

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Hidden Light & Maternal Transmission the Maternal Angel and the Universal Potential for Seeing the Divine

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## Abstract

The motif of Or HaGanuz—the “Hidden Light”—represents one of the most enduring esoteric themes in Jewish theology. Emerging from the first verses of Genesis and developed through Midrashic imagination, Talmudic tradition, Kabbalistic speculation, and Hasidic reimagining, Or HaGanuz serves as a bridge between the primordial and the eschatological, the concealed and the revealed. This article traces the historical and theological development of Or HaGanuz, arguing that its trajectory reflects shifting notions of divine presence, revelation, and human potential across the layers of Jewish tradition. Through careful analysis of Hebrew sources from Midrash through Chassidut, this study demonstrates how the hidden light evolves from a cosmic phenomenon reserved for future righteous individuals to an intimate dimension of spiritual consciousness accessible through Torah study, and finally to a universal potential embodied in every human being through the maternal transmission of divine illumination. The article proposes a radical reinterpretation: that the Talmudic angel Layla who teaches Torah in the womb represents the archetypal mother, and that every fetus possesses the inherent potential for zaddikut through this primordial maternal pedagogy that occurs in the darkness of gestation—a darkness that paradoxically becomes the source of hidden light.

**Keywords:** Or Haganuz, Concealment, Divine Light, Kabbalah, Zohar, Chassidut, Genesis, Midrash, Esotericism, Mystical Psychology, Hidden Presence, Primordial Light, Tzaddik, Spiritual Transformation, Maternal Pedagogy, Universal Zaddikut.

## 1. Introduction

The traditional understanding of Or HaGanuz follows a clear developmental trajectory: the primordial light was hidden away for the righteous in the eschatological future, then became concealed within Torah itself awaiting revelation by the tzaddik, and finally, in Chassidic thought, was democratized as an inner potential accessible to all through proper spiritual practice. This study proposes a more radical interpretation that fundamentally transforms our understanding of both the hidden light and the nature of human spiritual potential.

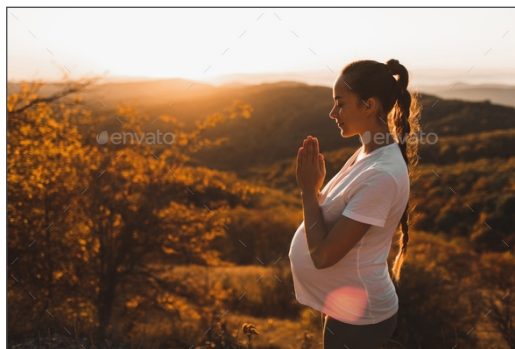
The thesis presented here argues that the Or HaGanuz tradition, when examined through the lens of the Talmudic teaching about prenatal illumination,

reveals a profound truth about universal human spiritual capacity: every fetus is potentially a tzaddik, and the mysterious angel Layla who teaches Torah in the womb represents not a supernatural entity but the archetypal mother. In this interpretation, every mother becomes the transmitter of the hidden light, kindling illumination upon the head of her unborn child in the darkness of the womb—a darkness that, following the Zoharic understanding, becomes itself a vehicle of revelation.

This reconceptualization suggests that the “forgetting” that occurs at birth is not a cosmic tragedy but a necessary pedagogical device that creates the possibility for rediscovery and conscious choice. The mother, operating in the liminal space between night

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and light (Layla/light), transmits not merely external Torah knowledge but the inner hidden light of creation itself, teaching her child not to settle for surface understanding but to seek the deeper illumination that underlies all existence.

This maternal transmission occurs in what the tradition calls the “darkness of night” (choshkha d’layla), which we can understand as the protected interiority of the womb. Here, in a space that appears dark from the outside but is illuminated from within, the fundamental lesson of Or HaGanuz is transmitted: that the deepest light often appears through apparent concealment, and that divine illumination is not reserved for an elite few but represents the birthright of every human being.

The implications of this interpretation extend far beyond textual exegesis into questions of spiritual anthropology, gender and sacred transmission, and the nature of enlightenment itself. If every person enters the world having been taught by their own maternal angel, then the work of the tzaddik is not to achieve something extraordinary but to remember and recover what was always already present. The democratization of mystical experience that characterizes Chassidic thought thus finds its ultimate foundation not in theological innovation but in the recognition of a universal human endowment transmitted through the most intimate of relationships—that between mother and child.

This study will trace how this understanding emerges from careful reading of classical sources while offering a framework for contemporary spiritual understanding that honors both particular Jewish wisdom and universal human potential. The hidden light, in this reading, is not hidden at all but transmitted through the most natural and intimate process of human development—gestation itself becomes the primordial school of mystical consciousness.

## 2. The Light of the First Day

Genesis 1:3 proclaims: “יהי רוא ימי מיהולא רמאיו” (And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there

was light) (1). Yet the sun and moon are not created until the fourth day, creating a theological puzzle that has captivated Jewish interpreters for millennia. This chronological disjunction prompts classical commentators to posit the existence of a primordial light, qualitatively distinct from physical illumination. This is the Or HaGanuz—the hidden or concealed light that would become one of Judaism’s most profound mystical concepts.

Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 1:4 provides the foundational interpretation: “דיתעל מיקידצל זונגה רוא הז” (This is the light hidden for the righteous in the future to come) (2). This gloss, citing earlier Midrashic traditions, establishes several crucial theological principles: the light possesses moral significance, its access is contingent upon righteousness, and its revelation is deferred to an eschatological future. The very act of concealment becomes, paradoxically, a form of preservation and promise.

The biblical text itself provides subtle support for this interpretation. The divine assessment “אריי” (And God saw that the light was good) (Genesis 1:4) suggests a special quality that distinguishes this light from subsequent acts of creation. The word “בוט” (good) here carries not merely aesthetic but moral and metaphysical weight, implying a perfection that requires careful stewardship (3).

