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Kabbalah and Modernity

Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations

Edited by

Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi and Kocku von Stuckrad

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INTRODUCTION: KABBALAH AND MODERNITY

Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi & Kocku von Stuckrad

1. Introduction

In his celebrated *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), Gershom Scholem, "founder" of the modern academic study of Kabbalah, wrote about the relevance of kabbalah for modern times:

> At the end of a long process of development in which Kabbalism, paradoxical though it may sound, has influenced the course of Jewish history, it has become again what it was in the beginning: the esoteric wisdom of small groups of men out of touch with life and without any influence on it.[1]

Twenty years later, in his 1963 article 'Thoughts on the Possibility of Contemporary Jewish Mysticism', he was even more explicit: 'When all is said and done, it may be said that in our time, for the most part, there is no original mysticism, not in the nation of Israel and not among the nations of the world'.[2] Although Scholem was aware of the fact that both in Europe and in Israel the twentieth century witnessed a renaissance of kabbalistic thinking, along with the establishment of new schools and the adaptation of traditional doctrine to new conditions and questions, he refused to acknowledge these currents as "real kabbalah".[3] In what can be called an act of purgation he discriminated a high-standing mystical tradition that flourished in medieval and early modern times from a "fallen" kabbalah that was contaminated with the influences of "modernity".[4] The impact of this act of purgation on academic research into modern kabbalah has been enormous. Only recently have scholars of religion began to turn their attention to the many-faceted roles that kabbalistic doctrines and schools have played in nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture. Often, and necessarily,

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[1] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 34.
[2] Scholem, *Devarim be-Go*, 71 (our translation).
[3] See Kilcher, 'Figuren des Endes'.
[4] Huss, 'Ask No Questions'.

this new interest and openness went along with a contextualization and revaluation of Gershom Scholem's approach to kabbalah.

2. The Chapters of the Present Volume

The present volume is largely based on an international conference on 'Kabbalah and Modernity', which was held at the University of Amsterdam in July 2007. This collection of essays brings together leading representatives of the ongoing debate on kabbalah and modernity, in order to break new ground for a better understanding and conceptualization of the role of kabbalah in modern religious, intellectual, and political discourse. The volume is divided into four thematic fields: a reappraisal of modern scholarship devoted to kabbalah; Romantic and esoteric readings of kabbalah; modern kabbalistic schools; and the relationship between kabbalah and politics in modern times. Although these fields intersect in many ways, each of them highlights a separate aspect of kabbalah vis-à-vis modernity.

2.1. *Kabbalah Scholarship: A Reappraisal*

With the rise of an academic study of Judaism in the nineteenth century, many scholars depicted kabbalah and Hasidism as a by-gone tradition of Jewish "superstition" that was contrasted with Jewish enlightenment (Haskalah) and emancipation. It was through the influence of Protestant scholars—particularly in the context of the influential *Wissenschaft des Judentums*—that kabbalah was introduced as a legitimate field of historical research, albeit with many biased, polemical assumptions. Negative evaluations stood side by side with Romantic images of Hasidic culture. Scholars such as H. Graetz, A. Jellinek, A. Franck, or E. Bischoff can be regarded as important precursors of subsequent research on kabbalah. G. Scholem doubtlessly is the major figure of the academic study of kabbalah in the first half of the twentieth century. His approach to Jewish mysticism is strongly informed by the conditions of German culture after World War I and the search for primordial, "pure" religion that was set against the predicaments of modernity.[5]

[5] Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*; Hamacher, *Gershom Scholem*; Hayoun, *Gershom Scholem*; Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane*.

The first section of this volume contextualizes these early 'mappings' of kabbalah and addresses their implication for contemporary scholarship. Andreas B. Kilcher, in his chapter on philology and kabbalah, looks at the intertwinement of science and metaphysics, of secular philology as the historical science of texts, and of a re-theologized philology as an ultimately messianic project. Kilcher examines the premodernist model of kabbalistic philology of Knorr von Rosenroth's work on the book of Zohar and the kabbalistic philology of Johann Georg Hamann that takes an anti-modern stance against historicizing philology. He then focuses particularly on the kabbalistic philology of the young Gershom Scholem, which pushes the dialectics of the methods of historical criticism and theological rigor to their limits by viewing philology as the continuation of kabbalah.

Giulio Busi's chapter on the visual lore in kabbalah examines the failure of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars of kabbalah to appreciate the visual elements of Jewish mysticism. Busi explains that this failure should be seen in light of the German background of the study of kabbalah, which underestimated all elements that do not belong to the "higher" level of philosophy, an approach still marked by idealistic philosophy. Busi argues that reconstructing the development of kabbalistic thought without taking into account its visual features has impaired the effectiveness of the philological method, and he suggests that the study of the graphic dimension of kabbalistic works enables us to understand better otherwise obscure works and to rethink whole chapters in the history of Jewish mysticism.

In his contribution, Eric Jacobson examines the clandestine affinity of kabbalah with modernity. He argues that kabbalah and modernity share a commonality when narratives of the former unexpectedly rise to the surface of intellectual and cultural life in the *fin de siècle* of the twentieth century. According to Jacobson, the dislocation of modernity parallels the religious anarchism of kabbalah, and for this reason the study of kabbalah harbors not only historical or descriptive narratives, but also normative impulses. Its normative value, he claims, lies in the fact that it is part of a greater movement within modernity which is engaged with dislocation and relocation; in particular, the dislocation of the canon and the introduction of the margins into the center.

2.2. *Romantic and Esoteric Readings of Kabbalah*

More or less outside traditional Judaism, various Romantic movements embraced kabbalistic notions and incorporated them into

philosophical, literary, and artistic discourses. While many aspects of these influences have been the subject of recent research,[6] the large field of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century esotericism, and its adaptations of kabbalah, have largely been ignored by historians of religion. This is astonishing insofar as kabbalah has figured prominently in the works of Eliphas Lévi, French occultism, the Theosophical Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (S.L. MacGregor Mathers), Aleister Crowley, Vladimir Soloviev, traditionalism, and other representatives or currents of modern Western esotericism. The second section of this volume offers five studies that shed further light on this marginalized area. It traces the multi-leveled influences of Romanticism and esotericism on the modern formations of kabbalah.

In his contribution, Konstantin Burmistrov focuses on the reception of kabbalah in Russian masonic and Rosicrucian groups since the eighteenth century until the early twentieth century. Burmistrov shows how the history of this reception is closely related to political and social factors. Whenever not affected by condemnations and persecutions these groups proliferated and contributed significantly to introduce kabbalistic works and ideas in Russia, often with erudite studies and translations. Even if much of this material remains still unexplored and unpublished today, its variety and richness deserves close attention, also because it seems to be dependent only in part on western European sources. Burmistrov also argues that the attitude towards kabbalah in Russian esoteric circles changed over time, going from hopes of using it as a tool towards social regeneration in the eighteenth century, to a more circumscribed application to magical practices in the early twentieth.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff compares in his chapter two different, but closely related, readings of kabbalah in nineteenth-century France, that of one of the pioneers in the scholarly study of kabbalah, Adolphe Franck, and that of the founder of modern occultism, Eliphas Lévi. Hanegraaff highlights the fact that, despite their differences, both readings were based on the idea of a "universal kabbalah", where the Jewish element plays an important, but not exclusive role, and significant emphasis is given to Zoroaster as ultimate source for this esoteric tra-

[6] Goodman-Thau et al. (eds.), *Kabbala und Romantik*; Goodman-Thau et al. (eds.), *Kabbala und die Literatur der Romantik*; Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbalah*, 239–327.

dition. This concept of universal kabbalah would be later polemically rejected by modern scholars such as Gershom Scholem, who would insist on the intrinsic Jewish identity of kabbalah.

Jean-Pierre Brach's contribution focuses on another important, but relatively neglected, figure in the history of kabbalah studies in France: the erudite Paul Vulliaud. Vulliaud represents an original figure in the cultural landscape of early nineteenth-century France because, while being a Catholic and not a member of any specific occultist movement, he developed a personal esoteric interpretation of kabbalah. His vision of kabbalah as true esoteric tradition anticipates some of the features of Guénonian traditionalism, and particularly the tension between the disdain for purely philological and historical arguments and the desire to prove claims about the validity of tradition through a critical, erudite reading of the texts.

Subsequently, Marco Pasi focuses on the attitude of the early Theosophical Society towards kabbalah, particularly as exemplified by the writings of H.P. Blavatsky, in order to question the definition of "Western esotericism" that has become standard in current research in the field. Pasi discusses the shifting place of kabbalah in the context of modern esotericism, in relation to the changing attitude towards its "Western" as opposed to "Eastern" identity. For both nineteenth-century occultists and twentieth-century scholars kabbalah often ends up being in a sort of borderland between the two identities.

Boaz Huss in his contribution also focuses on an example taken from the early history of the Theosophical Society, more particularly Abraham David Ezekiel, a Baghdadi Jew from Poona, India, who joined the Society in 1882. His interest in kabbalah was revived by his encounter with the theosophical teachings. He created a small press in Poona and translated into Arabic, among other things, the part of the Zohar known as the *Idra Zuta*, which caused some controversy and was condemned by Sephardic rabbinic authorities. Despite Blavatsky's ambivalent attitude towards kabbalah and Judaism, the Theosophical Society appears to have been instrumental in bringing several Jewish personalities to develop an interest for kabbalah.

2.3. *Modern Kabbalistic Schools*

The volume's third section addresses some of the twentieth-century modern kabbalistic schools and investigates their influence on contemporary, "postmodern" kabbalah. Although kabbalah was marginalized

in Jewish culture of the modern period, due to the after-effects of the Sabbatian movement and the rise of the Jewish Enlightenment, various kabbalistic schools continued to exist in traditional Jewish circles, in eastern Europe, northern Africa, and the Middle East. In the early twentieth century, Jerusalem became an important center of kabbalistic activity. Alongside the activity of the old kabbalistic center Beth-El, new centers of kabbalah studies were established by immigrants from Poland, Syria, and Iraq. While some kabbalists in this period preserved old forms of kabbalistic teaching and practice and rejected modernism, others have embraced modernity and integrated kabbalistic teaching with modern ideas. Most important of these were R. Abraham Kook, who integrated modern nationalism and kabbalah, and R. Yehuda Ashlag, who developed an innovative kabbalistic-Communist system. Many of the contemporary kabbalistic schools, who have been gaining much popularity and influence in recent years, are based on the teaching of these early twentieth-centuries kabbalists, and have also reached new geographical regions, such as the United States, where they have particularly thrived.[7]

Jonatan Meir examines the conventional image of the decline and decay of kabbalah in the early twentieth century and offers a correction to it. Meir argues that contrary to this image, Jerusalem kabbalists of the early twentieth century, especially those of Yeshivat Shaʿar Ha-Shamayim, did not lack innovation. What is more, based upon their belief that we are entering a new age of revelation, they tried to spread kabbalah within the yeshiva and among the traditional public beyond its walls. Meir shows that Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva was part of a significant change of attitude toward the spread of kabbalah and that it played a central role in the flourishing of kabbalah among the traditional public.

In his contribution, Elliott R. Wolfson focuses on the apocalyptic messianism of Menahem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Rebbe of Habad-Lubavitch Hasidism. Residing in New York for a large part of his life, Schneerson was convinced that the United States offered a favorable environment for the promotion of Judaism and the international spreading of Hasidism. In this respect, he placed himself in continuity with the previous Rebbe, Yosef Yitzhaq Schneersohn, but carried his reflections further, by postulating an inherent affinity

[7] Huss, 'The New Age of Kabbalah'.

between America and traditional Jewish laws. In the context of his messianic vision, he felt that the American Jews had a special role to play in the apocalyptic times that were about to come, by spreading the traditional teachings of Hasidism beyond Jewish milieus, in order to include also Gentiles. The traditional boundaries between Jew and non-Jew were therefore challenged and redefined in ways that Wolfson shows as being more complex than previously understood.

Jody Myers examines the teachings on marriage and sexuality of the Kabbalah Centre, the movement created in 1970 by Philip Berg in the United States. One of the avowed aims of the Centre is to make traditional kabbalistic wisdom (as interpreted by Berg and the other teachers of the Centre) broadly available for Jews and non-Jews alike, while the organization has often attracted the attention of the media because of the interest shown by some popular celebrities towards its teachings. Myers shows how the Centre in its teachings about sexuality uses a rhetorical strategy that can be found often enough in New Age groups. On the one hand traditional religious arguments are avoided, and even explicitly rejected; on the other hand there is an emphasis on the scientific nature of kabbalistic teachings. Eventually, the Centre's views on sexuality and gender roles appear relatively conservative, with the partial exception of homosexuality, about which the Centre has a tolerant attitude that distances itself from traditional kabbalistic teachings, without necessarily denying its premises.

In his chapter Kocku von Stuckrad discusses the traditional Jewish concept of the Shekhinah and the way in which it has been reinterpreted in the twentieth century in the context of widespread changing attitudes towards sexuality and gender models. In this period the Shekhinah has become one of the several aspects of the feminine divine as presented in modern goddess spirituality. In the rest of the chapter von Stuckrad focuses more particularly on Madonna, whose engagement with kabbalah (through the teachings of Berg's Kabbalah Centre) has drawn attention in the media recently. Von Stuckrad shows how Madonna represents a new way of organizing gender differences, while playing at the same time with stereotypes that have a long genealogy in Western culture.

Finally, Sara Møldrup Thejls discusses the ideas of the Danish occultist Erwin Neutzsky-Wulff, and his use of traditional kabbalistic concepts (such as the sefirot) in his own teachings. Thejls sees a continuity between Neutzsky-Wulff and earlier forms of occultist kabbalah, that had began developing in the nineteenth century. Interestingly,

Neutzsky-Wulff uses kabbalah in the context of the neurological explanations he offers for his occult theories (for instance, for him the sefirot correspond to certain centers located in the brain). By doing so, he is not only carrying further the premises of occultist kabbalah, but is also close to the emphasis on scientific discourse that can be found in Berg's Kabbalah Centre.

2.4. *Kabbalah and Politics*

The fourth section addresses and sheds new light on the political aspects of modern kabbalah. Since early modern times, kabbalistic interpretations of salvation history have repeatedly played an important role on the interface of religion and politics. Particularly the Lurianic notion of *tikkun* ("restoration") of the perfect primordial state of creation triggered the inspiration of Jewish and Christian authors. In the Sabbatian movement, and subsequently in nineteenth-century Hasidism, *tikkun* was a key concept in messianic and salvific expectations. The rise of political Zionism had its influence on these interpretations, as well. In centers such as Prague, Zionist ideas merged with messianic concepts, as in the students' organization Bar Kochba, founded under the leadership of Samuel Hugo Bergman, before World War I. After the Shoah, questions of salvation history and theodicy formed a critical element of intellectual culture. Although messianic expectations in the beginning were more or less separated from political Zionism, the founding of the State of Israel (1948) and particularly the "miraculous" victory of the Six Days War (1967) led to a fusion of messianic expectations and Zionist programs. The emergence of Gush Emunim ("Bloc of the Faithful") from the writings of R. Abraham Isaac Kook and his son, R. Zvi Yehuda, stands out as an example of this new blending of mystical concepts with political programs—Israel's wars were read as signs of *tikkun*.[8]

In his chapter, Steven M. Wasserstrom examines Ernst Jünger's political mythology, political theosophy, and political mysteries. Wasserstrom describes Jünger's Leviathan myth, the Jewish esoteric traditions he associated with that myth, and his application of it in an anti-Jewish politico-theosophical program. Wasserstrom argues that

[8] Aran, 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Land'.

these features of what he calls "Cabala of Enmity" constituted a weaponry of esoterica and engaged political reality.

Shaul Magid examines the Jewish Renewal movement as a form of American pragmatism. Magid shows that Jewish Renewal's new religiosity is dependent on American metaphysical religion in general and American pragmatism in particular, and argues that Jewish Renewal comprises a novel and unexamined indigenous form of American spirituality.

