silence, or, d’ma-ma, which comes before the ‘voice’. The ‘praise’ is the ‘voice’ which comes after the ‘silence’, or d’ma-ma. But these ‘silences’ are not occurring one after the other, but, instead, they point out that sometimes a person needs to ‘keep silence’ and that this special ‘silence’ sometimes allows one to express a great excitement, or
to undergo the mystical experience, not through the use of words but, instead, through an absolute silence. Here we can conclude that a mystical experience is not one that is not found in noise, or in fire, or in trembling, or in any concrete image, but, instead, it is found in a special silence which has the power to make the bones of the mystic tremble. At that moment, only the person who is in the midst of this special trance is able to feel its power. Such absolute silence offers the person experiencing it a reason to accept the ‘divine light’.

We are told that in early Islam, among the companions of the prophet Muhammad, that there were people who wanted to search for the religious law which was addressed by the prophet. These people were striving to pay attention to their souls and they tried to harmonize between their internal and their external experiences. It is suggested that a movement of ascetics developed and they renounced the pleasures of the earthly world and all of its luxuries. In many ways, they even imitated the earlier Christian ascetics. In their teachings they emphasized the love of Allah, as it is found expressed in the Qur’an:

Allah will bring a people whom he will love and they will love him. (5:54.).

The intensity of these ascetics’ relationships was expressed by using poetry and by playing music. The music and poems describe the love relationship with Allah through hearing, which also brought them to the state of ecstasy. Yet, it is important to note a very important chapter in the Qur’an, entitled al-Qadar, or, ‘the Night of Decree (Fate)’. This is the ‘night of power’, which is connected to every aspect, as we find it described in the following verse:

Therein (that night) is decreed every matter of ordainments. (44:4.).

The meaning of this verse, which also appears in Chapter 97, is that all earthly matters, such as death, birth, calamities, and provisions, all that is said and which will come to be in the future, is already decreed by Allah. This later chapter 97 is a model of the spiritual experience of the prophet and it made him an exemplary spiritual model for the Sufi.

Early Muslim Sages did not stress the mystical experience of Elijah. He is presented in the Qur’an as being one of the ‘messengers’, who was one of “our believing servants” (37:123-132.). But, as much as Ilias (Elijah) has his name in the Qur’an, and his story therein follows, in some respects, what we find recorded in the OT, the oral tradition took the story in another direction, as we can see in the passage found in 18:60, which presents Moses as he spoke to his servant:

I will not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas.

This tradition named the new person, “our servant”, Khidhr. However, this
name does not appear in the Qur'an. It is only in the translated text of the Qur'an (18:66.) that Khidhr’s name appears inserted in parantheses, as is shown below,

*qal la hu musa,*

So Moses said to him.(Khidhr)

At this point, the Islamic oral tradition not only identified al Khidhr with Elijah, but it also defined him as the ‘one who has patience’. It also defined Moses as the ‘one who lacks patience’. That notion is shared in the following hadith:

Allah’s messenger said, We wished Musa had more patience so that Allah might have described to us more about their story. *(Sahih, 249.)*

In the work of the Sufi poet Jalalu addin Rumi, some references are made to Jesus. One example is,

When someone asks you: ‘How did Christ quicken the dead?’ Then give me a kiss in his presence, ‘Thus.’

Various interpretations can be made of this. The most common one is that Christ is a ‘breath’ that grants the receiver new life. Some other poems of the Sufis view Jesus as akin to being a ‘spring’. This image plays an important role in this tradition’s developing ‘relationship’ between Jesus and al-Khidhr, where Jesus is understood to be the ‘breath of life’ and al-Khidhr is understood to be the one ‘who seeks the water of life’. This combination of images is connected to each of these two traditions’ belief in the resurrection of the dead. Sufi poets derived their imagery from the Qur’an. They also paid attention to some episodes, as well as to some allusions, that occur in the NT. They related many sayings and statements to Jesus. For example, the Sufi poets quoted this saying that is attributed to Jesus:

The world is a bridge, pass over it but do not stay on it.

It is said that this saying was written on the gate of Akbar’s palace. In the hadith, there is a response to the story that appears in the Gospels when Jesus was reported to have walked on water on the lake of Gennesaret. That response shares what the prophet Muhammad stated:

If my brother Jesus had had more *yaqin* (certainty), he would have walked in the air.

In the Sufi tradition, Ibn ‘Arabi (b. 1165) maintained a special relationship with al-Khidhr, who initiated him into the ‘Divine mysteries’. Indeed, in the Islamic tradition, al-Khidhr is a very important spiritual figure who was related to Elias
(Elijah), the Biblical prophet. Because he initiated the people into a ‘spiritual life’, Ibn ‘Arabi became the disciple of al-Khidhr. In 1204, when he visited the city of Mosul, he received the ‘mantle’, or, khirqah (‘tatter’, ‘rag’, ‘polishing cloth’) from Ali ibn Jam’i, who had received it directly from al-Khidhr.

The episode depicting al-Khidhr as an instructor is strongly linked to the Jewish tradition where, in the early Biblical literature, we find stories about the Jewish Sages who had studied with Elijah. The episode of the mantle is related to the transfer of spiritual power that was passed in the Jewish tradition from Elijah to Elisha.

These three traditions borrowed religious and cultural values from each other. Despite their long history of animosity and conflict with each other, they were close to one another, and, in some places, their followers lived with one another as neighbors. Their conflicts never prevented these people from borrowing intellectual and religious concepts from each other. However, the process of borrowing was not restricted to assimilation and acceptance. Instead, it involved a longer process of examination and re-examination, which was completed by the Sages in each tradition. Only when the respective Sages approved were the borrowed aspects from the other traditions allowed to become accepted as a part of each of the other traditions. Yet, when these traditions are dealing with the concept of Messianism and with the concept of the Messiah, each tradition is still searching for the amado, and each tradition is still unwilling to accept the idea that this amado is an ideal. Instead, these traditions see their search for the amado as being their unique search for a ‘real’ saviour, and not as a simple search, nor as a quest for a better life, or for a more respectful relationship to be shared among all the people in God’s universe.