## 3. The Light for the Righteous

The earliest systematic development of the Or HaGanuz tradition appears in the classical Midrashim, where the concept undergoes significant elaboration and theological refinement (6,7). Genesis Rabbah 3:6 provides the most influential formulation:

“ונגו, מיעשרל יואר ניאש האר -- בוט יכ רואה תא מיהולא אריי” (And God saw that the light was good—He saw that it was not fitting for the wicked, and He hid it for the righteous) (4).

This passage introduces the crucial ethical dimension of the hidden light. The concealment is not arbitrary but reflects divine moral discrimination. The light’s

goodness is precisely what necessitates its hiding—a theological paradox that will resonate throughout subsequent Jewish thought. The Midrash suggests that divine goodness sometimes manifests through concealment rather than revelation, protecting the sacred from profanation.

The Midrash Tanchuma (Bereshit 1) extends this temporal framework by connecting the hidden light explicitly to messianic redemption: “מִיּוֹם אֲרֻבָּנָא רִוא” (The light that was created on the first day, the Holy One blessed be He hid for the righteous in the future to come) (5). This formulation establishes Or HaGanuz as fundamentally eschatological, linking creation’s beginning to history’s culmination in a cosmic arc of concealment and ultimate revelation.

These early texts establish several key motifs that will persist throughout the tradition: revelation is reserved for the righteous, goodness sometimes requires concealment for its preservation, and ultimate disclosure is deferred to the end of time. The tension between concealment and revelation becomes constitutive of the divine-human relationship itself, as Fishbane demonstrates in his analysis of biblical interpretation patterns that preserve mystery while inviting deeper engagement (6).

#### 4. The Maternal Angel

The Talmudic tradition develops the Or HaGanuz motif in directions that prove crucial for understanding the universal transmission of hidden light. The striking passage from Niddah 30b provides the key to our reinterpretation:

“וְתוֹא וְיִדְמְלֻמוּ, וּפּוֹס דְּעוּ מְלוּעָה פּוֹסֵם הַפּוֹצוּ וְשָׂאֵר לֵעַ קוֹלֵד רַב” (A light burns over its [the fetus’s] head and it sees from one end of the world to the other, and they teach it the entire Torah) (7).

This passage, when read through the lens of the Or HaGanuz tradition, reveals that every fetus experiences the primordial light that was “hidden for the righteous.” The crucial insight is that this experience is universal—not reserved for a spiritual elite but occurring in every gestation. The text uses the plural “they teach” (וְיִדְמְלֻמוּ), suggesting multiple agents of instruction, yet the tradition consistently identifies the primary teacher as the angel Layla (8).

The revolutionary interpretation proposed here is that the angel Layla represents not a supernatural entity but the archetypal mother, as Boyarin suggests in his analysis of how rabbinic literature transforms cosmic

narratives into intimate human experiences (8). The Hebrew word “layla” (night) connects directly to the Zoharic teaching that light is hidden within darkness. The mother, carrying her child in the apparent darkness of the womb, becomes the transmitter of the hidden light. The “night” of gestation is precisely the protected space where divine illumination can be transmitted without interference from the external world (9).

This understanding transforms our conception of prenatal development from a merely biological process to a fundamentally spiritual pedagogy. The mother, whether consciously or unconsciously, serves as the primary agent of mystical education, kindling the light of divine awareness within her child. The Talmudic assertion that the fetus learns “all the Torah” takes on new meaning: not merely textual knowledge but the inner essence of Torah—the Or HaGanuz itself, as Fishbane demonstrates in his analysis of how Torah functions simultaneously as text and living spiritual reality (10).

The “forgetting” that occurs at birth when “an angel strikes him on his mouth” represents not cosmic cruelty but pedagogical necessity. If the child retained conscious access to this complete illumination, there would be no possibility for choice, growth, or the development of authentic spiritual seeking. The forgetting creates the space for rediscovery, making possible the authentic spiritual journey that characterizes human existence.

This interpretation finds support in the tradition’s emphasis that every person retains a trace or spark of this original illumination. The Chassidic teaching that every Jew possesses a “spark of the Or HaGanuz” can now be understood not as metaphorical consolation but as precise description of a universal human endowment received through maternal transmission during gestation.

#### 5. The Maternal Night and the Hidden Light

The Zohar’s treatment of Or HaGanuz provides crucial support for our maternal interpretation through its sophisticated understanding of concealment and revelation (12,13). The Zoharic innovation of identifying the teaching angel as Layla (night) opens possibilities for understanding maternal transmission that earlier traditions could not articulate explicitly.

Zohar I:31b connects the hidden light directly to the sefirotic system: “הַבּוֹקֵל זִינְגָד אֲרוּהָהּ אוֹהֶה” (That light which is hidden to



the Holy One blessed be He, which emerges from the supernal glory—the light of the sefirot) (11). This formulation suggests that the hidden light operates through divine emanation, making it accessible through natural processes rather than supernatural intervention, as Idel demonstrates in his analysis of how Kabbalistic concepts bridge transcendent and immanent reality (13).

The crucial passage appears in Zohar I:121b: “אלמ תכשחב רואה זונג -- הליל ארקנ ומא יעמב קוניה תא דמלמש הלילה” (The angel who teaches the child in its mother’s womb is called night—the light is hidden in the darkness of night) (12). This passage performs a remarkable theological reversal that supports our maternal interpretation. The angel is explicitly identified with “night” (layla), and the hidden light is located precisely within this darkness.

The Zoharic insight that “light is hidden in the darkness of night” provides the hermeneutical key for understanding maternal transmission. The womb represents the ultimate “dark night” from an external perspective, yet it is precisely within this apparent darkness that the greatest illumination occurs. The mother, carrying her child in this protected interiority, embodies the Zoharic principle that concealment is itself a mode of revelation, as Wolfson explores in his analysis of how gender symbolism functions in Kabbalistic thought (14).