Finally, Gideon Aran deals with the status of kabbalah in contemporary Israel, based on its connection with Palestinian suicide terrorists. Aran examines the way in which a particular religious group—*Zaka* (an abbreviation for *Zihuy Korbanot Ason*, literally: Disaster Victim Identification)—handles the tragic consequences of the phenomenon of terrorism, and argues that Zaka's "terror religiosity" has a clear mystical aspect.

It is to be hoped that the essays in this volume will offer the reader a comprehensive look at the ways in which modernity and kabbalah have interacted during the last two centuries by introducing new concepts that were absent in more traditional forms of Jewish mysticism, or simply by adapting and revitalizing old ones. It is the editors' conviction that 'kabbalah and modernity' are not mutually exclusive terms; rather, it is the transformation of the kabbalistic field under conditions of modernity that is at stake. May this volume contribute to a better understanding of the complex dynamics that are involved in this process.

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PART I

KABBALA SCHOLARSHIP: A REAPPRAISAL

PHILOLOGY AS KABBALAH

Andreas B. Kilcher

According to the modern understanding, philology has played a major role in the process of secularizing the knowledge of, and about, texts. This has greatly affected the development of religious studies and the humanities as a whole. Philology removes the aura of the sacred from both religious and literary texts. It demystifies holy books and turns them into man-made ones, situating them and their genesis in the historical contexts of culture, knowledge, and biography.

Yet this image of philology as a secularizing and historical discipline has to be put into the context of the history of science itself. It evolved as part of the emergence of historical disciplines in the early nineteenth century, in conjunction with a general theory or "philosophy of philology", fostered in Germany by figures such as Friedrich August Wolff and August Boeckh. This in turn led not only to national philologists breaking out of the mould of classical philology. It also led to the development of historico-critical theology out of *philologia sacra*.

Indeed, philology had its greatest impact in secularizing and "demystifying" religious texts.[1] The explosive nature of the philological and historical study of the bible is well illustrated by Spinoza's banishment after he published his *Theological and Political Treatise*, even though it was likewise not until the nineteenth century that historico-critical theology was established.[2] In Judaism, this was the result of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* ("Academic Study of Judaism") which transferred religious tradition into the realm of history. Well versed in Boeckh's and Wolff's new philological methods, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* set its eye on Judaism's religious literary heritage.[3]

Its take on the kabbalah is symptomatic of this approach. One example is Leopold Zunz's study of the 'historical effectiveness' ('*historische*

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[1] Bultmann, 'Neues Testament und Mythologie' (first published in 1941).

[2] Exemplarily with Johann Salomo Semler or Ferdinand Christian Baurs.

[3] Cf. Kilcher, '"Jewish Literature" and "World Literature"'; Veltri, 'Altertumswissenschaft und Wissenschaft des Judentums'; Trautmann-Waller, *Philologie allemande*; Glatzer (ed.), *Leopold Zunz*.

Wirksamkeit') of the kabbalah in 1818, in which he tracked down its literary roots: the Talmud on the one hand, Neoplatonism and "oriental" esoteric sciences on the other, as Zunz illustrates using the Zohar as an example 'The Zohar [...] translates, cites, and comments on sections of the Talmud [...], developing Neoplatonic concepts interspersed with the magic, chiromancy, physiognomy, evocation of spirits, talismans, divine alphabets, and mysteries of the Orient'.[4]

Peter Beer puts forward a similar argument in his *Geschichte, Lehren und Meinungen aller* [...] *religiösen Sekten der Juden und der Geheimlehre oder Kabbalah* ('History, Teachings and Views of all Religious Sects of the Jews and of the Secret Teachings or Kabbalah') (1822–1823). Like Zunz, Beer historicizes the kabbalah by juxtaposing the myths of the origins of these secret teachings—such as the divine revelation to Adam or Moses—with a history of its evolution. In this endeavor, his focus is not the theology, but the genealogy of the kabbalah. Beer's modern investigation of its origins and sources dispels the uniqueness and sacredness of the kabbalah. Here the kabbalah is explained as a syncretistic amalgam of ancient esoteric theologies that had been adopted by the Jews since their exiles in biblical times—first Egyptian, then Greek, Persian, and Chaldean theology. Consequently, he sees the purveyor of this disparate diasporic knowledge not to be mythical heralds of divine wisdom such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, or Shimon bar Yochai, but a real, philosophical and historical scholar of the diaspora of antiquity instead—Philo of Alexandria:

> Since Philo borrowed from Egyptian sources, the kabbalah is nothing else than an ancient Egyptian theology engrafted onto the holy scriptures, intermingled with later ideas of the Chaldeans, Persians, and Greeks.[5]

Zunz and Beer thus dissect the kabbalah into a plurality of origins. This is a fundamental *philological* critique, yet one which contains a *theological* critique, too. With its genealogy laid bare, kabbalah no longer falls within the Jewish literary canon. Instead, it becomes an amalgam of non-Jewish sources. Thus, the philology of the kabbalah thus practically reveals itself to be the end of the kabbalah in its historical beginnings.

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[4] Zunz, 'Masora Talmud Kabbala Grammatik in historischer Wirksamkeit', 81. All translations are by David Matley, if not indicated otherwise.

[5] Beer, *Geschichte, Lehren und Meinungen*, 187–188.

This secular and modern understanding of philology, as founded in the nineteenth century, is clearly distinct from a another major alternative concept of philology that also "happened" to be established on the basis of kabbalah. This philology does not pit history off against religious tradition; instead, it sees itself as a part of or a medium for this tradition. It focuses less on the genealogy of the sources and origins of religious texts, but more on its present form. Its approach is not to historicize but to modernize. The historical works it brings forth do not archive texts in a museum, but continue a tradition. This kind of philology *is* "kabbalah" in the most literal sense: it is "transmission", and thus kabbalistic philology.

This kabbalistic model most pointedly differs from the modern understanding of science in having a theological component. In extreme cases it functions, qua *philologia sacra*, as an antithesis to modernity. However, the issue of the modernity of philology in its kabbalistic variety is far more complex. Its relation to modernity is not antithetical, but dialectical. More precisely, its dialectics are those of procedure and intent, method, and agenda. Whereas the philological methods in the kabbalistic model do indeed correspond to modern scholarly practice, they are at the same time subordinated to a higher goal that lies beyond academic study in its purely pragmatic and didactic intentions. This goal is precisely that of renewal. In theological terms it even reveals itself to be messianic. It is the restitution of a lost, esoteric tradition. This is precisely what philology as kabbalah achieves.

In the following I will take three examples to analyze more closely this astonishing intertwinement of science and metaphysics, of secular philology as the historical study of texts on the one hand, and of re-theologized philology as an ultimately messianic project on the other hand. These examples differ in their attitude toward modernism and Judaism. Firstly, I will examine a pre-modernist model of kabbalistic philology, as developed in particular by the Christian kabbalists. I will illustrate this by referring to Knorr von Rosenroth's philological work on the book of Zohar. Secondly, I will analyze an instance of kabbalistic philology from the eighteenth century that takes an anti-modern stance against historicizing philology. The case in point is that of the enlightened critic of the Enlightenment, Johann Georg Hamann. Thirdly, and most importantly, I will discuss an example of kabbalistic philology from the twentieth century, pushing the dialectics of the methods of historical criticism and theological rigor to their limits by viewing philology as the continuation of the kabbalah. The case in point is the young Gershom Scholem.

1. Christian Kabbalah as Messianic Philology (Knorr von Rosenroth)

Only at first glance is it surprising to find Christian Hebraists and kabbalists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at the origins of a modern philology of the kabbalah. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that they played a particularly important role in the development of modern philology.[6] In contrast to most Jewish kabbalists, they did not pass on Judaism's esoteric tradition via religious means of communication such as oral initiation. Instead, they used the modern media of a no longer purely sacred philology such as the printing press, translation, and historical and lexicographical commentary. This work can be considered a philology *of* the kabbalah in an entirely modern sense. Yet at the same time, theological functions were attributed to this philological work that contrasted with its modern techniques: the conversion of the Jews, the establishment of an esoteric theology that would bind Judaism and Christianity, and the restitution of a primordial tradition.

This double function of Christian kabbalistic philology can be illustrated by numerous examples ranging from Pico della Mirandola through Johannes Buxtorf to Knorr von Rosenroth. Knorr's *Kabbala Denudata*, for instance, which I will use as an illustration, is to a large extent a philological project in the modern sense. It is a commentary on, translation, and scholarly edition of the Zohar.[7] The first part of the *Kabbala Denudata* (1677) is intended in the best philological sense as an *apparatus in libri Zohar*, including a lexicon of key kabbalistic terms. The second part follows the philological agenda in its very title: *Liber Zohar restitutus* (1684). Here, individual extracts of the Zohar are translated (*Idra Raba, Idra Suta*, and *Sifra Dezniuta*) and published in a scholarly edition with annotations. Finally, Knorr also published a complete Hebrew edition of the Zohar in 1684. All this renders it obvious that Knorr's Zohar project has a strong and clearly philological character, entirely in keeping with modern (i.e. secular) philology. An ancient Hebrew text is made accessible through scholarly publication, translation, and commentary.

Yet Knorr's philological work in making the Zohar accessible is at the same time a theological project. Philology has taken on the

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[6] See Veltri & Necker (eds.), *Gottes Sprache in der philologischen Werkstatt*.
[7] See Kilcher, 'Kabbalistische Buchmetaphysik'.

functions of restitution and recovery, even redemption. Knorr views the Zohar as a primordial tradition, Jewish *and* Christian at the same time, which is to be restored by the *Kabbala Denudata*. The aim was thus a *restitutio* of a long-lost tradition called kabbalah. This is made clear both by the title of the second volume of the *Kabbala Denudata, Liber Zohar restitutus*, and by the definition of the term *restitutio* in Knorr's *Lexikon cabbalisticum*. There, 'restitutio, restauratio, redintegratio' are given as Latin translations of the central messianic category of the *Idrot* in the Zohar, in Lurianic kabbalah, and Sabbatianism: *restitutio* is Knorr's translation of the Hebrew term *tikkun*.[8]

The term *restitutio* thus has two apparently contradictory meanings. On the one hand it refers to the philological reconstruction of the Zohar as the material bearer of ancient knowledge, i.e. scholarly publication, translation, commentary.[9] The restitution of the physical corpus at the same time also permits the *restitutio doctrinae*,[10] the renewal of the 'transcendental metaphysical and theological teachings of the Hebrews', in Knorr's words.[11] Here, scholarly publication takes on the dimension of reparation, of *tikkun*. The category of *tikkun* also testifies to the fact that transmission is, in this case, not understood as a linear documentation of history, but as the mending of a rupture. When Knorr talks of the 'usefulness of translating the book of Zohar' (*de utilitate versionis libri Cabbalistici Sohar*),[12] he does so with this historico-theological and even messianic potential in mind, with the Thirty Year's War as a historical point of reference. As a document of a Jewish-Christian era, and thus also as a *prisca theologia*, the *restitutio* of the Zohar is intended to overcome all confessional differences and renew the harmony between religions. Precisely this is the messianic expectation Knorr had of the philological restitution of the *Zohar*. In a letter to his friend Henry More, Knorr declares:

> I assumed that the great division of the Christian religion has no other reason than the difference of philosophical terms and metaphysical principles among the Christians [...]; therefore I assumed that I had to

[8] Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, 732. See Kilcher, 'Tikkun'.

[9] It is no coincidence that Knorr lists in his important foreword of the second volume the different texts of the zoharian library. See *Kabbala Denudata*, 8–9. With regard to the technique of the book, we can identify an analogical form of *Kabbala Denudata* with the Zohar—both of them are library-like compilations of texts.

[10] See Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. II, 7.

[11] Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, title.

[12] Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. II, 3.

> search after that old philosophy which flowered at the time of Christ among his disciples and which stems from the oldest sources of the holy oracle. When I was about to search after this old doctrine of God and other spiritual and theological issues, I came across that oldest book of the Jews, the Book of Splendor. Even though I questioned the age of this book in view of its division into chapters, I was aware that the chapters themselves and the teachings, which seem to be fragments rather, were very old and contained the oldest teachings and theses.[13]

The restitution of this oldest doctrine, the kabbalah, which was handed down in the book of Zohar in fragments, seems for Knorr to be the best way 'to bind the divided churches together to a Christian unity'.[14] This is the theologico-political mission of the philological Zohar project.

Ultimately, this messianic function of philological reconstruction is confirmed by the work of philological study. By raising the study of the Zohar to the level of a daily ritual, Knorr and the Sulzbach kabbalists saw themselves as undertaking a task analogous not only to that of Isaac Luria and his circle, but also to the mythical "assembly"—as described in the *Idrot* of the Zohar—whose messianic aim it was to reveal the hidden secrets of the Torah (*rasin de oraiita*) by means of kabbalistic philology and, by means of this kabbalistic method, to restore the metaphysical order of the world, the *tikkun ha-olam*.[15]

2. Kabbalistic Philology in the Enlightenment (Hamann)

Around 1750, the enlightened critic of the Enlightenment Johann Georg Hamann was familiar not only with numerous classics of Christian kabbalah such as Reuchlin, Pistorius, Kircher, Buxtorf, Leibniz, and Wachter, but also with Knorr's *Kabbala Denudata*. However, this

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[13] Ibid. Cf. also the following passage (at p. 5): 'Versione igitur librum Sohar eo minus judicavi indignum, quod non tantum dignissima solerti ingenio existimem, quae sunt difficillima, & à vulgari usu remotissima, sed & quo omnino sperem ab ipsius Regni Christi temporibus similia studia non fore aliena. Remque aggressus sum eó libentius, quod non tantum Magistro nunc uti queam in istis studiis versatissimo Judaeo hoc sene, qui in Germania sui vix habet similem, sed & Commentarii ad hanc rem mihi suppetant Manuscriptia R. Jizchak Lorja Germano, in Palaestina consarcinati, prolixi quidem & multo ob raritatem aere comparati, sed perspicui satis Ingenio in his studiis versato. Sed haec omnia tamen horis tantum succisivis tractanda mihi sunt inter strepitus & litigia fori, consiliorum conflictus, aulaeque ministeria, saepè satis defatigato, &c.'

[14] Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. I, Amico Responso, 75.

[15] See Liebes, 'Messiah of the Zohar', 11; Kilcher, 'Kabbalistische Buchmetaphysik'.

does not necessarily mean that he subscribed to its concept of kabbalistic philology.[16] Nevertheless, it is certain that Hamann did develop an emphatic concept of "kabbalistic philology" in the course of his critique of the secular and historical concept of language and philology in the Enlightenment. In line with Shaftesbury, Hamann criticized the reduction of philology to mere historicization in order to juxtapose it with an enthusiastic reading that renews traditional texts. The prerequisite for this was a resacralization of language. In his view, language was not an arbitrary means of communication, but a medium of revelation. According to Hamann, a philology that reads texts under this premise is a kabbalistic one.

Hamann specifically developed a philology of this kind in his critical appraisal of the two enlightened language theorists Michaelis and Herder. In his review of Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), Hamann defended the "more elevated hypothesis" ('*höhere Hypothese*') of the divine origins of language. And he did so as a "kabbalistic philologist":

> Which Dulcinea is more worthy of a kabbalistic philologist than revenging the individuality, authenticity, majesty, wisdom, beauty, fertility, and exuberance of the sublime hypothesis—from which all systems and languages of the old and new Babel draw their subterranean, animal, and human origins, their fire.[17]

Hamann puts forward a similar argument in his essay *The Knight of the Rose Cross's Last Will and Testament on the Divine and Human Origin of Language* (1772). Here, too, he rejects the Enlightenment's secular theory of language in order to juxtapose it with a metaphysical

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[16] Regarding Hamann's knowledge and idea of kabbalah see Kraft, 'Christliche Kabbalistik'; idem: 'Zur Deutung', 5–30. Particularly because the library register of the friends Hamann and J.G. Lindner is in good repair (Hamann, '"Biga Bibliothecarum"'), Kraft is able to show that Hamann has been engaged with literature of Christian kabbalah since 1753. The most important names manifest the deepness of Hamann's knowledge: Reuchlin, Pistorius, Böhme, Kircher, Buxtorf, Bacon, Newton, Helmont, More, Leibniz, Knorr von Rosenroth, Wachter. René de Rapins plays a special role in this context: *Réflexions sur l'Eloquence, la Poétique, l'Histoire et la Philosophie* (1686), the part on philosophy (the seventeenth chapter focuses on the kabbalah) is translated by Hamann. See his *Sämtliche Werke*, IV, 62–63. On Hamann's knowledge of kabbalah see Kraft, 'Christliche Kabbalistik', 22, 52–61. On Hamann's library see Imendörffer, *J.G. Hamann und seine Bücherei*, 109–111. More details regarding Hamann's idea of kabbala are provided in Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie der Sprachmagie*, 205–217; see also Vaughan, 'Johann Georg Hamann und die Kabbala', 155–162.

[17] Hamann, 'Rezension der Herderschen Preisschrift', 143–144.

"divine" explanation in the name of the kabbalah.[18] Hamann perceives language as the 'mother of reason and of revelation, its very essence'.[19]

The renewal of this "kabbalistic philology", for which language is divine revelation, corresponds to a neo-kabbalistic style of writing. In 1762, Hamann describes it in his *Aesthetica in nuce*. Its very subtitle reveals its approach: a *Rhapsody in Kabbalistic Prose.* The 'latest aesthetic', devised here by Hamann as a kabbalistic style, turns out to be a modernization of one of the 'most ancient';[20] he calls for it to be implemented as a 'modern imitation of the kabbalistic style of writing'. This approach consists not only in the theory of the script's revelatory character, which ran contrary to the view of the Enlightenment, but also in its continual renewal, which he puts into practice through extensive quotation. Hamann's 'kabbalistic prose' consists of talking 'by signs' and of evoking and modernizing the hidden tradition through countless quotations.[21] In this intertextual practice of renewing religious traditions, "kabbalistic philology" goes beyond the critical historicization of the text of the bible. Here it becomes an enlightenment of the Enlightenment. In Hamann's works, the exemplary function of a *new* philology and aesthetics, one that is critical even of the Enlightenment, is thus assumed by the "*most ancient*" philology and aesthetics: kabbalah.

3. The Mystery of Philology (Scholem)

There is ample philological evidence for our leap from Hamann, the kabbalah enthusiast critical of the Enlightenment, to Scholem, the historian of the kabbalah. Scholem had read Hamann since 1915, and in the years that followed, Hamann's influence became apparent: it played a considerable role in his becoming a philologist and historian of the kabbalah, as well as in his conducting this philology as a kabbalistic one—not solely as historicization but also as a renewal and continuation of the hidden Jewish tradition. It is precisely in this regard that Scholem's grand

[18] Hamann, 'Des Ritters von Rosencreuz letzte Willensmeynung', 173–176.
[19] Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, 108.
[20] Hamann, *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten, Aesthetica in nuce*, 147. On *Aesthetica in nuce* see Küsters, *Inhaltsanalyse*.
[21] With this apt description Peter Kraft characterizes Hamann's style ('Zur Deutung von Johann Georg Hamanns "Kabbalistischer Prose"', 8).

historiographic project can be understood as a kabbalistic one. Here, historiography becomes *the* modern kabbalah. Indeed, in his young years Scholem refers to Hamann when he formulates his astonishing thesis in 1918: 'Judaism should be derived from its language' ('Das Judentum ist aus seiner Sprache herzuleiten').[22] Hamann's kabbalistic philology, which raised language to the primary subject matter of philosophy and theology, is still cited at the beginning of Scholem's essay on 'Der Name Gottes und die Sprachtheorie der Kabbalah' as late as 1970 (published in 1981):

> That is the point from which the mystical theories of language in all religions originate, the point where language becomes the language of revelation, and the language of human reason; for it was Johann Georg Hamann who described the fundamental thesis of linguistic mysticism with magnificent laconism: 'Language—the mother of reason and revelation, its very essence'.[23]

With Hamann as his starting point, the young Scholem searches for a way out of a philology that practically buries the kabbalah in a history of Judaism. He, too, finds it in a new *philologia sacra*, which itself assumes the function of the kabbalah. Scholem's Janus-like intellectual profile displays traits of both philologies. On the one hand he is *the* historian of the kabbalah, one who—not unlike the historians of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*—writes a chapter of Jewish history using critical, philological, and methodological rigor. His historical criticism is also highlighted by the fact that he vehemently rejects any endeavors to renew the kabbalah in the twentieth century (such as those by Oskar Goldberg or Georg Langer).[24] With the authority of the historian, he distinguishes between the "real", "historical" kabbalah on the one hand, and a "false", "unhistorical", remythologized pseudo-kabbalah on the other. Here, Scholem becomes an un-kabbalistic historiographer of the kabbalah.

Yet at the same time Scholem was also a kabbalistic historiographer of the kabbalah. This was most apparent in the phase when he first began his study of the kabbalah, between around 1915 and 1925. Here, Scholem approached the kabbalah based on a concept of philology that was almost polemic in its rejection of the historicizing and

[22] Scholem, '95 Thesen über Judentum und Zionismus', 289.
[23] Scholem, 'Der Name Gottes', 9.
[24] See Kilcher, 'Figuren des Endes'.

secularizing philology of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He criticized it as a 'liquidation and dissolution of tradition', as the 'historical suicide' of Judaism.[25] This critique also had a cultural Zionist purpose. Scholem wanted a new Zionist study of Judaism, as formulated before him by Chaiim Nachman Bialik or Heinrich Loewe, not to ceremonially confine Judaism *qua* historiography to the annals of history, but instead to prepare the way for a 'renaissance of Judaism', for animating Judaism ('*verlebendigen*') by the means of philology and academic scrutiny.[26] Scholem argued in a similar sense, when he, too, rejected the scholarly 'burial ceremony' of pre-Zionist study of Judaism and advocated a new philology that would renew Judaism and kabbalah by means of academic description. This discipline is a means and method for 'real build-up' ('*echten Aufbau*'), and the historian becomes a constructive 'restorer' ('*Restaurator*') and even saviour of the past, bringing it new life, instead of a destructive 'gravedigger'.[27] Scholem outlined this project of philology for the first time in 1918 in a letter to his future wife Escha Burchhardt.

> I am studying philology, of which I have indeed gained extraordinary knowledge and of which one should only speak with the greatest awe. It is a truly secret discipline, and the only genuinely historical one that has ever existed. It is one of the greatest confirmations of my view of the central role of tradition, albeit naturally in a new sense of this word.[28]

It goes without saying that this 'new sense of the word "philology"' as a 'secret discipline' corresponds precisely to the kabbalah: kabbalah as the transmission of an esoteric tradition. This resacralized philology thus would not only have the task of using the kabbalah to renew the hidden metaphysics of Judaism for modern times; it would also become a renewal of kabbalah itself by taking over its task of transmission.

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[25] Scholem, 'Wissenschaft vom Judentum', 21.

[26] See Bialik, 'Das hebräische Buch', 35: 'Zeit ist es. Unsere Westler schufen die Wissenschaft des Judentums in fremden Sprachen. Unsere Schriftsteller im Osten schufen "bloss" die neuhebräische Literatur. Sie unterschätzen die Wissenschaft nicht, halten aber die hebräische Sprache nicht für notwendig. Ist nicht an der Zeit, dass die Wissenschaft des Judentums mit der Sprache des Judentums weiterwächst, um die Renaissance von beiden und von dem jüdischen Geiste zu vervollkommnen? Durch eine solche Vermählung hätte sich die Wissenschaft des Judentums von all den Fremdkörpern befreit, […] und—was noch wichtiger ist—vom Nagen an den Knochen der Vergangenheit, von der fruchtlosen Dürre, von der Blutarmut und Impotenz. […] Nur auf diesem Weg kann die Wissenschaft des Judentums verlebendigt werden'.

[27] Scholem, 'Wissenschaft vom Judentum', 20.

[28] Scholem, *Briefe I*, 167.

Shortly afterwards young Scholem clarified this 'new sense' of philology as kabbalah in his first reviews of new kabbalistic publications. He published two reviews of translations from kabbalistic literature, written in 1920 and 1921 for Martin Buber's journal *Der Jude*: Scholem reviewed translations of *From the Holy Book of Zohar* (1920, translated by Jankew Seidmann) and of *The Poetry of the Kabbalah* (1920, translated by Meïr Wiener). In both reviews, Scholem initially took a strictly critical philological approach by polemically arguing against the renewal of the kabbalah on the basis of a semi-mystical psychology of lived experience. His critique was particularly directed against the anti-philological, remystifying translation practice of Buber and his circle, according to which the ancient texts of the kabbalah and Chassidism were modernized 'ecstatically', instead of philologically, with the intention of bringing about a 'renaissance' of Judaism.[29] Scholem's criticism is aimed at 'psychologism' and 'ideology of lived experience'.[30] In combating 'the audaciousness of the generalization of the term kabbalah'[31] in wild adaptations and inspired works, Scholem thus initially proves to be an agent of historical and philological criticism of literary sources.

However, as part of his criticism not only of the academic study of Judaism, but also of a psychological remystification of Judaism, Scholem at the same time presents his new concept of philology as a secret science. Indeed, Scholem sees philology as the only possibility to renew the kabbalah in modern times. Rigorously philological knowledge that studies the 'literal image' of tradition can approach kabbalah much more closely than an experience based on mere 'feeling'. According to Scholem, not the excesses of the mystagogues and ecstatics, but

> the hard and painstaking work of insight is the medium through which the ruins of our holy possessions can be awakened and reshaped into new life. The more silent parts of our Scriptures, and not just mysticism alone, have long been waiting for the appreciative love that divines its aura.[32]

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[29] See Scholem, 'Martin Bubers Deutung des Chassidismus'. Scholem voices doubts about the 'allzu modernen Wendung dieser Deutung', precisely about the 'Haltbarkeit dieser beflügelten und ergreifend schön formulierten Deutungen unter kritischer und nüchterner Analyse' (169), i.e. about the criteria of a historical analysis.

[30] Scholem uses the idea of *Erlebnisideologie* in a letter to Siegfried Lehmann on 9 October 1916, in: *Briefe I*, 49.

[31] Scholem, 'Lyrik der Kabbala', 57.

[32] Scholem, 'Über die jüngste Sohar-Anthologie', 369.

This philology, whose agenda incidentally preempts Walter Benjamin's redemption of historiography, not only objectifies the kabbalah in a modern, academic manner. It also has the function of renewal. More precisely: it is the only renewal that is possible. It alone achieves what Scholem describes as 'appreciative love'. Thus it becomes not only kabbalah in the literal sense, but also "philology", or "the love of words". It is precisely here that the philology *of* the kabbalah is transformed into philology *as* kabbalah.

Scholem draws the same conclusion in his review of Wiener's *Poetry of the Kabbalah*. Even though here, too, he sees 'the modest and yet magnificent work of the philologists' as consisting in 'returning the full luster to a dusty and fundamentally little appreciated work',[33] he once again grants philology the ultimately messianic function of salvaging the kabbalah from the 'ruins of the past'.[34] In Scholem's view, this is the kabbalistic and 'mystic function of philology':

> I do believe that deep philology can have a mystic function if it fosters, accompanies, and evokes the changes of time in its works, and that the worthy transmission of the legacy of the generations [...] may involve a deeper relation to the kabbalah, one which is not without reason termed "transmission".[35]

Thus Scholem's historiography has two countenances. Scholem's exoteric philology *of* the kabbalah is readily discernible, woven throughout long stretches of his works and not quite distinct from the philology of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, no matter how much he may have criticized it.[36] Yet Scholem's second, esoteric countenance is less evident. At the margins of his historiographic project he grants philology the function of a loving and redeeming reading. It is not a ceremony of burial but of awakening, with the aim of bringing tradition out of its banishment in history and into the present. Here, modern discourse *on* kabbalah becomes modern discourse *of* kabbalah, and philology in turn becomes the modern kabbalistic activity *par excellence*: transmission. This is the turning point in a dialectic, the antitheses of which are construction and destruction, as is vehemently formulated by Scholem in his critique of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*:

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[33] Scholem, 'Lyrik der Kabbala', 56.
[34] Ibid., 19.
[35] Ibid., 69.
[36] Scholem, 'Überlegungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums', 22–24.

> It is part of the essence of historical criticism as a historical method that it cannot escape from this dialectic. Its destructive task [...] can turn into its very opposite in an instant: into the uncovering of a mass of facts and values that instantaneously alter the entire perspective, an uncovering that, without intending to do so, sublimates ruins of the past to symbols of enchanted life. In their critical work, historians must expect to suddenly appear as restorers at the very next step of their work. [...] historical criticism served them as a dialectic method for every authentic construction.[37]

In this transformation of destruction into construction, of historiography into restoration, philology becomes kabbalah in a double sense: as the transmission and as the redemption of a hidden tradition. In messianic terms, it is given the task of *tikkun*: its duty is to rescue a lost tradition from the ruins of the past.

The importance and continuity of this unhistorical—kabbalistic—concept of philology for Scholem is confirmed by the fact that he reformulated it, as late as 1958, in his 'Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah' ('Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala'). While before he was talking about the 'dialectics of destruction and construction', here, in the first of these sentences, he is talking about the 'irony' that characterizes the revelation of a hidden truth.

> There is something ironic in the philology of a mystical tradition such as the kabbalah. It occupies itself with a wall of fog that, as the history of the mystical tradition, surrounds the corpus, the space of the object itself; a fog, of course, that comes forth from itself. Does something of the principle of the thing itself—invisible to the philologist—remain, or do the most important aspects disappear in the projection of the historical evidence? The insecurity in answering this question belongs to the very nature of philological scrutiny; hence, the hope that inspires such a work keeps something ironic, which cannot be separated from it. But does such an element of irony not already belong to the very object of kabbalah itself, and not only to its history? The kabbalist claims that there is a tradition of truth that can be transmitted. An ironic notion indeed, because the truth that is at stake here cannot be transmitted at all. It can be seen, but not transmitted; and exactly what can be transmitted of it, does not comprise it any more. Real tradition remains hidden; only decayed tradition becomes an object and it is only in its dilapidation that its greatness becomes visible.[38]

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[37] Scholem, 'Überlegungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums', 19–20.

[38] Scholem, 'Zehn unhistorische Sätze über Kabbala', 264: 'Die Philologie einer mystischen Disziplin wie der Kabbala hat etwas Ironisches an sich. Sie beschäftigt sich

Philology still inherits the task of kabbalah as transmission of a hidden truth. But this task is now seen more skeptically by stressing that the esoteric truth can only be transmitted by a contradiction: by making it exoteric. Nevertheless, philology follows kabbalah in inheriting precisely this 'irony' from the kabbalah itself. Even more so: in making the hidden truth exoteric, philology brings kabbalah—ironically—to completion.

Translated from the German by David Matley

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mit einem Nebelschleier, der als Geschichte der mystischen Tradition das Korpus, den Raum der Sache selbst umhängt, ein Nebel freilich, der aus ihr selber dringt. Bleibt in ihm, dem Philologen sichtbar, etwas vom Gesetzt der Sache selbst oder verschwindet gerade das Wesentliche in dieser Projektion des Historischen? Die Ungewissheit in der Beantwortung dieser Frage gehört zur Natur der philologischen Fragestellung selbst, und so behält die Hoffnung, von der diese Arbeit lebt, etwas Ironisches, das von ihr nicht abgelöst werden kann. Aber liegt solch Element der Ironie nicht vielmehr schon im Gegenstand dieser Kabbala selber, und nicht nur in ihrer Geschichte? Der Kabbalist behauptet, es gäbe eine Tradition über die Wahrheit, die tradierbar sei. Eine ironische Behauptung, da ja die Wahrheit, um die es hier geht, alles andere ist als tradierbar. Sie kann erkannt werden, aber nicht überliefert werden, und gerade das an ihr, was überlieferbar wird, enthält sie nicht mehr. Echte Tradition bleibt verborgen; erst die verfallende Tradition verfällt auf einen Gegenstand und wird im Verfall erst in ihrer Größe sichtbar'.