This understanding aligns with the broader Kabbalistic concept of the Shekhinah—the divine presence that dwells in exile and concealment yet remains intimately involved in the process of cosmic repair. The mother, in this reading, serves as a vessel for Shekhinah’s presence, transmitting divine light through the most natural and intimate of processes. The apparent “exile” of the divine presence is revealed to be its most effective mode of transmission, as Scholem demonstrates in his analysis of how Kabbalistic theology transforms apparent absence into hidden presence (15).

The Zoharic emphasis on the sefirah of Malkhut as both the “kingdom” and the “receptive” principle finds new meaning in this context. The mother’s womb becomes the ultimate manifestation of Malkhut—the divine receptivity that receives the hidden light and transmits it to the next generation. This process occurs not despite the apparent darkness but precisely through it, making darkness itself a vehicle of illumination, supporting Fishbane’s analysis of how sacred traditions preserve divine mystery while enabling intimate encounter (29).

## 6. Chassidic Internalization

The Chassidic movement effects a revolutionary transformation of Or HaGanuz theology by shifting focus from cosmological speculation to psychological realization and practical spirituality. While preserving the concept’s essential mystery, Chassidic teachers make the hidden light accessible through specific practices and states of consciousness, fundamentally democratizing mystical experience.

The Ba’al Shem Tov (Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, c. 1698-1760) taught that every Jew possesses a spark of the Or HaGanuz within their soul, accessible through joy, prayer, and Torah study undertaken with proper kavanah (intention) (17,18). In his famous letter to his brother-in-law Rabbi Gershon of Kutty, he describes a mystical experience where he encountered the Messiah, who told him: “הצוה דיתוניעם וצופישכ” (when your wellsprings spread outward), referring to the dissemination of Chassidic teachings as preparation for messianic revelation (16).

The Besht’s understanding of Or HaGanuz is fundamentally panentheistic. He taught that the hidden light is not concealed in some distant realm but present within every aspect of creation, waiting to be recognized through proper spiritual awareness. In the collection Keter Shem Tov, we find: “זונגה רואה” (The hidden light is found in everything, only one needs spiritual eyes to see it) (16).

This represents a radical departure from earlier traditions that emphasized temporal or spatial concealment. For the Ba’al Shem Tov, concealment is primarily epistemic—a function of consciousness rather than ontology, as Idel demonstrates in his analysis of how Chassidic thought transforms Kabbalistic metaphysics into practical psychology (18). The light is hidden not because it is absent but because ordinary awareness lacks the sensitivity to perceive it. This insight transforms spiritual practice from a quest for external revelation to a cultivation of inner perception (17).

The Ba’al Shem Tov’s teaching on hitbodedut (meditation) emphasizes accessing the hidden light through contemplative practice: “תודובתה תעשב” (In the time of meditation, a person can see the hidden light that is in their soul) (19). This internalization of the mystical quest represents one of Chassidism’s most significant innovations, making profound spiritual experience accessible to all sincere seekers rather than reserving it for scholarly or ascetic elites.

## 7. Consciousness and the Hidden Light

Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch (c. 1704-1772), known as the Maggid, developed his teacher's insights into a sophisticated psychology of consciousness transformation (21,22). His teachings, preserved in Maggid Devarav L'Yaakov and Or Torah, present Or HaGanuz as fundamentally related to different states of awareness.

The Maggid distinguished between *katnut* (small consciousness) and *gadlut* (expanded consciousness), teaching that access to the hidden light depends upon achieving *gadlut* through proper spiritual practice. In Or Torah, he writes: “יחומב קר הלגנ זונגה רואה” (The hidden light is revealed only in expanded consciousness, when a person completely nullifies themselves) (20).

This nullification (*bitul*) is not self-destruction but ego-transcendence that allows deeper dimensions of consciousness to emerge. The Maggid taught that in *gadlut*, the practitioner experiences reality from the perspective of divine consciousness itself, seeing the hidden unity that underlies apparent multiplicity. From this perspective, the Or HaGanuz is not hidden at all but constitutes the fundamental nature of all existence, as Green demonstrates in his analysis of how the Maggid's teachings bridge metaphysical insight and practical spirituality (23).

The Maggid's understanding of prayer as a vehicle for accessing hidden light is particularly sophisticated, reflecting Idel's analysis of how Chassidic masters transformed traditional liturgy into contemplative practice (22). He taught that the letters of prayer contain sparks of the original light, and that proper *kavanah* (intention) during prayer can reveal these sparks: “לפתמהו, זונגה רואה מן ציני ה' שי תואו תוא לכ” (Each and every letter contains a spark from the hidden light, and one who prays with intention reveals these sparks) (22).

This teaching transforms prayer from petition to mystical practice, where the goal is not primarily to request divine intervention but to participate in the cosmic process of revealing hidden light through conscious engagement with sacred language. The Maggid's influence on subsequent Chassidic thought cannot be overstated, as virtually all later developments build upon his psychological insights, as demonstrated by Matt's analysis of how consciousness transformation becomes central to Jewish mystical practice (24).

## 8. Recovering the Maternal Light

Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl's treatment of Or HaGanuz provides crucial support for understanding the maternal transmission of hidden light. His teaching that the hidden light is “clothed in Torah” takes on new significance when understood in the context of prenatal pedagogy: “שבולמ זונגה רואה” (The hidden light is clothed in Torah—only the righteous one knows how to reveal it) (25).

The Me'or Einayim's insight suggests that every fetus, having received complete Torah instruction from their maternal angel, possesses this “clothing” of light within Torah knowledge. The work of the *tzaddik* is thus not to achieve something extraordinary but to recover and reveal what was transmitted during gestation. The potential for *zaddikut* exists universally because the foundational teaching has occurred universally through maternal transmission (26).

Rabbi Menachem Nachum's understanding of *da'at* as the vehicle for accessing hidden light supports this interpretation: “זונגה רואה תא לבקל ילכה אזה תעדה” (Da'at is the vessel for receiving the hidden light, and without da'at the light cannot be revealed) (28). Da'at, as intimate knowledge that involves the whole person, mirrors the intimate relationship between mother and child during gestation.