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BEYOND THE BURDEN OF IDEALISM: FOR A NEW APPRECIATION OF THE VISUAL LORE IN THE KABBALAH

Giulio Busi

1. A Discovery of Kabbalistic Drawings

My personal discovery of the visual dimension of the kabbalah comes from an experience in the field, which suddenly brought me into contact with this intriguing aspect of mystical manuscripts. Some ten years ago I drove to Mantua to have a first look at the manuscripts collection of the Jewish community. Mantua is an ancient town that, from the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century, was a very active center of Jewish studies that made, among others, a significant contribution in the field of mysticism.

The director of the library was waiting for me and seemed to be a bit uneasy. He took my arm and led me through corridors where no normal visitor is usually allowed, to the very heart of the ancient and imposing building. After a last heavy door we entered the treasury where all the bibliographic riches of Mantua, the manuscripts, the incunabula, and the rare books are kept. It is a long room, very dark in order to protect the books from the light. The Hebrew manuscripts had been prepared for me, arranged on a huge neo-classic table at the center of the room. This collection was donated to the Municipal Library at the beginning of the 1930's and therefore managed to escape the ravages of the Second World War and the dispersion of the Jewish heritage caused by racial laws.

So, there I was, in that old room of the library, which smelled of wax, together with this impressive collection of manuscripts. The director was only too happy to leave me alone to take care of this quite weird stuff and, for my part, I was also happy to have the opportunity to get acquainted with such a precious heritage. The manuscripts I had in front of me were not expensive copies on vellum, but rather simple copies intended mainly for personal study or school texts, where the teachers transmitted to their pupils the secret doctrines, the new theories, or even the mystical interpretation of their dreams. The task

ahead of me was to organize the enormous amount of information contained in these texts into a modern catalogue.[1]

It was already rather late in the morning and I realized that I would not be able to get down to any methodical work that day, but still I wanted to get acquainted with the collection. I picked up one book and started to turn the pages. It was a reworking of a text by Chayyim Vital, more precisely a collection of short quotations dealing with the mystical meaning of the liturgy. Suddenly I was struck by a beautiful drawing of the sefirotic worlds, which occupied an entire page.[2] I looked at it for a while, then an idea came to my mind. The kabbalah is not only theory but—at least as far as manuscripts are concerned—also a visual experience. I put aside the text I was looking at, leaving it open on the table, and I picked up a second work. After some pages, there it was! Another striking image, this time even more surprising because the ten heavens of the cosmos were surrounded by two huge serpents, the head of each one holding the tail of the other one.[3] As I put this drawing close to the previous one, I could not avoid noticing a strange kind of relationship between the two.

At that point I became really involved in the game and began to open one manuscript after the other. In a few minutes the huge table was entirely covered by old kabbalistic drawings: cosmic wheels connected through channels of light, hundreds of Hebrew letters arranged according to symmetric patterns or twisted into abstract geometric shapes. Little by little, one detail after the other, a large picture had taken shape in front of me: a complete atlas of the Jewish mystical utopia.

The Mantuan drawings impressed me even more since, notwithstanding my years of study of Jewish mystical literature, I was not able, at first, to fit these graphical materials into the frame of the history of the kabbalah. Visually evident as they were, the diagrams were a kind of erratic evidence of the past, with no link to any philological theory. I went back to the work of Scholem and to the more recent bibliography on the kabbalah, but I was not able to find anything on a subject that my manuscripts showed to be of primary importance.

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[1] Busi, *Catalogue of the Kabbalistic Manuscripts*.

[2] Mantua, Biblioteca comunale, Ms. ebr. 51, fol. 107bis (see below image 1). See Busi, *Mantova e la Qabbalah*, XVII, plate 15; idem, *Qabbalah visiva*, 400–401.

[3] Mantua, Biblioteca Comunale, Ms. ebr. 24, fol. 63r (see below image 2). See Busi, *Mantova e la Qabbalah*, XXV, plate 23; idem, *Qabbalah visiva,* 374–375.

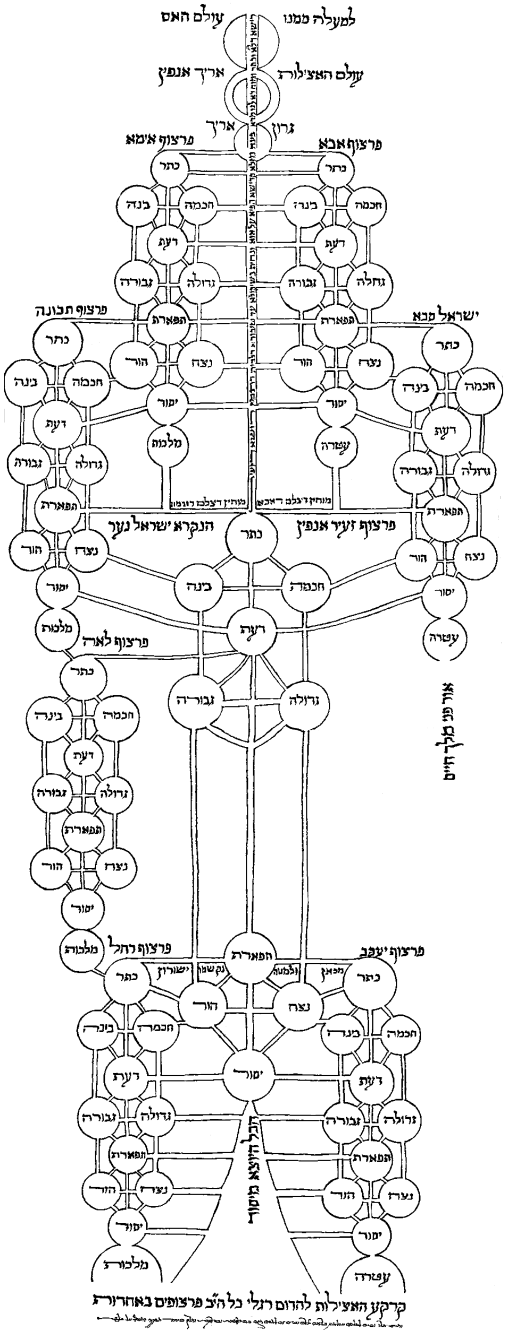

Image 1: Mantua, Biblioteca Comunale, Ms. ebr. 51, fol. 107bis

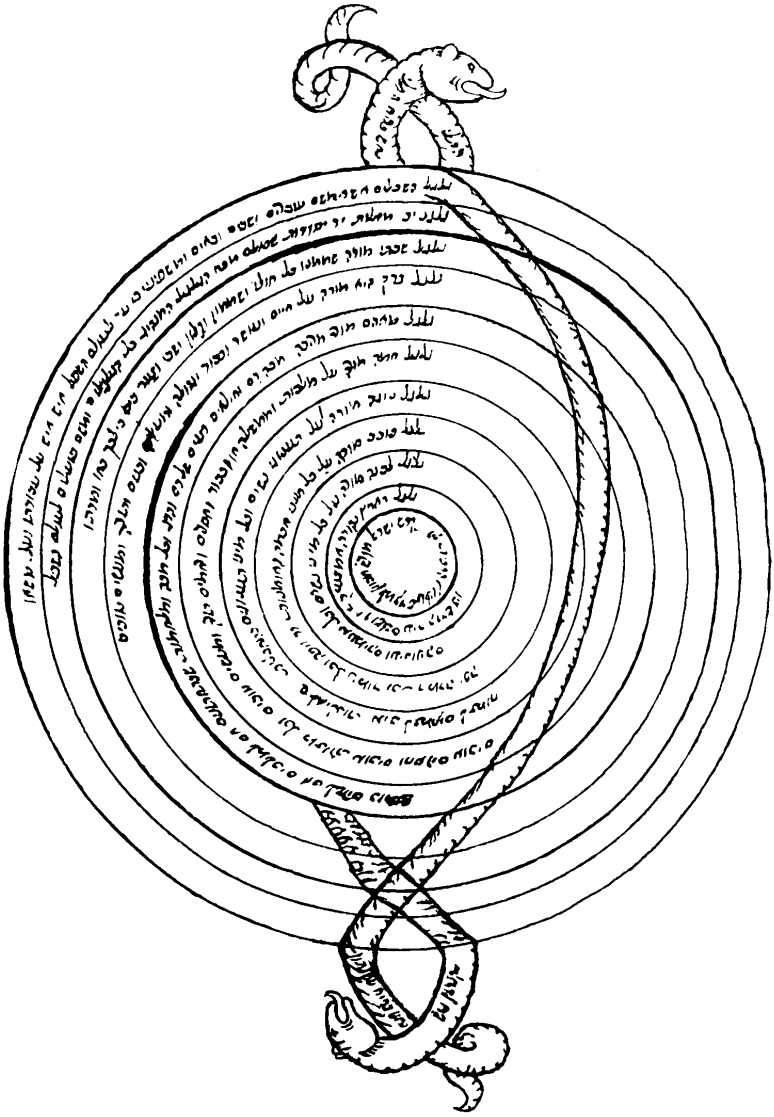

Image 2: Mantua, Biblioteca Comunale, Ms. ebr. 24, fol. 63r

To solve this intellectual riddle, I began to collect drawings from non-Mantuan manuscripts, too, and I soon realized that they numbered well above my expectations. The more evidence I put together the less understandable appeared to me the silence that enveloped the whole matter. In order to show to a more general public the richness of the graphical heritage of Jewish mysticism, I arranged an exhibition of the Mantuan manuscripts and attempted a first survey of the subject in the catalogue that accompanied it.[4] After some years of further studies, I published an anthology of the kabbalistic drawings with some one hundred and fifty diagrams, which encompasses the whole history of the kabbalah from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries.[5] Much work remains to be done. My aim is now to prepare a comprehensive inventory of all the extant kabbalistic drawings.

One of the many questions I asked myself during my journey through the visual kabbalah was why the terrain had remained practically untouched so far. Had such a gap in historical research been caused by a conscious dislike or by an unconscious underestimation of graphic representations? In order to clarify this point, I believe it is necessary to sum up briefly the cultural background that influenced modern scholarship on Jewish mysticism.

2. From Pico to Scholem: The Long Journey of Kabbalistic Studies from Florence to Berlin (and Jerusalem)

The study of the kabbalah in Europe has begun twice, a first time at the height of the Italian Renaissance and a second time during the blossoming of German Romanticism. For Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), who in 1486 laid the foundation stone of Christian kabbalah, Jewish secret lore was a constitutive part of ancient theology. For him and for his immediate followers, the mystic tradition cherished by the Jews belonged to the wider stream of a deeper knowledge, just as did the teachings of Egyptian divine sages like Hermes or Greek philosophers like Plato and Plotinus. Pico was not interested in keeping a philological distance from the kabbalistic texts; to the contrary, his approach was an eclectic one, aimed at using the kabbalah in a continuing interplay with other traditions. It is true that Pico deserves

[4] Busi, *Mantova e la Qabbalah*.
[5] Busi, *Qabbalah visiva*.

the credit for having collected what can be termed the largest kabbalistic library ever owned by a Christian scholar till modern times. Nevertheless, he reshaped freely the Jewish teachings into the broader frame of his harmonizing vision.[6]

Such an attitude can also be traced in his followers, like Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522),[7] Giles of Viterbo[8] (ca. 1465–1532), and even Guillaume Postel (1510–1581).[9] For all of them the kabbalistic sources added living water to be mixed with the stream of their Christian utopia. From Pico on, and until the late seventeenth century, the Christian kabbalah remained a very creative undertaking, although surely lacking a high philological standard. One could say that the humanists were less strict with regard to Hebrew than with regard to Latin and Greek sources, as if the Jewish lore were a mine of raw materials to be used without constraint.

The scholars imbued with Renaissance esthetic values did not fail to take notice of the graphic dimension of Jewish mysticism. We know, for instance, that Giles of Viterbo charged a Jewish scribe with the task of preparing a kabbalistic scroll with 'drawings in various colors on a large parchment sheet'.[10] At the beginning, scrolls like the one owned by Giles were used in order to understand better the Hebrew mystical lore, but quite soon the Christian kabbalists developed their own visual patterns. As early as 1548, Guillaume Postel conceived an image of a kabbalistic *menorah,* and published it in a pamphlet together with a short treatise about its symbolic meaning.[11]

This was one of the first steps toward an independent Christian way of commenting on the kabbalah with images. In the second half of

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[6] About Pico's kabbalistic studies see Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter*; Busi (ed.), *The Great Parchment*.

[7] About Johannes Reuchlin see the extensive bibliography quoted in Reuchlin, *L'arte cabbalistica (De arte cabalistica),* edited by Busi & Campanini, 229–270; among the most recent titles see Reuchlin, *Briefwechsel,* edited by Dall'Asta & Dörner; von Abel & Leicht, *Verzeichnis der Hebraica*.

[8] See Giles of Viterbo, *Scechina e Libellus*; O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*; Pfeiffer, *Zur Ikonographie von Raffaels Disputa*; Istituto Storico Agostiniano, *Egidio da Viterbo*; Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar*.

[9] Among the most recent studies see Secret, *Postel revisité*; Matton (ed.), *Documents oubliés sur l'alchimie, la kabbale et Guillaume Postel*; Petry, *Gender, Kabbalah, and the Reformation*.

[10] Sed-Rajna, 'Un diagramme kabbalistique'. According to Sed-Rajna, a copy of the parchment which belonged to the cardinal is now preserved in Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hunt. Add. E; see also Busi, *Qabbalah visiva*, 10.

[11] See Secret, *Guillaume Postel*.

the sixteenth century and even more during the seventeenth century the amount of kabbalistic drawings grew considerably, often intermingling with a broader Hermetic heritage. In most cases, kabbalistic elements were mixed with astrological or mnemonic ones.[12] In its visual expressions the Christian kabbalah was quite creative and eclectic, and it represented an important element of a much larger frame of Renaissance esotericism. More interested in re-shaping the Jewish kabbalah than in analyzing it objectively, the Christian scholars developed their own visual system instead of describing faithfully the diagrams of the Hebrew manuscripts they collected.

The second beginning of the kabbalistic studies in the early nineteenth century can be considered in many respects as an independent one, since Christian and Jewish scholars at the time who took interest in the kabbalah had goals different from the ones of the Italian and European humanists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

This second phase came into being under the combined impulse of idealistic philosophy and German philology. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854) played a pivotal role in promoting the new interest for the kabbalah, and for the Zohar in particular, even if he himself never went beyond a general appreciation for the matter.[13] Schelling's motivations were not linked with Pico's Renaissance quest. Instead of being a branch of the ever-green tree of wisdom, the kabbalah attested for him a stage in the history of symbolic patterns of knowledge. He considered the kabbalah to be a kind of 'remnant of the primeval system that represents the key to all religious systems'.[14] As a cultural fossil, the kabbalistic lore was for the German philosopher a useful tool in order to decode the ancient mythological mentality.

On the one hand, this attitude put Jewish mysticism on the agenda again and thus rescued it from the devaluation it suffered during the Enlightenment age. On the other hand, the close relationship of the Christian kabbalists of the Renaissance with the kabbalah was definitely over. Schelling's interest was marked by distance, since the kabbalah was for him a tradition firmly in the past, to be superseded by

[12] A typical example of such a mingling of different visual patterns is offered by the works of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600): see Gabriele (ed.), *Giordano Bruno*.

[13] On Schelling's interest for the kabbalah see Folkers, 'Das immanente Ensoph'; Schulte, 'Zimzum bei Schelling'.

[14] Schelling, 'Über die Gottheiten von Samothrake', 416.

the evolution of philosophy. In pleading in favor of a new publication of kabbalistic masterworks, like the Zohar, he wrote for instance:

> It is highly desirable that these most venerable monuments will soon be taken away from the hands of simple theologians and transmitted to the pure historians, so that they can enjoy the same unlimited veneration and be used as sources at least as good as Homeric poetry or Herodotus' narratives.[15]

Schelling's references to Jewish lore were further developed mainly by Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860), who, in his *Philosophie der Geschichte* (published 1827–1857), offered a general outline of the kabbalistic tradition. Molitor translated the kabbalah into the language of German idealism, thus giving a European flavor to Jewish thought.[16] He was driven by a strong Catholic enthusiasm, but even some of the first Jewish scholars who dealt with the kabbalah were imbued with ideas derived from Schelling.

The most interesting example is offered by Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer (1808–1841), who studied the Hebrew manuscripts in the Munich Library and attempted the first scholarly survey of Jewish mysticism. Both in the historical analysis and in the study on the meaning of the names of God,[17] Landauer's approach, as Abraham Geiger put it, belongs to 'the symbolical-philosophical school of Schelling'.[18] His untimely death prevented Landauer from developing a mature analysis of the kabbalah. Nonetheless, the posthumous publication of his notes on medieval Jewish mysticism[19] had a great influence and was held in great esteem even by an exigent reader like Heinrich Graetz.[20]

Also quite important were two others Jews who wrote in German on mystical subjects, namely David Heymann Joel (1815–1882) and Adolf Jellinek (1820–1893).[21] Although they were not enthusiastic followers of Schelling, like Molitor and Landauer were, they both reexamined

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[15] Ibid., 417 (all translations are mine, if not noted otherwise).

[16] On Molitor's kabbalistic sources cf. Koch, *Franz Joseph Molitor*. Some documents about the relationship between Molitor and Schelling have been published by Sandkühler, *Freiheit und Wirklichkeit*, 249–277.

[17] Landauer, *Jehova und Elohim*; idem, *Wesen und Form des Pentateuchs*.

[18] Geiger, 'Review of Landauer', especially p. 405. See also Goodman-Thau, 'Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer', especially p. 252.

[19] Landauer, 'Vorläufiger Bericht'.

[20] See Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 7, 385–386.

[21] About Jellinek see Rosenmann, *Dr. Adolf Jellinek*. A short appraisal of his kabbalistic studies was published by Jost, *Adolf Jellinek und die Kabbala*.

the kabbalah according to the spirit of contemporary German philosophy, and saw it as a part of the broader phenomenon of *Religionsphilosophie*. This reading of religion according to the principles of philosophy, which dominated German culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, was aimed 'at tracing in every religion the eternal power of spirit'.[22] It is not by chance that Joel uses these very words at the beginning of his *opus magnum*, which bears the revealing title of 'Die Religionsphilosophie des Sohar'. And it is precisely this 'spiritual power' that Joel tries to extract from the kabbalah through a kind of translation of the original Hebrew thought into philosophical terminology. His program was to 'keep the inner kernel, the metaphysical principle, and to separate it with care from its exterior husks or casual waste'.[23]

It is interesting that Joel gave quite a positive evaluation of the kabbalah, because he was convinced that the mystical lore 'had developed from the very intimate core of Judaism'.[24] Such an appraisal of the Jewishness of the kabbalah was to have a deep influence on Gershom Scholem and would constitute one of the main reasons for his "rediscovery" of the secret tradition.

The German idealistic background is also clearly detectable in the work of Adolf Jellinek. A gifted preacher and active communal leader, Jellinek wrote important essays on the history of the kabbalah and published many texts that were not previously edited. Some of his philological statements on the development of Jewish mysticism have retained via Scholem their effectiveness until today. He praised the work of Molitor as an attempt to grasp the ideal nucleus of kabbalistic teachings, and also for him, as for Joel, 'mysticism is a greatly important moment in the spiritual development of humanity'.[25]

Particularly important is Jellinek's analysis of the kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia. While he discussed at length Abulafia's works and even published one of them, he did not show very sympathetic feelings for his radical theories. A revealing example is offered by Jellinek's approach to what he calls Abulafia's 'ecstasy', which he rejected with

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[22] Joel, *Die Religionsphilosophie des Sohar*, viii.
[23] Ibid., ix.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Jellinek, *Auswahl*, iv; idem, *Mikrokosmos*, v–vi. Less positive is Jellinek's earlier judgment of Molitor in his preface to the translation of Franck's *Die Kabbala oder die Religions-Philosophie der Hebräer*, xi.

Hegelian overtones,[26] naming the kabbalist a 'mystical fanatic'.[27] It is worth mentioning that the now widespread definition of Abulafia's mysticism as 'ecstatic kabbalah' derives ultimately from Jellinek's characterization. In fact, Gershom Scholem adopted Jellinek's definition[28] of Abulafian mysticism, and trough his seminal works on the history of the kabbalah, handed it down to later scholarship. As a matter of fact, Abulafia himself in his works never used the word 'ecstatic', which actually is not attested in medieval Hebrew. Instead, he always spoke of a 'prophetic kabbalah' as a path based on rational premises and built upon the belief that prophecy represents the highest form of knowledge. Such an idea, heavily influenced by the theory of prophecy formulated by Moses Maimonides in his *Guide of the Perplexed*,[29] has little to do with the irrational aura evocated by the word "ecstasy", applied to the kabbalah in nineteenth-century Germany.

It is not surprising that none of the nineteenth-century scholars influenced by the idealistic culture paid attention to the visual elements of the kabbalah. Their philosophical inclination oriented them toward

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[26] It is well known that Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) disdained Schelling's philosophy of identity as 'the night in which, as we say, all cows are black'. According to Schelling, on the contrary, the merging of subject and object defined by the word "ecstasy" represented the highest level of knowledge.

[27] Jellinek, *Auswahl,* 18 Nonetheless, Jellinek acknowledged some genuine inspiration in Abulafia's work: 'Notwithstanding his ecstasy one finds in his writings also some very clever remarks, as well as elevated ideas and inspired similitudes' (*Philosophie und Kabbala*, vi).

[28] While accepting from Jellinek the idea of an 'ecstatic kabbalah', Scholem overturned the negative opinion of his predecessor and considered the Abulafian theories to be a sincere mystical quest. Such a positive attitude is particularly evident in his seminal *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Scholem was undoubtedly influenced by Martin Buber. In fact, in 1909 Buber published a book entitled *Ekstatische Konfessionen*, an anthology of mystical experiences chosen from Jewish as well as from Hindu, Neoplatonic, Gnostic, Catholic, and even Chinese mysticism, to which he added an essay on 'Ekstase und Bekenntnis' (significantly, Buber's book is quoted in the essential bibliography at the end of *Major Trends,* 425, together with Molitor's *Philosophie der Geschichte*). The concept of 'ecstatic kabbalah' has been popularized by a fortunate series of studies by Moshe Idel (e.g. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*; *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, to quote only the most popular ones). However, as far as I know, Idel has never discussed the German idealistic roots of such a definition.

[29] It suffices here to quote what Abulafia writes in his *Chayye ha-'olam ha-ba*: 'Know that no prophet can prophesize without rational thinking (*bilti machshavah sikliut*) and that prophecy is the highest among human grades'; see also Busi, *Qabbalah visiva*, 142.

what they envisaged as the metaphysical and spiritual core of the kabbalah, and the mystical diagrams probably appeared to them strange and primitive, like the husks one should discard and throw away.

A similar indifference was shown by Scholem, who almost completely ignored the graphic dimension of Jewish mysticism. In fact, even though he made a largely unprecedented attempt to deal with the history of the kabbalah as a whole and brought to light many philological facts previously unknown, his intellectual background was largely influenced by German scholarship of the nineteenth century. In his autobiography, Scholem stresses his dismay for the positivistic attitude with which the fathers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (such as L. Zunz, S.J.L. Rapoport, S.D. Luzzatto, A. Geiger, and M. Steinschneider) had rejected the kabbalah. Nonetheless, he does not even mention people like Joel and Jellinek, to whom his interpretation of crucial points in the history of Jewish mysticism is deeply indebted. For instance, besides the reading of Abulafia's mysticism as 'ecstasy', Scholem takes from Jellinek the division between a zoharic theosophy and an ecstatic kabbalah. Like Jellinek, he considers the latter to be completely different from the former. On the other hand, he follows Joel in appreciating the kabbalah as an original creation of the Jewish spirit, more authentic than philosophy.

He also echoes these predecessors in his appraisal of Christian Molitor, whom he considers—quoting Jellinek almost verbatim—as somebody who really managed to understand the kabbalah.[30] Even the idea that the kabbalah contains a Gnostic nucleus, which represents one of the most evident and yet problematic features of Scholem's work, is derived from nineteenth-century German scholars, namely Jellinek and also the vehement positivist Graetz.

Visual kabbalah simply did not fit into Scholem's intellectual horizon. He takes diagrams very rarely and then only briefly into account, significantly only to reject them as useless. This is the case with the *Sefer ha-gevul* by David ben Yehudah he-Chasid, which can probably be considered the real masterpiece of visual kabbalah. In his study on David ben Yehudah, Scholem writes that the *Sefer ha-gevul* preserves 'many drawings and circles' but adds that he 'had not been able to take great advantage from them' because 'they conceal more that they

[30] Schulte, '"Die Buchstaben haben…ihre Wurzeln oben"'.

reveal'.[31] Almost these very words were repeated by Moshe Idel, sixty years later, on the same subject: 'The *Sefer ha-gevul* is illustrated by endless circles and figures that obfuscate rather than illuminate the significance of the text'.[32]

The scholars of modern times mentioned so far deserve the credit for having established the study of the kabbalah on a sound philological ground. Without them this field would still be at the mercy of unsystematic improvisation. It is evident that their failure to appreciate the visual element of Jewish mysticism cannot be attributed to an intentional disregard for the subject. Rather, their attitude should be seen in light of the German background of the study of the kabbalah during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That is to say, the reason why the visual aspects of the kabbalah have remained "invisible" until today is linked to an unconscious underestimation of all elements that do not belong to the "higher" level of philosophy, an approach still marked by idealistic philosophy.

3. In Praise of Inky Mysticism

As I have tried to show in my recent studies, drawings actually do not conceal but clarify mystical theories. Since the thirteenth century, and well into the modern age, kabbalists have tried to fix on paper the unfathomable features of the divine world, thus adding a relevant number of drawings to many mystical works. The first drawings we can date with reasonable certainty are included in the writings of Yaaqov ben Yaaqov ha-Kohen (mid-thirteenth century), who was active between Spain and southern France and was heavily influenced by the tradition of the *Chasside Ashkenaz*.[33] After him, Abraham Abulafia used graphic devices in order to visualize the unceasing flow of permutations that animates the Hebrew language, while the adepts of the so-called *Iyyun* circle produced maps of supernal palaces and heavenly spheres. It is true that in the main corpus of the Zohar only a

[31] Scholem, 'Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Chasid neked ha-Ramban' (= *Studies in Kabbalah*, vol. 1), especially 145.

[32] Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 217.

[33] On Yaaqov ha-Kohen see Scholem, 'Qabbalot rabbi Yaaqov we-rabbi Yitzchaq ha-Kohen'; idem, *Le-cheqer qabbalat rabbi Yitzchaq ben Yaaqov ha-Kohen*; Abrams, *Book of Illumination*; idem, 'Traces of the Lost Commentary'; Farber-Ginat & Abrams (eds.), *Commentaries to Ezekiel's Chariot*; Busi, *Qabbalah visiva*, 109–121.

few drawings are included, but it is also worth remembering that at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century David ben Yehudah he-Chasid created an astonishing number of drawings based on the zoharic *Idrot*. The already mentioned *Sefer ha-gevul* by David ben Yehudah evocates a mysterious zoharic lore, expressed mainly through graphic proportions.[34] A few large kabbalistic parchments dating from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries show that drawings were widely used for teaching purposes, especially on the Italian peninsula, where the visual elements seem to have enjoyed remarkable attention. In some cases, the scrolls were lavishly decorated, and not—as it was usually the case—simply sketched with ink; this reveals the fact that the artistic atmosphere of the Renaissance permeated also some aspects of otherwise austere kabbalistic milieus.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, Moses Cordovero made use of quite a few diagrams in order to clarify his systematization of the kabbalah in the *Pardes rimmonim*.[35] With the spreading of Lurianic kabbalah the visual dimension of the emanation received an even broader attention. Lurianic manuscripts are full of complicate diagrams, in which galaxies of sefirotic entities grow with baroque profusion.[36] Only a few of these drawings have found their way into the printed edition of Lurianic works. Actually, the kabbalistic drawings try to imitate the immaterial lines that God drew before shaping the visible world. Many kabbalists believed that these very lines had a special importance, even superior to theories expressed through words. Far from being pure ornaments or a simple didactical tool, these diagrams have a hermeneutical status and express a relationship between divine forces, which is often impossible to analyze discursively. Therefore, reconstructing the development of kabbalistic thought without taking into account its visual features has sometimes impaired the effectiveness of the philological method. The graphic dimension enables us to understand better quite a few otherwise obscure works so that we can even rethink whole chapters of the history of Jewish mysticism.

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[34] On David ben Yehudah see Scholem, 'Rabbi David ben Yehudah'; Goldreich, *Sefer ha-gevul*; Idel, 'The "Zohar" Translation'; idem, 'Once more about R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid'; idem, 'Chomer qabbali'; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*. I have published and commented on some sixty drawings taken from *Sefer ha-gevul* in my *Qabbalah visiva*, 209–335. See also below images 3 and 4.

[35] See Busi, *Qabbalah visiva*, 389–394.

[36] Ibid., 395–441.