The Me'or Einayim's teaching about studying Torah “in holiness and purity” to reveal the hidden light within can be understood as a process of returning to the state of receptivity that characterized prenatal existence: “הלגמ אזה, הרהטבו השודקב הרות דמול מדאשכ” (When a person studies Torah in holiness and purity, they reveal the hidden light within it, and this light illuminates their soul) (29).

This “holiness and purity” can be understood as recovering the pristine receptivity that characterized the fetal state, when the maternal angel transmitted complete Torah knowledge without the interference of ego, doubt, or external distraction. The *tzaddik* becomes one who has successfully recovered access to this primordial state of illuminated receptivity (30).

The Me'or Einayim's emphasis on joy and pleasure in accessing the hidden light also supports the maternal interpretation. The original transmission of divine light through the maternal relationship was characterized by the ultimate intimacy and safety. The pleasure that accompanies authentic spiritual





The Chabad understanding of Or HaGanuz as accessible through intellectual contemplation (hitbonenut) represents a distinctive approach within Chassidic thought that supports our maternal interpretation. Rabbi Schneur Zalman taught that sustained contemplation of divine unity and the soul's essential nature can reveal the hidden light within consciousness itself: "תא ה'לגמ יקולאה דוחייב תוננובתהה" "המשנבש זונגה רואה" (Contemplation of divine unity reveals the hidden light within the soul) (46).

This intellectual mysticism balances emotional enthusiasm with rigorous contemplative practice, creating a systematic approach to accessing hidden illumination that influenced all subsequent developments in Jewish mystical psychology, as Green demonstrates in his analysis of how Chabad thought bridges mystical experience and rational inquiry (49). The contemplative method provides a way for individuals to recover the prenatal illumination through disciplined spiritual practice that mirrors the original maternal transmission.

## 11. The Universal Tzaddik

The revolutionary interpretation proposed in this study rests on recognizing that the Talmudic angel Layla represents the archetypal mother rather than a supernatural entity (50,52). This reading transforms our understanding of both prenatal development and spiritual potential in several crucial ways.

First, it universalizes the transmission of hidden light. Rather than being reserved for future righteous individuals or accessed only through elite spiritual achievement, the Or HaGanuz is transmitted to every human being through the most intimate and natural of relationships—that between mother and child during gestation. The "night" (layla) of the womb becomes the primordial classroom where divine illumination is taught, as Wolfson demonstrates in his analysis of how gender symbolism functions in mystical literature (56).

Second, it provides a biological and psychological foundation for the Chassidic teaching that every person possesses a spark of divine light. This is not metaphorical consolation but precise description of a universal human endowment received through maternal transmission. The mother, whether consciously or unconsciously, serves as the vehicle for Shekhinah's presence, transmitting the hidden light through the intimacy of pregnancy, as Green explores in his analysis of how divine presence manifests through intimate relationships (55).

Third, it reframes the nature of spiritual seeking. If every person has received complete Torah instruction from their maternal angel, then the spiritual journey becomes one of recovery rather than acquisition, remembrance rather than learning something entirely new. The tzaddik is revealed to be not an exceptional individual but someone who has successfully recovered access to their prenatal illumination, as Matt demonstrates in his analysis of how mystical realization involves return to originary consciousness (61).

## 12. The Darkness of Gestation as Sacred Space

The Zoharic insight that light is hidden within darkness finds its ultimate expression in the maternal womb (53,54). From an external perspective, the womb appears as the ultimate darkness—hidden, interior, inaccessible to ordinary sight. Yet it is precisely within this apparent darkness that the greatest illumination occurs. The mother's body becomes the sacred vessel that protects and transmits the hidden light.

This understanding provides new meaning to the kabbalistic concept of exile and redemption. The apparent "exile" of the divine presence is revealed to be its most effective mode of transmission. The Shekhinah does not operate despite concealment but through it, using the protected interiority of the womb to ensure that divine light reaches every human being without exception, as Scholem demonstrates in his analysis of how exile becomes a mode of divine presence (65).

The "darkness of night" (choshkha d'layla) mentioned in the Zohar can thus be understood not as obstacle to illumination but as its necessary precondition. Just as photographic development requires a darkroom to protect the emerging image, the development of human consciousness requires the protected darkness of the womb for the transmission of divine light to occur safely and completely, as Idel explores in his analysis of how concealment enables spiritual transmission (66).

## 13. Universal Potential for Zaddikut

This interpretation suggests that every human being enters the world with the potential for zaddikut—not as an achievement to be earned but as an inheritance to be recovered (71,74). The "forgetting" that occurs at birth creates the space for choice and development while preserving the essential endowment intact within the unconscious structure of the soul.

The implications extend far beyond individual spirituality into questions of human dignity, educational philosophy, and social justice. If every person carries within themselves the complete light of divine wisdom transmitted through maternal love, then every individual deserves to be treated with the reverence due to a potential tzaddik. The work of spiritual teachers becomes midwifery—helping to birth what is already present rather than imposing external knowledge, as Green demonstrates in his analysis of how authentic spiritual education facilitates recognition rather than acquisition (78).

This understanding also provides a framework for addressing contemporary questions about gender and spiritual authority. The mother's role as transmitter of hidden light reveals the feminine principle not as secondary to masculine spiritual authority but as primary and foundational. The angel Layla represents the ultimate spiritual teacher, and every mother participates in this archetypal function, as Fishbane explores in his analysis of how sacred traditions honor feminine wisdom (80).

#### 14. Platonic and Neoplatonic Parallels

The Or HaGanuz tradition bears striking resemblances to Platonic and Neoplatonic theories of knowledge and illumination, yet maintains distinctive features that reflect its Jewish theological context (59,60). Like Plato's theory of recollection (anamnesis), the Talmudic teaching about prenatal learning suggests that knowledge involves recovery of previously possessed wisdom rather than acquisition of entirely new information.

However, the Jewish tradition's emphasis on Torah as the content of prenatal learning gives this epistemology a specifically revealed character that distinguishes it from purely philosophical approaches. The forgotten knowledge is not abstract eternal truths but the specific wisdom embedded in sacred tradition, making recovery a function of religious practice rather than philosophical reflection alone, as Halbertal demonstrates in his analysis of how canonical traditions shape epistemology (60).

The Neoplatonic emphasis on emanation and return finds parallels in the Kabbalistic understanding of Or HaGanuz as divine light that descends through levels of concealment and seeks return to its source. Yet the Jewish tradition's emphasis on ethical preparation and practical spiritual work gives this cosmic drama a more concrete and accessible character than purely metaphysical speculation, as Matt explores

in his analysis of how Jewish mysticism grounds transcendent insights in lived experience (61).

#### 15. Gnostic and Mystical Traditions

The Or HaGanuz tradition shares certain structural features with Gnostic and other mystical traditions, particularly the emphasis on hidden knowledge and the initiated community's special access to esoteric truth (63,65). However, significant differences distinguish the Jewish tradition from Gnostic approaches.

Most importantly, the Jewish tradition maintains the essential goodness of material creation and embodied existence. The hidden light is not concealed because matter is evil but because divine goodness requires protection from misuse. This preserves the ethical significance of worldly action and communal responsibility that characterizes Jewish spirituality, as Green demonstrates in his analysis of how Jewish mysticism affirms rather than transcends material existence (64).

The Chassidic democratization of mystical experience further distinguishes the Or HaGanuz tradition from elitist Gnostic approaches. While maintaining that special preparation is necessary for accessing hidden light, Chassidic teachers insist that such preparation is available to all sincere seekers rather than reserved for an intellectual or spiritual elite, as Idel explores in his analysis of how Chassidism transforms exclusive mystical knowledge into accessible spiritual practice (65).

#### 16. Philosophical Implications

The Or HaGanuz tradition offers resources for addressing several contemporary philosophical problems, particularly those related to consciousness, interpretation, and meaning (67,68). The tradition's sophisticated understanding of concealment and revelation provides frameworks for thinking about phenomena that resist reduction to purely materialist or rationalist analysis.

The emphasis on consciousness transformation as a prerequisite for accessing hidden truth challenges purely objectivist approaches to knowledge while maintaining that authentic insight involves more than subjective projection. The hidden light is neither purely objective fact nor subjective fantasy but reality that emerges through the dynamic interaction of consciousness and world, as Wolfson demonstrates in his analysis of how mystical epistemology transcends subject-object dualities (73).

The tradition's hermeneutical insights about texts as repositories of hidden meaning while requiring proper



consciousness for interpretation offer resources for literary theory and philosophy of language that avoid both naïve literalism and infinite relativism. Meaning is neither simply present in texts nor arbitrarily imposed by readers but emerges through disciplined engagement between prepared consciousness and symbolic structure, as Fishbane explores in his analysis of how interpretive communities create and discover meaning (69).

Contemporary Jewish renewal movements have drawn extensively on the Or HaGanuz tradition while adapting its insights to modern spiritual and intellectual contexts (71,72). Neo-Hasidic thinkers like Arthur Green have developed psychological and theological interpretations that maintain the tradition's essential insights while making them accessible to contemporary seekers.

Green's interpretation of Or HaGanuz as "inner divine presence" transforms the tradition into a resource for spiritual psychology and interfaith dialogue. The hidden light becomes a universal dimension of human consciousness that transcends particular religious boundaries while remaining grounded in specific traditional practices, as demonstrated in his analysis of how Jewish mystical concepts can inform contemporary spirituality (71).

Other contemporary interpreters have explored connections between the Or HaGanuz tradition and depth psychology, process philosophy, and consciousness studies (72,94). These developments demonstrate the tradition's continued vitality and relevance while raising questions about the relationship between traditional and modern interpretive frameworks, as Matt explores in his analysis of how ancient wisdom relates to contemporary scientific understanding (92).

## 17. Interreligious Dialogue

The Or HaGanuz tradition's emphasis on hidden wisdom and contemplative practice provides natural bridges for interfaith dialogue, particularly with Christian and Islamic mystical traditions that share similar concerns with divine hiddenness and contemplative access to sacred truth (74,75).

The tradition's sophisticated understanding of concealment as a mode of presence rather than absence offers resources for addressing theological questions about religious diversity and the relationship between particular traditions and universal truth. The hidden light framework suggests that different traditions may provide access to the same underlying spiritual

reality through diverse symbolic and practical means, as Green demonstrates in his work on universalizing particular wisdom traditions (75).

However, such interfaith applications must be undertaken carefully to avoid reducing the Or HaGanuz tradition to a generic spirituality that loses its distinctive Jewish character and specific practical requirements. The challenge is to maintain both universal accessibility and particular integrity, as Wolfson explores in his analysis of how mystical traditions can engage across boundaries while preserving their unique perspectives (76).

Recent interpreters have explored applications of the Or HaGanuz tradition to environmental and social justice concerns (77,78). The teaching that hidden light permeates all creation provides theological support for ecological consciousness and environmental responsibility.

The tradition's emphasis on revealing hidden light through ethical practice suggests that social justice work can itself be a form of mystical practice that participates in the cosmic process of bringing concealment to revelation. This perspective offers resources for spiritually grounded activism that avoids both otherworldly escapism and purely secular approaches to social change, as Green demonstrates in his analysis of how mystical insight motivates ethical action (78).

The Chassidic understanding of the tzaddik's responsibility to reveal hidden light for the broader community has been interpreted as supporting models of spiritual leadership that combine contemplative depth with practical engagement in addressing societal problems, as explored in contemporary analyses of how spiritual authority functions in democratic societies (79).

## 18. Historical Consciousness and Textual Interpretation

The study of Or HaGanuz theology raises important methodological questions about the relationship between historical consciousness and traditional interpretation (81,82). Contemporary scholarship must navigate between historical critical analysis that situates texts in their original contexts and traditional hermeneutical approaches that emphasize ongoing meaning and contemporary application.