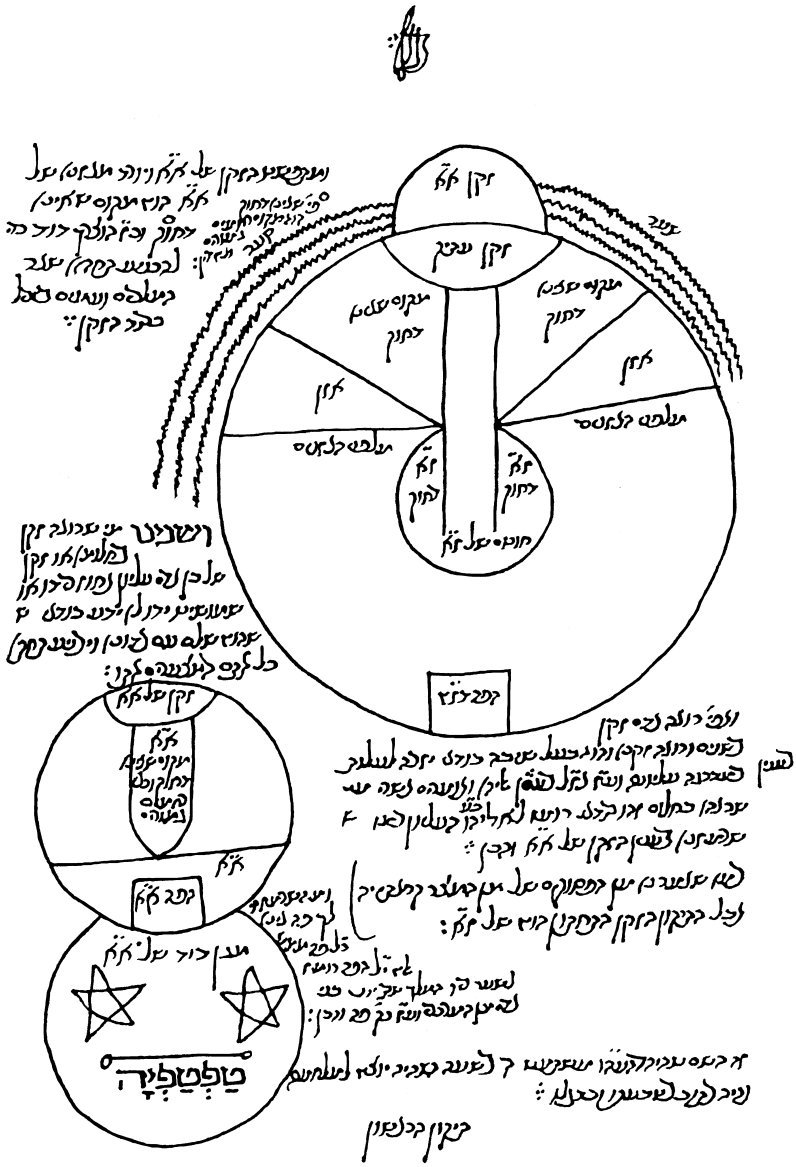

Image 3: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. hebr 876, fol. 79v

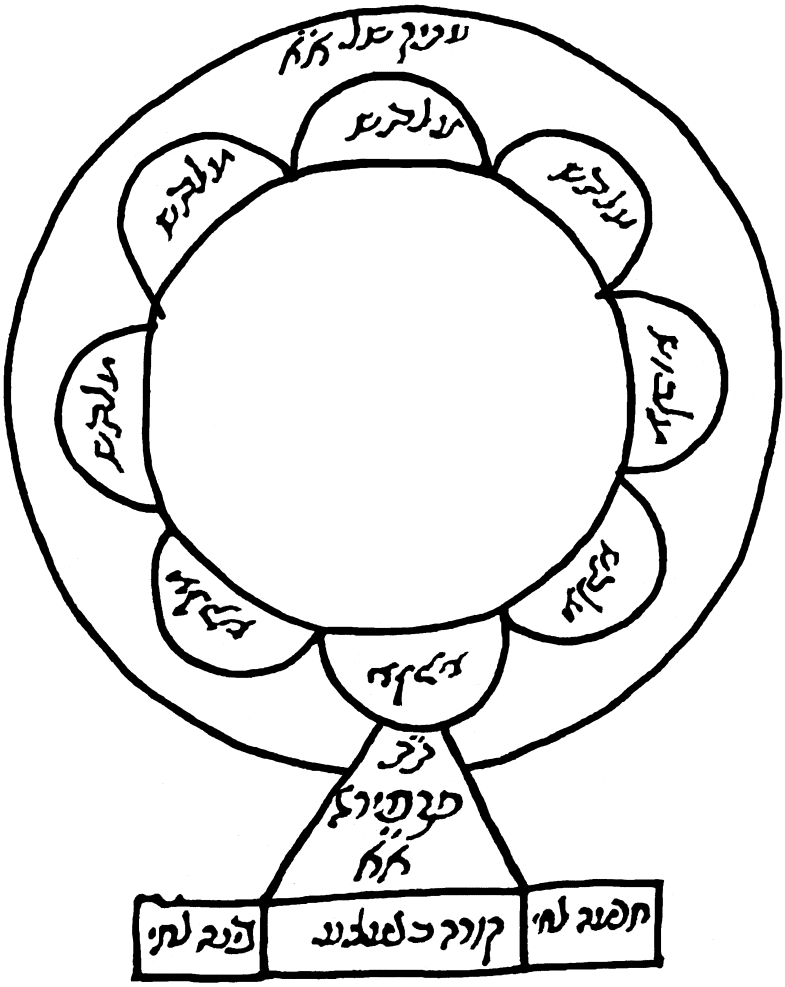

Image 4: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. hebr 876, fol. 87r

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THE FUTURE OF THE KABBALAH: ON THE DISLOCATION OF PAST PRIMACY, THE PROBLEM OF EVIL, AND THE FUTURE OF ILLUSIONS

Eric Jacobson

1. Introduction

Kabbalah has a clandestine affinity with modernity. Perhaps this is why we have witnessed the underestimation of the force of the kabbalah not once but twice: the historians of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school discouraged the interest in Jewish mysticism but also Gershom Scholem predicted an end to Jewish mysticism with the failing belief in the divine origins of Scripture. The kabbalah has become a thriving field of academic study despite the historians of the nineteenth century. But equally in defiance of Scholem's prognosis, details of the kabbalah are better known and more widely practiced now than at any other time in history.[1] Two generations of scholars who were once vehemently opposed find common ground as we enter an age in which kabbalistic trends flourish contemporaneously in universities and open marketplaces.[2] The future of the kabbalah under these conditions may be difficult to estimate. It is nevertheless clear that the fundamental opposition between kabbalah and modernity has proven to be rather superficial. The contrast between the two could not be

[1] Exceptional is the continuous rise of Habad, from the airports and Mitzvah mobiles of the 1970s to the acute Messianic aspirations of the 1990s. Despite every post-war expectation for a quiet and dignified burial, modern Hasidism has re-emerged to have a formidable impact on Jewish life and politics. No less unique is the development of the kabbalah as a new religious movement with its spiritual center in California. That an international celebrity would claim to be a devotee would surely have been difficult for Scholem to anticipate at a time when he saw the decline of Jewish mysticism as being correlated to the failing belief in the divine origin of Scripture—a sensible and also reasonable observation that has proven totally wrong in practice. See the title essay of Scholem, *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism* and Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane*, 76–85.

[2] Some have called these conditions postmodernist and others the essence of modernity—two alternate time sequences in which there is no consensus as to whether we are in or already beyond modernity. See Berman, *All that Is Sold Melts into Air*; Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*; D. Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*.

more self-evident: between the darkness of the middle ages and the brash neon of the culture industry, between the amulets against the 'emanations from the left' and the rationality of the medical industry, between the obscurity of esoterica and the revelations of reason. And yet, from out of the historical dustbin emerges the kabbalah: a jack-in-the-box which suddenly makes its home in the center of modernity.

2. Kabbalah and Modernity: A Clandestine Affinity

We begin this search for an understanding of the future of the kabbalah by seeking to discern a clandestine affinity between two categories as diametrically opposed as any could be.[3] The search for a commonality leads us firstly to the modern readers of the kabbalah and their means of interpretation. We begin with a *reading-in* to the text, a reading thoroughly imbued with the historical moment of our time: a moment in which the dismissal of rationalism, the counter-historical turn and contemporary cultural forms meet, head on, in a strange and fragmented world beyond past primacies. If a secret affinity exists between kabbalah and modernity, then it might be termed an *elective affinity* in this specific sense, since it is a relationship which transcends historical and textual progression through the application of meaning—a reading-in to the text which must always discover some grounding, however obscure and remote, within the text itself. New readings also provoke new approaches. So, for example, the introduction of a theory of the composite origins at the end of the nineteenth century had a considerable effect on the reading of the bible in many different fields. By upsetting a traditional reading of scripture, the Documentary Hypothesis instigated new trends in scriptural reasoning, which also participated in the discovery of new meaning within the text.[4] We might consider the contemporary methods and techniques used in the reading of the kabbalah in a similar fashion: an emphasis on applied

[3] Our search begins with a historiography of its own, as did the explorations of the two generations which preceded us, although we are operating in an age marked by a historic decline of past primacies, including the gradual erosion of the primary significance of the difference between mysticism and philosophy.

[4] Would Weber's study of ancient Israel or Freud's revision of Moses have been possible without the dissemination of the theory of composite origins at the end of the nineteenth century?

meaning would here suggest an affinity between kabbalah and modernity which is primarily *read-in*.[5]

Modern readers of the kabbalah *read-in* to the text to discover meanings which have contemporary relevance. Yet how could the application of meaning begin to explain the necessity or magnitude of this affinity, or distinguish the interpretation of the kabbalah from the general study of Jewish texts which equally relies on such methods of interpretation? For this reason we cannot limit the impact of the kabbalah to the mere prosperity and dissemination of kabbalistic ideas in a quantitative sense, and in particular, to the work of the new scholars of the kabbalah and their influence upon contemporary intellectuals, artists, and philosophers.[6] The influence of influence cannot alone explain the intensity of this affinity, nor the widespread use of kabbalistic motifs today. We must turn our attention instead to the condition of modernity, and that substance within it which seeks to express a profound sense of dislocation through the speculative systems of the past. We may take dislocation as a clue, for what serves as a greater signifier of the experience of modernity than the contemporary experience of dislocation, witnessed in the rapid transformation of the most basic experiences of living, residing, consuming, communicating, and convening with others? The dislocation of former centers of culture, both topographical and figurative, has contributed to an atmosphere of apprehension and suspicion toward doctrines, dogmas, and institutional theories in our time. In the myriad forms of modernity, we see the growth of the heteronomy of the subject in moral, industrial, and religious dimensions. Modernity has become the Do-It-Yourself of moral instruction, the heterogeneity of cultural sources and hybridity of practices. Equally in the politics of devolution and in the economic practices of diversification, the divine monad sheds emanations: what was once deemed whole is no longer a totality but a collection of parts. We even witness a decline and decentralization of authorship and intellectual property, and with it, the rise of anonymity and the return of pseudoepigraphy, making its appearance

[5] On applied meaning, see the discussion on timebound exegesis in Halivni, *Peshat and Derash*. In the context of Kabbalah, see Magid, 'From Theosophy to Midrash'.

[6] From the gallows of the French revolution with Moses Dobruška to the literary, aesthetic and philosophical work of Benjamin, Kafka, Borges, Oe, Eco, Gitai, Levi—the influence of the kabbalah on these authors and artists are known in greater or lesser degree.

seamlessly from the email to the blog. A decline in uniform authorship accompanies a decline in central authority, which occurs simultaneously and in rapid acceleration with the demise of the colonies, the collapse of the guiding and formative notions of the enlightenment, the sudden realignment of economic and political landscapes with the conceptual decline of the West, not to speak of the constant and radical transformation of the systems of communication and transit. In this sphere of competing authorities, we are personally witness to an uncanny number of dissociated narratives which served at one time as the groundwork of individual experience. Modernity has come to epitomize the culture of dispersal, with exile and dislocation the salient features of the modern age.

What connections can be drawn with the kabbalah? If we were to understand these dislocating features as being largely antinomian, since in every aspect described there is also a counter-force at work which undermines a former vision of consistency and continuity, we might suggest that the commonality between kabbalah and modernity is primarily an *affinity of antipathy*. Kabbalah found voice in a largely parallel history of European esoteric thought from the twelfth to the nineteenth century. Whether we consider specific antinomian movements or simply its persistence beyond every prediction and plan for its demise, Judaism continues to flourish in the subaltern crevices of Medieval Europe. The fact that Jewish thought has been shown to have existed beyond the prying eyes of European culture, which Hannah Arendt once claimed the greatest achievement of Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, suggests a continuity which is antinomian in a very specific sense: it is antinomian in relation to the primacy of the dominant European traditions.[7] Jewish thought can be said to play an integral role in the dislocation of the idea of the uniform character of the past, an idea upon which Walter Benjamin staked great claim toward the end of his life.[8] Antinomian, in this sense, is not necessarily the intention or purpose of any act, but rather its effect on a *nomos* which no longer appears complete.

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[7] Arendt, 'Jewish History, Revised' in: *The Jewish Writings*, 303–312.

[8] Cf. Walter Benjamin's last will and testament, now widely recognized as one of the central texts of the twentieth century, 'Theses on the Concept of History'. Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', *Gesammelte Schriften* I:1, in particular, Thesis 2, 694; in English: *Illuminations*, 253.

This is the central feature of Arendt's reading of *Major Trends*, in which she emphasizes the dynamic qualities of Jewish thought rumbling below the surface of European culture. In response to the association of Jewish culture with passivity, Arendt views the kabbalah as bearing active qualities of independent thought in contrast to the study of law and interpretation. The false dichotomy she delivers between rabbinics and kabbalah has long since been corrected. Yet the specific form of action which Arendt identifies with the kabbalah is worthy of consideration. The idea of action approximates the condition of the *vita activa* which found a favored place in her later work. 'To act', she writes, 'means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, *to begin*, *to lead* and ultimately *to rule* indicates), to set something into motion, (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*)'.[9] The *vita activa* emerges in Arendt's late work in the context of the primacy of classical civilization, and yet it is no surprise to find the dynamics of Jewish thought here between the lines. Scholem's work was the first to document the active intellectual current of Jewish thinking within European culture, says Arendt. The autonomy of the kabbalah is antinomian not of its own accord—although surely radical antinomian currents exist within Judaism—but rather by failing to conform to the dominant narratives of European civilization. The Jews proved continuously able to lead or to rule themselves, if not in the realm of power, then at least in the life of the mind.

The autonomy of the kabbalah has a distinct antinomian character in relation to the dominant traditions, and thereby a second affinity with modernity which can be characterized as an affinity of antipathy through its opposition. It is an elective affinity which tarries with the negative. However, by being a force of relations, this elective affinity yields a discrete moment which is more than the sum of its parts. It yields a positive—a tangible antinomian condition lodged within the cultures of power. As with all antinomian traditions, there is always something radical which lies just below the surface. I recall Scholem's thesis regarding the decline of Jewish mysticism: the failing belief in central doctrines—even a residual belief in *matan torah* which understands the Halakhah in relation to the commandments and not as mere ethical suggestions—has left us bereft of the banisters needed to guide us up and down the ladders of ascension. Without guiding

[9] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 177; *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*, 215.

narratives, by which I mean binding rather than merely conditional narratives, we are left with an anarchism of Jewish practice, and our agency in this anarchism exists in a condition of ethical, institutional and theoretical autonomy.[10] This autonomy is comparable to the antinomian and more specifically auto-nomian character of modernity. Here we have a vision more compelling than the kabbalist turning toward modernity. Under these conditions, the modern world may have finally entered the den of the kabbalist. My second argument therefore concerns the relation of affinities in a necessary sense: kabbalah and modernity express a hidden affinity which, in part, comes from the active integration of the kabbalah into the humanities and world culture, but more importantly, it is an affinity which Goethe and later Benjamin understood as elective—two discrete and unrelated phenomena which share unique, momentary properties of affinity.[11] Jewish esoteric thought reaches new frontiers and unexpected terrain precisely at the moment in which the world descends into more profound levels of intellectual dislocation.

3. Modernity, Enlightenment, and the Illusion

An affinity between modernity and the kabbalah exists in two regards: a *reading-in* to the text which finds commonality in the moment that meaning is applied and an antinomian condition which makes this reading possible.[12] But was not the affirmative character of modernity assured to us through the movements of rationality, secularism, and coherence of thought under the banner of Enlightenment? Is this not the inheritance of modernity? How has modernity, the child of the Enlightenment, now become the *enfant terrible*? The answer may lie in the relationship between Enlightenment and myth.

The concept of the Enlightenment can be said to have originated with the notion of rational precepts which can be derived from scripture

[10] Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane*, 80.

[11] Goethe, *Elective Affinities* and Benjamin's essay, 'Goethe's Elective Affinities', in: *Selected Writings, 1913–1926*, vol. 1. Michael Löwy has sought to apply this concept to German Jewry as a whole in his *Redemption and Utopia*.