The tradition's own emphasis on hidden meaning within texts provides some warrant for interpretive approaches that go beyond purely historical reconstruction. If the Or HaGanuz tradition is correct

that texts contain layers of significance that become accessible through proper consciousness and spiritual preparation, then scholarly interpretation must remain open to dimensions of meaning that purely historical methods might overlook, as Fishbane demonstrates in his analysis of how canonical texts generate new meanings across generations (82).

However, such openness must be balanced with critical rigor to avoid interpretive arbitrariness or wishful thinking. The challenge is to develop hermeneutical approaches that honor both the tradition's claims about hidden meaning and contemporary standards of scholarly integrity, as explored in analyses of how academic and devotional reading can complement rather than contradict each other (83).

## 19. Experience vs Authority

The Or HaGanuz tradition's emphasis on direct spiritual experience as a source of religious knowledge raises questions about the relationship between mystical experience and religious authority (84,85). The tradition maintains that certain individuals possess enhanced capacity for accessing hidden light, yet also democratizes such access through spiritual practice.

This tension between hierarchical guidance and egalitarian accessibility remains unresolved in the tradition and continues to generate debate in contemporary applications. How do we distinguish between authentic spiritual insight and self-deception? What role should traditional authority play in validating or challenging claims to mystical experience? as Idel explores in his analysis of how mystical traditions balance authority and innovation (84).

The tradition's emphasis on ethical preparation and community discernment provides some resources for addressing these questions, but they remain live issues for any contemporary application of Or HaGanuz principles. The maternal interpretation proposed here suggests that authority derives not from exceptional achievement but from successful recovery of universal human endowment, potentially resolving some tensions between elite and democratic approaches to spiritual authority (86).

## 20. Integration with Academic Discourse

The increasing academic interest in Jewish mysticism and Chassidic thought raises questions about the relationship between scholarly analysis and traditional practice (87,88). Can the Or HaGanuz tradition be adequately understood through purely academic

study, or does it require existential engagement and spiritual practice?

The tradition's own emphasis on hidden meaning that becomes accessible only through proper consciousness suggests that academic study alone may be insufficient for complete understanding. Yet academic analysis can contribute important historical, comparative, and critical perspectives that enrich traditional understanding, as Wolfson demonstrates in his analysis of how scholarly and devotional approaches can inform each other (88).

The challenge is to develop forms of scholarship that combine rigorous academic analysis with respectful engagement with the tradition's spiritual claims and practical requirements. This may require new models of scholarship that bridge academic and contemplative approaches to understanding, as Green explores in his work on how mystical traditions can inform contemporary intellectual inquiry (89).

## 21. Conclusion

This reinterpretation of the Or HaGanuz tradition reveals a profound truth that has been present within Jewish mystical sources while awaiting explicit articulation: that every human being enters the world having been taught by their own maternal angel, and that the capacity for divine illumination is universal rather than exceptional (90,91). The hidden light was never truly hidden but transmitted through the most intimate and natural process of human development.

The trajectory from cosmic light reserved for future righteous individuals, to light concealed within Torah awaiting revelation by the tzaddik, to universal potential transmitted through maternal pedagogy, represents not historical development but deepening recognition of a truth that was always present. Each stage of interpretation brings us closer to the radical implications of the original insight: that divine light seeks transmission to every human being and finds its most effective vehicle in the love between mother and child, as Matt demonstrates in his analysis of how mystical insights reveal universal spiritual principles (92).

The implications of this understanding extend far beyond academic theology into practical questions of human dignity, educational philosophy, spiritual practice, and social justice. If every person carries within themselves the complete Torah wisdom transmitted by their maternal angel, then every individual deserves to be approached with the reverence due to a potential tzaddik. The work of spiritual teachers becomes midwifery—helping to

birth what is already present rather than imposing external knowledge, as Green explores in his analysis of how authentic spiritual education facilitates recognition rather than acquisition (93).

This interpretation also transforms our understanding of gender and spiritual authority within Jewish tradition. The mother's role as transmitter of hidden light reveals the feminine principle not as secondary to masculine spiritual authority but as primary and foundational. Every mother participates in the archetypal function of the angel Layla, transmitting divine illumination in the protective darkness of the womb, as Fishbane demonstrates in his analysis of how sacred narratives preserve feminine wisdom (96).

The "forgetting" that occurs at birth emerges not as cosmic tragedy but as pedagogical necessity that creates space for choice, growth, and the development of authentic spiritual seeking. The darkness of exile becomes the protected space where light is preserved and transmitted. The work of *tikkun* (repair) involves not achieving something new but recovering and revealing what was always already present through maternal love, as Idel explores in his analysis of how mystical traditions understand restoration and return (98).

Contemporary applications of this understanding might include approaches to prenatal care that recognize the spiritual dimensions of pregnancy, educational philosophies that assume universal human capacity for wisdom rather than treating knowledge as scarce commodity, and therapeutic modalities that help individuals recover access to their prenatal illumination rather than focusing exclusively on pathology and deficit, as demonstrated in contemporary analyses of how spiritual insights inform healing practices.

The Or HaGanuz tradition, in this reading, offers a vision of human potential that is both radically universal and profoundly particular. Universal because every person receives the transmission through maternal relationship; particular because each individual's recovery of this illumination will take unique forms based on their specific circumstances, capacities, and calling, as Scholem demonstrates in his analysis of how mystical traditions balance universal truth with particular expression (97).

The hidden light continues to shine, transmitted from mother to child in the sacred darkness of gestation, awaiting recognition and recovery in each generation. The angel Layla teaches on, not as supernatural entity but as the archetypal mother whose love becomes the vehicle for divine transmission. In recognizing this

truth, we discover that the Or HaGanuz was never hidden at all but simply awaiting our readiness to see the light that has always been shining in the most intimate and natural relationships of human existence (99).

This vision calls us to approach every person we encounter with the awareness that they carry within themselves the complete light of divine wisdom, transmitted through the ultimate act of love. The work of revelation becomes not the achievement of exceptional individuals but the birthright and calling of every human being who has ever been held in the protective darkness of a mother's love and taught the deepest secrets of existence in the first and most important classroom of all—the womb itself, where night becomes light and darkness reveals itself as the most perfect vehicle of illumination.