[12] The affinity of antipathy emerges from an antinomian condition within modernity, a modernity against itself which, at the same time, seeks knowledge of itself. In this sense, we speak of three phenomena: an antinomian condition, an affinity of antipathy, and the reader who applies meaning in this context.

and nature in equal measure. Francis Bacon, arguably the staunchest representative of this view, suggests that even 'fabulous and fantastical' matters of a most esoteric kind—such as angels, spirits, and the real existence of evil—can be turned to 'sober and grounded' contemplation with the aid of reason. Reason gleaned from scripture is advanced through the dispelling of errors and illusion, writes Bacon:

> Otherwise it is of the nature of angels and spirits, which is an appendix of theology, both divine and natural, and is neither inscrutable nor interdicted. For although the Scripture saith, 'Let no man deceive you in sublime discourse touching the worship of angels, pressing into that he knoweth not', [...] it may appear thereby that there be two things only forbidden—adoration of them, and opinion fantastical of them, either to extol them further than appertaineth to the degree of a creature, or to extol a man's knowledge of them further than he hath ground. But the sober and grounded inquiry, which may arise out of the passages of Holy Scriptures, or out of the gradations of nature, is not restrained. So of degenerate and revolted spirits, the conversing with them or the employment of them is prohibited, much more any veneration towards them; but the contemplation or science of their nature, their power, their illusions, either by Scripture or reason, is a part of spiritual wisdom. For so the apostle saith, 'We are not ignorant of his stratagems'. And it is no more unlawful to inquire the nature of evil spirits, than to inquire the force of poisons in nature, or the nature of sin and vice in morality. But this part touching angels and spirits I cannot note as deficient, for many have occupied themselves in it; I may rather challenge it, in many of the writers thereof, as fabulous and fantastical.[13]

With the scientific discoveries of Copernicus at the end of the sixteenth century, an idea captured the European mind which had a lasting impact through the promise of rationality. It was now deemed possible that beliefs could be proved and disproved through investigations of the natural world. Enlightenment, in this view, meant the world revealed through science. 'Without a natural and experimental history', argues Bacon, 'no progress worthy of the human race could have been made'.[14] The foundations of a true philosophy can only be achieved once thought is freed from the unreasoned doctrines of theology. From illusions and dreams, 'men wake as from deep sleep, and at once perceive what a difference there is between the dogmas and

[13] Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (1605), in: *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 195.

[14] Bacon, 'Description of a national and experimental history, such as may serve for the foundation of a true philosophy', *Preparative toward a Natural and Experimental History* (1620), in: *Collected Works of Francis Bacon*, 252.

figments of the wit and a true and active philosophy'.[15] The liberation of the mind through knowledge, and thus knowledge as power (the phrase most often attributed to Bacon), has in every sense a commonality with the speculative sciences, perhaps even the sciences which the natural sciences would least welcome.[16] However, unlike the esoteric sciences, the philosophy of the Enlightenment promises the liberation of the mind from mere speculation. Enlightenment vows to deliver humanity from the dark realms of myth to the light of reason.

In 1943, as the German-Jewish philosophers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer found themselves bereft of house and home, it became apparent that the rationalist age which Bacon announced 350 years earlier had reached its end in the high modernism of Weimar culture. In contrast to everything professed by the Enlightenment, modernity heralded in an age of barbarism. Adorno and Horkheimer questioned whether the seeds of destruction had been inherited from the Enlightenment: 'Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought', begins the first chapter of their monumental work, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'has always aimed at liberating beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity'.[17] Francis Bacon captured the spirit of the age with the notion of superstition overcome by the discovery of a nature released from myth. In the process of dissolving the sphere of the myth of nature—freeing nature, as it were, from speculations which can neither be tried nor tested—nature became a great laboratory, and myth, which gave rise to civilization, that very factor which prevented the progress of science. Freedom in nature would occur through the liberation of freedom from nature. All substance under the microscope of the Enlightenment was to be reduced and synthesized to the one. Whether under the positivism of Auguste Comte or the idealism of G.W.F. Hegel, 'anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion'.[18] The very distance between divine and profane, so essential to religious thought, is emptied of meaning under the searchlight of the science of

[15] Ibid.

[16] It might be possible to view the kabbalah, in the first instance, as also perceiving knowledge of the world as explainable through the function and performance of nature. See the work of Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, 112–155.

[17] Horkheimer & Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1.

[18] Ibid., 5.

enlightenment: 'In the face of the unity of such reason, the distinction between God and man is reduced to an irrelevance'.[19] In overcoming the primary thesis regarding the omnipotence of God, Enlightenment loses contact with meaning in nature and instead becomes transfixed on its mastery. Everything is reduced to a means to an end, with nothing retaining value in itself, but only as a synthesis of the other. With every step taken to neutralize the mythical element within the modern age, the ideology of the Enlightenment became part of the elimination of reason. 'Whereas the myths of classical civilization, be they Hellenistic or Judaic, already entail Enlightenment', every advance of the ideology of Enlightenment becomes 'more deeply entangled in mythology', in particular, the myths of National Socialism.[20] Here 'the fake myth of fascism is unfurled as a genuine myth of prehistory, but whereas the genuine myth is in awe of retribution, the false one executes retribution blindly on its victims'.[21] No longer seeing itself as emerging from the wellsprings of myth, 'Enlightenment is totalitarian', the authors concluded.[22]

The world of Enlightenment gave rise to an ideology of scientific knowledge. Eliminating the myths of civilization and thereby those of religion, Horkheimer and Adorno argued, Enlightenment returns to the need to re-establish axial or foundation myths in modernity. Under the rule of the ideology of the Enlightenment, mythology has permeated the sphere of the profane. Existence, thoroughly cleansed of demons and their conceptual descendants, 'takes on, in its gleaming naturalness, the numinous character which former ages attributed to demons'.[23] Enlightenment neutralizes myths only to reinvent them in a more pernicious form. The social world becomes the domain of dark forces. Theories of race, conspiracy, and fundamentalism are just a few of the demons which replace Samael, Metatron, and Asmodeus in the modern age. In this regard, part of European modernity culminates in the discovery of Auschwitz.[24]

This historical dynamic, in which the foundational mythology of civilization would be neutralized and replaced by the fables of modernity,

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[19] Ibid., 6.
[20] Ibid., 8 (modified translation).
[21] Ibid., 9 (I have modified the translation considerably here).
[22] Ibid., 4.
[23] Ibid., 21.
[24] See Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

is already anticipated by the concept of the illusion in the work of Bacon and other formative figures of the ideology of the Enlightenment.[25] An illusion, according to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is any substance which cannot be reduced from the multiple to the one. Whatever remains inconclusive, unconquerable, and unable to be rendered as a synthesis, assumes the cloak of the dark forces. The illusion is, in this sense, the sphere of modernity in which all non-reducible elements reside. It is the territory of civilization's refuse—that aspect in the production of culture which remains once reason has been removed. Illusion can be seen as the excess of civilization, the effluence of modernity.

If the idea of the elimination of illusions begins with the Enlightenment, the concept of religion as a system of illusions culminates in the modern period. Sigmund Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* is paradigmatic of this view. Freud stakes claim in this work to what he calls a 'rational ground for the precepts of civilization' and must thereby overcome a primary dilemma: the very substance which regulates and protects civilization ultimately undermines its rational grounding.[26] Mastery over nature, and in particular, human nature, is a precondition of human self-preservation, for 'every individual is virtually an enemy of civilization'.[27] Religion, at the center of this social process, prevents the implosion of destructive impulses generated within civilization. A negative dialectic is here at work: civilization is formed by social impulses but destroyed by human instincts; it is both necessary for social life and the very cause of its regression. Religion fulfills these impulses or wishes through the repression of nature. 'Every civilization must be built on coercion and renunciation of instinct' and religion is the means by which the instincts are kept in check.[28]

Horkheimer and Adorno introduced the idea that civilization contains within itself both the machinery of progress and the seeds of its own destruction. Freud argues that individuals flourish in civilizations, in their mental capacities and economic ones, but are stymied by the instinctual world which lies beneath the surface. The contradictions of

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[25] A similar argument can be made with Bentham's notion of illusion; see Ogden, *Bentham's Theory of Fictions*.

[26] Sigmund Freud, *Studienausgabe*, Band IX: Fragen der Gesellschaft / Ursprünge der Religion, 'Die Zukunft einer Illusion' (1927); In English: *Future of an Illusion*, 1957.

[27] Freud, *Future of an Illusion*, 3.

[28] Ibid., 5.

this quintessentially modernist view are particularly instructive here: The illusion is imbedded in civilization, and the same forces which give rise to the pleasures of social convocation are also those which are charged with the repression of the impulses. Religion and civilization share common ground. One might argue that the two are, in fact, the same, or at least have entirely the same functions in Freud's system and yet Freud proposes the abolition of the former and not the latter. The strength of religion, he writes, is that it is based on the 'fulfilment of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes.'[29] The paradox in Freud's theorem is that although the wishes which emerge from these impulses are real, their fulfillment is illusory. With regard to the term illusion, we can discern three different categories in Freud: errors of judgment (*Irrtum*), illusions (*Illusionen*), and delusions (*Wahnideen*).[30] Illusions appear to exist somewhere between errors of judgment and delusions. Some illusions are in other words mistakes which can be corrected; others are thoughts which can never be proved or disproved. Freud gives three examples. The first is a famous experiment gone wrong: Columbus' voyage to India which lands him in America. This is an idea which was corrected in time. The second example is alchemy. We have not yet proven alchemy to be true but it may prove realizable at a later period in time. The third example, the concept of an Indo-Germanic race, is taken from the ideology of National Socialism. This he calls a 'psychiatric delusion'.[31]

The illusion of religion is however somewhat different than all three examples since according to his view, it is part real and part unreal, part true and part false. Freud identifies wishes as real but their fulfillment as illusory, and thereby appears to leave the world of impulses behind and enter the realm of the rationality of belief. Underlying his critique of the rationality of belief is a rather vague notion of the plausibility of their realization. In the field of epistemology, this problem is commonly discussed as the possibility of the awareness of the existence of objects that can be known and those that cannot. In the absence of criteria to understand the difference between real wishes and false perceptions of fulfillment, Freud is unable to address the

[29] Ibid., 47.
[30] Ibid., 48.
[31] Ibid., 49.

problem of belief itself—a difficult problem, to be sure, but entirely necessary for a discussion of illusion.[32] No one can be forced to believe or disbelieve, says Freud. However, in reality, it is rather difficult to go about our normal daily activities without being required to undertake some form of belief, irrespective of our free will. Few of us will readily admit to holding irrational beliefs or beliefs which we know are not true, but none of us can sustain ourselves without some form of primary assumptions. We do not believe, for example, that we can drink a cup of tea without a cup or swim without getting wet. In this sense, we do normally maintain that we believe in something, such as: to swim, we must get wet. We have little choice in the matter. With regard to real wishes and irrational beliefs, it is thus entirely possible that an idea can be illusory and at the same time reasonable enough to be believed. The rationality of an idea is therefore determined by an entirely different set of criteria, largely a priori, such as whether it can be discussed, understood, revised, revisited, etc.[33] Columbus' thinking that he had reached India was clearly an illusion. However, it was not irrational. Narratives found in religious traditions may be termed illusions but this does not address the problem of whether the ideas are subject to discourse, analysis, revisions, and hence subject to reason. Freud's example of the future of alchemy,[34] which retains the possibility of a systematic analysis, comes closest to the problem at hand: the normative character of the relationship between kabbalah and modernity.

4. The Primacy of Illusions and the Problem of Evil

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the intellectual remainder of civilization comes to represent the illusion. The illusion rests solely on

[32] In leading a discussion of illusions or delusions, Freud is surely right in raising the question of belief but there is no serious attempt at a critique of the notion of faith. After all, the nature of thinking requires certain forms of belief through proof or otherwise, as no system can operate without some set of first principles. Freud is not prepared to enter into a discussion of first principles, and so his discussion of belief remains superficial.

[33] Philosophers of God, for example, are concerned with the rationality of the idea, not with its reality. Where they do take up the question of reality, they have often led us astray, such as G.W.F. Hegel who argued that the actual existing world is the completion of its potential and therefore comes to the conclusion that the rational is actual in his *Rechtsphilosophie*.

[34] See Chapter 7 of Freud, *Future of an Illusion*, 50.

the inability of an idea or a substance to be mastered. In *The Future of an Illusion*, it is that which has the ability to master the destructive impulse, although it itself remains substanceless and can be replaced by a new religion of modernity, such as psychoanalysis. In religious terms, the conflict between substance and illusion finds a parallel in the problem of evil. It is here that we may test the coherence and rationality of the affinity between kabbalah and modernity.

For the philosophers of the Enlightenment, evil is generally understood as an existence without substance. Leibniz offers a theory of privation such that evil is merely the absence of good in the same measure that cold could be said to be the absence of heat.[35] Evil has no substance of its own but exists only as a reference to the absence of the other. In this respect, it can be called an illusion. Similarly in Kant, radical evil is measured not by heinousness or extremity but by an act that consciously undermines a system of ethical norms. It is radical by the nature of its destructive capacity to undermine the very moral fiber of the idea of the maxim itself.[36] The idea of the emptiness of evil is further stipulated by Hermann Cohen who attributes volition in evil entirely to the realm of myth.[37] There is perhaps little surprise that these definitions would have failed to serve Hannah Arendt seeking a suitable term for the intentions of Adolf Eichmann.[38]

The kabbalists have a very different view of the reality of evil, one which Scholem sought to raise relatively early in his career. In the introduction to *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem argues the supremacy of mystics over the philosophers who had essentially lost touch with the 'primitive side of man's existence'.[39] The continued existence of evil into the Enlightenment and the framework of modernity lay the groundwork for the bifurcation of ways of the philosophers and the mystics.[40] The argument put forward by Hermann Cohen that evil is rightly domiciled within the realm of myth suited Scholem well, for it is precisely here, he argues, that the mystics proved better able to respond to the destruction of the law which the mythical world introduced: 'Thus through the wide and scattered provinces

[35] See the critique of Bayle in Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 405–443.
[36] Kant, *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, 39–42.
[37] Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, 452–455.
[38] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.
[39] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 35.
[40] From this, it is hardly a wonder that Scholem would later oppose Arendt's argument concerning the banality of evil so vigorosly.

of the kabbalah, the revenge of myth upon its conqueror is clear for all to see'. The kabbalah emerges here as a force in the return of the repressed: myth seeks revenge against its rationalist oppressors who lack an ability to respond to the *Lebensangst*, a fear of death, and the 'impulses of popular belief'.[41]

Twenty years later, in his 1961 Eranos essay on *sitra achra* (the other side), Scholem affirms again the reality of evil in the kabbalah, but now he suggests that the mystics respond to the origin of evil with some equivocation. To illustrate this point, he turns to the theology of creation in a few key figures.[42] The kabbalah remains unresolved as to whether evil, which is located in creation as a potential and deployed through human action, achieves autonomy and therefore a division of the heavenly realms, or the fact of its placement during creation suggests that evil exists within the godhead itself.[43] Much depends on the notion of a premature phase of divine action, a creation with an abortive start as a motif, which is already apparent in early midrashic texts (*Bereshit Rabbah*) but explored in detail in the kabbalah. Scholem refers here specifically to the *Treatise of the Left Emanation* of Isaac ha-Kohen and the *Zohar* of Moses de Leon.[44] An extensive passage from Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona's *The Secret of the Tree of Knowledge* found in this essay focuses on the problem of evil lodged

[41] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 35. The kabbalah expresses the 'Zerstörung des Gesetzes, das in seinem Ursprung die mythische Ordnung durchbrochen hat. So ist in weiten Bereichen der Kabbala die Rache des Mythos an seinen Überwindern mit Händen zu greifen […]'; Scholem, *Jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen*, 38; 'Die Philosophie ist in Gefahr geraten, den lebendige Gott zu verlieren, und die Mystik, die ausging, ihn zu bewahren, die den Weg des Juden zur religiösen Erfahrung mit neuem Glanz umkleiden wollte, hat auf ihrem Wege den Mythos wieder angetroffen und drohte in seinem Labyrinth sich zu verirren'; ibid., 40; 'Mystiker und Philosophen sind beide, wenn man so will, Aristokraten des Denkens. Und dennoch ist es gerade der Kabbala gelungen, eine Verbindung mit gewissen elementaren Impulsen des Volksglauben herzustellen'; ibid. 'Sie hat die primitiven Schichten des menschlichen Lebens nicht verachtet, jene entscheidenden Schichten der Lebensangst und Todesangst des einfachen Menschen, auf die rationale Philosophie nicht Kluges zu erwidern gewußt hat'; ibid., 38.