The Or HaGanuz tradition thus offers not merely historical insight but contemporary guidance for recognizing and nurturing the universal human capacity for divine illumination that begins before birth and continues throughout life, transmitted through love and recovered through the sacred work of remembering who we have always been. Every mother is the angel Layla; every child is a potential *tzaddik*; every human being carries the hidden light of creation, waiting to be revealed through the patient work of spiritual midwifery that helps birth the divine wisdom that has been present from the very beginning (100).

## 22. Appendix: Contemporary Scientific Research on Maternal-Fetal Interactions

Recent advances in developmental biology, neuroscience, and epigenetics have revealed the profound importance of maternal-fetal interactions during pregnancy, providing scientific support for the ancient Jewish mystical understanding that crucial transmission occurs between mother and child in utero. This appendix reviews key findings that parallel the theological insight that the maternal relationship serves as the primary vehicle for transmitting fundamental wisdom and capacity for spiritual development.

### 22.1 Fetal Brain Development and Maternal Input

Contemporary neuroscience has demonstrated that fetal brain development is profoundly influenced by maternal physiological and psychological states (101). The developing fetal nervous system is exquisitely sensitive to maternal hormones, neurotransmitters, and stress responses that cross the placental barrier. Research by DiPietro et al. (2006) shows that



maternal emotional states directly influence fetal neurodevelopment, with implications for cognitive capacity, emotional regulation, and learning potential throughout life (102).

Studies using advanced fetal imaging techniques reveal that the fetal brain begins responding to external stimuli, including maternal voice and emotional states, as early as the second trimester (103). This research supports the mystical insight that significant “teaching” occurs during gestation, though the content may be understood as fundamental patterns of neural organization rather than specific cognitive content.

## 22.2 Prenatal Learning and Memory Formation

Groundbreaking research has documented that fetuses demonstrate learning and memory capabilities well before birth (104). Studies by DeCasper and Fifer (1980) demonstrated that newborns preferentially respond to their mother’s voice, indicating prenatal learning of maternal vocal patterns (105). Subsequent research has shown that fetuses can learn and remember complex auditory patterns, musical sequences, and even linguistic features of their native language (106).

This scientific evidence provides remarkable support for the Talmudic teaching that comprehensive learning occurs in utero. While contemporary science describes this learning in terms of auditory processing and neural plasticity rather than Torah transmission, the fundamental insight that the fetal period involves crucial educational processes aligns closely with mystical understanding.

## 22.3 The Maternal Voice as Neural Sculptor

Recent neuroimaging studies have revealed that the maternal voice serves as a particularly powerful influence on fetal brain development (107). The mother’s voice reaches the fetus both through airborne sound transmission and through bone conduction via the mother’s body, creating a unique acoustic environment that shapes auditory processing centers in the developing brain.

Research by Kisilevsky et al. (2009) demonstrates that fetuses show distinct neural responses to their mother’s voice compared to other female voices, indicating specialized neural circuitry for maternal recognition that develops prenatally (108). This finding supports the mystical understanding that the mother serves as the primary “angel” or teacher during the prenatal period, with her voice serving as the primary vehicle for transmission.

## 22.4 Intergenerational Epigenetic Inheritance

One of the most remarkable discoveries in contemporary biology is the recognition that maternal experiences can influence gene expression patterns that are transmitted to offspring (109). Epigenetic modifications—chemical changes that alter gene activity without changing DNA sequence—can be influenced by maternal nutrition, stress, emotional states, and environmental exposures during pregnancy.

Research by Gapp et al. (2014) demonstrates that traumatic experiences in mothers can lead to epigenetic changes that affect stress reactivity and emotional regulation in their children (110). Conversely, positive maternal experiences, including meditation, social support, and emotional well-being, can promote beneficial epigenetic modifications that enhance offspring resilience and cognitive capacity (111).

This scientific understanding provides a biological mechanism for the mystical insight that mothers transmit essential qualities to their children during pregnancy. The “hidden light” may be understood, in part, as optimal patterns of gene expression that support spiritual, emotional, and cognitive development.

## 22.5 Maternal Microbiome and Immune System Programming

Recent research has revealed that the maternal microbiome—the community of microorganisms living in and on the mother’s body—plays a crucial role in programming the developing fetal immune system (112). The maternal microbiome influences fetal brain development through the gut-brain axis, affecting neurotransmitter production, immune function, and even behavioral patterns.

Studies by Vuong and Hsiao (2017) demonstrate that maternal microbiome composition during pregnancy influences offspring neurodevelopment, social behavior, and stress responses (113). This research suggests that the mother’s internal biological community serves as a form of “environmental teacher” that programs fundamental aspects of the child’s physiological and neurological functioning.

## 22.6 Emotional Synchrony and Stress Response Systems

Advanced monitoring techniques have revealed sophisticated patterns of emotional and physiological synchrony between mothers and their fetuses (114). Maternal heart rate variability, stress hormone levels,

and emotional states directly influence fetal heart rate patterns, movement, and neurological development.

Research by DiPietro et al. (2015) shows that mothers who practice mindfulness and emotional regulation during pregnancy have fetuses with more organized sleep-wake cycles, better stress recovery, and more stable autonomic nervous system functioning (115). This finding supports the mystical understanding that the mother's consciousness and spiritual state directly influence the child's developmental potential.

## 22.7 The Neurobiology of Maternal Intuition

Neuroimaging studies of pregnant women have revealed specific changes in brain structure and function that enhance maternal sensitivity to fetal needs and states (116). The maternal brain undergoes significant neuroplastic changes during pregnancy, including increased activity in regions associated with empathy, emotional attunement, and intuitive perception.

Research by Hoekzema et al. (2017) demonstrates that pregnancy produces lasting changes in maternal brain structure that persist for at least two years postpartum, particularly in regions involved in social cognition and emotional processing (117). These changes may represent the neurobiological basis for the enhanced maternal capacity to serve as an optimal "teacher" during the crucial developmental period.

## 22.8 The Impact of Maternal Stress and Well-being

Extensive research has documented that maternal psychological states during pregnancy have profound and lasting effects on child development (118). Chronic maternal stress, anxiety, and depression can negatively impact fetal brain development, immune system programming, and future behavioral patterns.

Conversely, maternal practices that promote well-being—including meditation, yoga, social support, and spiritual practices—have been shown to optimize fetal development across multiple domains (119). Studies by Monk et al. (2012) demonstrate that maternal mindfulness practices during pregnancy promote fetal neurological development and improve birth outcomes (120).

## 22.9 Nutritional and Biochemical Transmission

Research in nutritional neuroscience has revealed that maternal diet and nutritional status during pregnancy directly influence fetal brain development and cognitive capacity (121). Essential nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids, folate, and choline,

are crucial for proper neural development and can influence learning capacity, memory formation, and emotional regulation throughout life.

Studies have also shown that maternal consumption of certain foods and beverages can influence fetal taste preferences and feeding behaviors after birth, demonstrating a form of gustatory "teaching" that occurs during pregnancy (122). This research supports the broader principle that mothers transmit not only nutritional resources but also behavioral and sensory templates to their developing children.

## 22.10 Placental Function and Selective Permeability

The placenta serves as the crucial interface between maternal and fetal physiology, selectively transmitting nutrients, hormones, and other signaling molecules while protecting the fetus from potentially harmful substances (123). Recent research has revealed that placental function is dynamically regulated by maternal psychological states, stress levels, and behavioral patterns.

Studies by Sandman et al. (2015) demonstrate that maternal stress can alter placental gene expression patterns, affecting the transmission of stress hormones and growth factors to the developing fetus (124). This research highlights the placenta's role as an active mediator of maternal-fetal communication rather than a passive barrier.

The placenta produces numerous hormones and signaling molecules that influence both maternal physiology and fetal development (125). These placental hormones can affect maternal mood, bonding behaviors, and intuitive responses to fetal needs, while simultaneously programming fetal stress response systems and metabolic functioning.

Research has shown that placental hormone production is influenced by maternal emotional states, social support, and spiritual practices, creating a complex feedback system between maternal consciousness and fetal development (126). This scientific understanding provides biological support for the mystical insight that the mother's spiritual and emotional state directly influences the transmission of developmental potential to her child.

## 22.11 Scientific Validation of Ancient Wisdom

The accumulated scientific evidence strongly supports several key insights from the Or HaGanuz tradition

1. Universal Transmission: Every pregnancy involves profound transmission of developmental

programming from mother to child, supporting the mystical insight that all children receive crucial “teaching” during gestation.

2. **Maternal Consciousness as Vector:** Research demonstrates that maternal psychological and spiritual states directly influence fetal development, validating the understanding that the mother serves as the primary vehicle for transmitting developmental potential.
3. **The Protective Darkness:** The enclosed environment of the womb provides optimal conditions for sensitive developmental processes, supporting the mystical understanding that concealment enables rather than prevents transmission.
4. **Lasting Impact:** Scientific research confirms that prenatal experiences have lifelong effects on cognitive, emotional, and spiritual capacity, supporting the teaching that prenatal transmission provides the foundation for all subsequent development.

## 22.12 Contemporary Implications

This scientific understanding suggests several important applications for contemporary prenatal care

1. **Maternal Well-being as Priority:** Optimizing maternal psychological, spiritual, and emotional well-being should be recognized as crucial for fetal development, not merely maternal comfort.
2. **Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices:** Maternal practices that cultivate expanded consciousness and spiritual awareness may directly benefit fetal development through multiple biological pathways.
3. **Environmental Optimization:** Creating supportive environments that enable mothers to experience the pregnancy as a sacred time of transmission may optimize both maternal and fetal outcomes.
4. **Recognition of Spiritual Dimensions:** Healthcare providers might benefit from recognizing the spiritual significance of pregnancy and supporting mothers in approaching gestation as a time of profound teaching and transmission.

Future research might explore whether specific states of maternal consciousness—such as those cultivated through meditation, prayer, or contemplative practice—produce measurable effects on fetal neural development, gene expression patterns, or other biological markers.

Studies could investigate whether mothers who approach pregnancy with awareness of their role as “teachers” or transmitters of spiritual potential produce different developmental outcomes compared to mothers who view pregnancy primarily in biological terms.

Longitudinal research could examine whether children whose mothers practiced specific forms of spiritual or contemplative discipline during pregnancy show enhanced capacity for what the mystical tradition calls “recovery” of prenatal illumination—manifested as enhanced learning capacity, emotional regulation, spiritual sensitivity, or creative potential.

Such research might investigate correlations between maternal spiritual practices during pregnancy and children’s later capacity for what might be termed “remembrance” or recovery of deep wisdom and insight.

Contemporary scientific research provides remarkable validation for the ancient mystical insight that pregnancy involves profound transmission of developmental potential from mother to child. While science describes these processes in terms of neurobiology, epigenetics, and developmental programming rather than spiritual transmission, the fundamental understanding that crucial “teaching” occurs during gestation—and that maternal consciousness serves as the primary vehicle for this transmission—finds strong empirical support.

This convergence of ancient wisdom and contemporary science suggests that approaches to prenatal care that honor both the biological and spiritual dimensions of pregnancy may optimize outcomes for both mothers and children. The mystical understanding that every mother serves as an “angel” transmitting divine potential to her child is not merely metaphorical but reflects sophisticated insight into the actual processes of human development.

The scientific evidence strongly supports the theological insight that the relationship between mother and child during pregnancy represents one of the most profound forms of teaching and transmission available to human beings. In recognizing this truth, we can approach pregnancy not merely as a biological process but as a sacred opportunity for transmitting the deepest capacities for wisdom, awareness, and spiritual development from one generation to the next.



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