[42] Scholem, 'Sitra Ahra: Good and Evil in the Kabbalah', in: *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 56–87, first published in 1961 in the Eranos Jahrbuch *Der Mensch im Spannungsfeld der Ordnungen*, 'Gut und Böse in der Kabbala'. The reference here can be found in the English edition, 59–60.

[43] Scholem appears to repudiate his initial observations on the early kabbalah which feature quite prominently in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Here he rejects the notion that some of the motifs could have been influenced by Catharist doctrine of the twelfth century. See Scholem, *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 63–64.

[44] Ibid., 62.

in existence and only released through human action.[45] In this case it is the separation of those things that were originally designed by God to be united.[46] In the *sitra achra*, under the unfolding narrative of the *Zohar*, the evil side is unable to establish the basis of its own causation. This would require the relative autonomy of the two spheres—the divine side and the other side. But since even within the other side, it is believed that a spark of divine light shines forth, Scholem concludes that 'evil has no existence as pure evil, as the polar opposite of good; on the contrary, the two realms are interlaced'.[47] He concludes with a discussion of Lurianic kabbalah and Sabbatianism, showing how both movements continue to develop a theory of human action as cause of the release of evil, divinely created, but also as cure: as the release of the godhead from its self-contraction after the failure of creation.[48]

The contrast between a theory in which evil is understood as a real substance versus a theory which only sees evil in the absence of good, i.e. a theory of privation, is relatively clear. It is a more difficult question whether the idea of a parallel evil universe narrated in parts of the kabbalah would have its origins in God itself, and therefore is evidence for a theory of privation, or whether the volition and agency of evil is sufficiently autonomous of good, and therefore satisfies the criteria of independence normally attributed to the thesis of two powers in heaven. We find this problem evident in the first source of the kabbalah, *Sefer ha-Bahir*.[49] The *Bahir* addresses this question in its second paragraph while commenting on the mystery of the *Tohu va-Bohu*.[50] While *Tohu* refers to human misunderstanding or confusion—here meaning the absence of understanding—*Bohu* is presented as something which has substance. As the narrative unfolds, *Tohu* takes up its place in the realm of peace, while *Bohu* assumes its position in the 'realm of evil', as God 'makes peace and creates evil' in the words of

[45] Ibid., 69–71; Joseph Dan argues that Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona's *Secret of the Tree of Knowledge* is relevant here precisely as refutation of the *Bahir*'s position of evil existing within God Himself; the treatise being essentially a 'denial of the dualistic tendencies' in the *Bahir*. See Dan, 'Samael and the Problem of Jewish Gnosticism', in: *Jewish Mysticism* vol. III, 386.

[46] Scholem, *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 70.

[47] Ibid., 76; He develops later an explanation of Joseph Gikatila's theory of human action as the cause of evil.

[48] Ibid., 82–87.

[49] See also 'Kabbalistic and Gnostic Dualism', in Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. III, 415–433.

[50] *Bahir*, 119; Genesis 1:2.

Isaiah.[51] The north is localized as the site of evil and is identified with the letter *het* whose lower opening makes it susceptible to both good and evil. In this sense, the north serves as a gate through which both evil and good pass.[52] Speculation on the opening of the gates of justice reveals that good and evil share impulses, or more precisely, that their impulses exist in relation to one another.[53] However, evil has a substance of its own here and takes the form of a definitive, narrative entity: Prince Satan, the prince of *Tohu,* previously identified as the realm of confusion. The power of the Prince, however, is entirely limited by God,[54] as we are clearly instructed that God raises his hand against Satan and thereby makes him smaller.[55] Moreover, it is also evident that without Satan, Israel would stand little chance against evil. Satan 'cleaves to Israel', serving God in providing a limitation of evil in the form of temptation and thus suggesting his secondary status. He is a principle (*midda*) and is reduced here to a mere function. In the final part, evil is a narrative character in a new form. His name has changed. He is now Samael. It is Samael who took up residence in Eden and sought accomplices. The snake served him as both consort and vehicle, in the form of a camel, which he rode to the female, who is interestingly not quite Eve but merely female.[56] In conclusion, it appears certain that evil is no illusion in the narrative character of the *Bahir*, and yet the autonomy of the substance of evil remains ambiguous.

In the *Treatise of the Left Emanation* by Isaac ben Jacob Ha-Kohen, the discussion of the concept of evil begins with the notion of a paral-

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[51] *Bahir*, 121; Isaiah 45:7.

[52] Jeremiah 1:14, *Bahir*, 129–131.

[53] See Psalm 118:19, *Bahir*, 131. Evil in the realm of instinct or drive is also discussed in §110 and 137 (195, 221).

[54] *Bahir*, 197.

[55] *Bahir*, 193.

[56] *Bahir*, 225. Samael has a lasting impact on Isaac the Blind in which his understanding of evil is clearly informed by the terrain of Languedoc. Here Samael lives with a herd of sheep or goats in the high mountains. But one also finds here the notion that Samael's power is not located in the mountains or the desert—the places of absence—but rather without intermediary in the presence of Sefirah *Pahad*. In this regard, Samael has 'a legitimate position in the sacred totality of Creation', writes Scholem, a position which would only be displaced in a final war on the side of Israel's foe, Amalek. Yet even this loss would be eligible for restitution in the messianic era. 'It appears that Isaac the Blind was a follower of the doctrine of the ultimate "restoration of Satan", the Apocatastasis'. See Scholem, *The Origins of the Kabbalah*, 297–298; Dan, 'The Desert in Jewish Mysticism: The Kingdom of Samael', in: *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. III (originally printed in *Ariel* 40 (1976), 38–43).

lel universe that eludes every scholar who is unwilling to 'descend into the depths of the wisdom of the hidden emanation, the depths of good and the depths of evil'.[57] Curiously, there is little in this treatise about the exact nature and emanation of the good. Beyond the reference here to the two depths being analogous, we are again left wondering about the precise relationship between the two, just as we were with the *Bahir*.[58] The 'princes of jealousy and enmity', as they are referred to in the *Treatise*, have on the one hand clear and distinct characteristics of a parallel universe: 'their essence and their service is true and pure', which suggests that their substance is not merely the lack of something else—a formal condition of privation—but rather a substance in its own right. We have therefore every reason to believe that this evil has autonomous substance, as the purity of their enmity could not be guaranteed if their nature was defined by a missing element. We know that the spoken words of the princes of darkness are true and pure, 'free from mendacity' and falsehoods. That which comes from their lips must not be understood as mere deceptions. And yet beyond the statement regarding the purity of 'their essence', there is an indicator here that the causation of evil is not entirely autonomous. For not only are 'their essences' true and pure, but also 'their service'. In this respect, the dark side acts in tandem with that which it serves. Its causation is partial and, thereby, also its substance. The real and yet subaltern status of evil is seen by many as the primary solution of the kabbalah, as Moshe Hallamish explains: 'God has made one as well as the other'[59] is commonly used as a prooftext for the conviction that evil, darkness and death have a positive origin within the divine world. '[…] Evil has a real existence, yet is not an essential and substantial part of the divine world.'[60] There is further evidence in the *Treatise of the Left Emanation* that evil maintains a lesser status and lacks natural causation: Samael is termed evil 'not because of his nature but because

[57] Isaac Ben Jacob Ha-Kohen, *Treatise of the Left Emanation*, trans. and ed. by Dan, in *Early Kabbalah*, 165.

[58] Moshe Idel suggests a symmetry in the *Treatise* between the divine and evil realms of a parallel universe. Evil has the same measure of emanation as the divine, although the divine realm serves as 'a blueprint for the structure of the powers of evil'. Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 117.

[59] Ecclesiastes 7:14.

[60] Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*, 170. Evil is neither good nor evil but attaches itself to the evil emanations, the evil inclinations, and thereby makes itself evil.

he desires to unite and intimately mingle with an emanation not of his nature'.[61] It is clearly not his nature which is evil but his desire, which seeks to commingle with an essence outside itself, most likely a human evil impulse, equally contingent in creation but thereafter autonomous in action.

The author of the *Treatise* would be Scholem's prime example of the opposition between the mystics and the philosophers on the problem of evil—the mystics being thoroughly opposed to those who 'agree that there are no corporeal entities above the spheres'.[62] In keeping with the notion that the entities of the heavenly spheres are incorporeal elements of a parallel universe, evil emanations are deemed equally incorporeal and hence spiritual.[63] In this sense, evil cannot simply be ruled inferior to the divine realm. Following again from Isaiah 45:7 'He makes peace and creates evil', the emanations of the left are from one source:

> [W]hich came forth from the power of the emanation of repentance [...] His incomprehensible Wisdom chose to create a world that was entirely evil in order to chastise the erring: Maybe they will return in a perfect repentance to achieve merit—if not, this would be their final obliteration.[64]

The author is unwilling to dispense with the basic divine attribute of benevolence, and although not completely harmonious with Leibniz's position, he does indicate that even in the act of creating evil too, God chooses only the good.[65] The citation from Isaiah always assumes evil has a purpose, and therefore suggests that even with the presence of evil divine benevolence can be upheld.[66] Still, the author has a quandary regarding how God formed evil from this good, a mystery which he argues has been sealed. 'From the good came forth evil', he concludes, 'and God neither commanded nor demanded it'.[67] Joseph Dan

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[61] Ha-Kohen in Dan, *Early Kabbalah*, 172.

[62] Ibid., 173.

[63] Ibid., 174. The anti-philosophical position, which can also be understood as anti-Aristotelian, harmonizes with the non-kabbalistic approach to the problem of evil in the sixteenth century until the work of Manasseh ben Israel. See Dan, 'Manasseh ben Israel's Nishmat Hayyim and the Concept of Evil in 17th Century Jewish Thought', in *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. III, 361–363.

[64] Ha-Kohen in Dan, *Early Kabbalah,* 177.

[65] Leibniz, *Theodicy*, summary of formal arguments, first objection, 377.

[66] Hallamish, *Introduction to the Kabbalah*, 168.

[67] Ha-Kohen in Dan, *Early Kabbalah*, 178. This is not the end of the *Treatise*, nor have I reconstructed the elaborate narrative of the princes of evil and their consort,

has commented on the palpable absence of speculation on the nature of evil following the *Bahir* in the works of the schools of Provence and Gerona. Remarkable is the rather wholesale 'neglect of the theological problem of the autonomy and independence of evil on the theological level'.[68] For the purposes of the argument here, we are able to maintain that although evil is not entirely independent of its creator, it is sufficiently understood in the kabbalah as a substance of its own and thus unsuited to a theory of privation. Evil is quite real in this narrative, even if it remains contingent on both God and man for its ultimate purpose and continuous motion.

The dilemma of the possibility of evil existing in a parallel universe, particularly in regard to the final messianic conflict in the *Treatise of the Left Emanation*, would have been a considerable problem for Ashkenazi Hasidism.[69] Evil is therefore reduced to a function in their work. In *Hochmat ha-Nefesh*, Eleazar of Worms maintains that evil is created for demonstrative purposes to provide Israel an opportunity to choose. This is however predicated on the notion that God created an excess of the evil impulse and therefore needed to create and destroy worlds before developing the right mixture between good and evil inclinations in the final creation. There is no trace of dualism here, writes Dan:

> Evil comes from God directly, and it fulfils a divine function. The extent of evil in every phase of the creation is decided by God, according to His divine plan, which is a perfectly good one—to produce righteousness. Evil is a necessary means to bring righteousness forward, to test it in the most difficult circumstances and to justify the existence of the world by it.[70]

The notions of privation and relational dependence (i.e. Satan cleaving to Israel and thereby serving in the possibility of Israel's free choice) assume a parity between good and evil. But here the antinomian currents of modernity stake claim. How could it possibly be the case—writes perhaps our only true kabbalistic philosopher of modernity, Friedrich Nietzsche—that good and evil exist in a mediated relationship

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Lilith. It is nevertheless clear that these figures are not merely empty forms but treated as forces in themselves.

[68] Dan, 'Samael and the Problem of Jewish Gnosticism', in: *Jewish Mysticism,* vol. IV, 367–390.

[69] Dan, 'Samael, Lilith and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah' in: *Jewish Mysticism,* vol. IV, 280 (originally published in: *AJS Review* 5 [1980], 17–40).

[70] Dan, *Jewish Mysticism,* vol. IV, 274–275.

to one another: 'How could anything originate out of its opposite? For example, truth from error? [...] or the generous deed out of selfishness or purest vision of the sage out of desire?'[71] Is it rational to suggest that good and evil have such a definite relationship to one another that the one could emerge from the other? For the philosophers of privation, an intimate relationship between the two is assumed. But are good and evil truly two sides of the same coin and therefore permanent antitheses, the one necessary for the other? If the one were to be abolished, must the second go as well? Nietzsche impels us to doubt the opposition between the moments and therefore the contingency of good and evil as *Gegensätze* (antitheses). We must assert that these antitheses truly exist and are not merely 'folktales', in which good and evil are understood as relational in the popular imagination without proper examination. Were we to accept as valid and true the intimate and necessary relationship between good and evil, as suggested in the theory of privation, for all we know, says Nietzsche:

> It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of those good and respected things, consists precisely in their being complicatedly related, knotted and hooked to these evil and seemingly opposed things, and perhaps even being essentially identical with them.[72]

Caught on the thorns of Nietzsche's style, we may lack direction. Yet it is clear that Nietzsche's rejection of a theory of privation is also a refusal of the basic premise of philosophy since Socrates that a man does evil out of ignorance of the good.[73] If evil does not come from good, it cannot be its opposite, and therefore Leibniz's proposal that evil is merely the absence of good in the same way that coldness is the absence of heat, could have neither meaning nor importance for Nietzsche. Good which arises from a fear of evil remains a relational good, a good which is nothing in itself but merely a *good from evil*. Nietzsche therefore implicitly challenges the relational character of Hebrew bible ethics, and what he understands as morality derived from fear: Good that comes from a fear of evil remains merely a good from evil. He asks: when we love our neighbor as ourselves, how do we know that this is not really *fear thy neighbor* and therefore *love in order*

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[71] Nietzsche, 'Jenseits von Gut und Böse' in: *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §2.
[72] Ibid.
[73] See Plato's *Apology*.

to be loved? Fear, being so much more common than love and good neighborliness, does 'create new perspectives of moral valuation'.[74] But by this reasoning, we may find that, in the end, there is nothing more to this love than fear. Nietzsche's proposal, in short, is that nothing opposite can come from itself. Evil and good, were they to exist, must be independent entities.

Isaiah Tishby, in his pioneering *Wisdom of the Zohar*, divides the discussion of the problem of evil not between philosophers and kabbalists, but between optimists and pessimists.[75] By optimists, he means those who view evil in terms of the basic emanation theory set forth in Neoplatonic doctrine of a realm of perfect forms and their mirrored counterpart.[76] Retaining a monistic structure, the optimists view evil as the weakest part of the emanation, that part which is farthest from its source.[77] Pessimism corresponds to a Gnostic worldview for which evil is a real force that parallels the divine world. Tishby's pessimists divide the heavens into two realms and ascribe every evil in this world to an event in a parallel universe. In this form, the integrity and purity of the divine realm is preserved. Both positions however present a problem for the author of the *Zohar*: were he to accept the first position, and see evil as a privation of good, evil would be a force bereft of substance, or at a minimum, autonomy. Such a view would present evil as a mirage or an illusion—a position which did not seem to live up to the facts of worldly experience, inundated with countless examples of evil and suffering. The second position provided no solid refuge for a Jew either, since a theory of two powers in heaven would inevitably undermine the idea of Creation, lest God created the two worlds, and purged the evil from within himself. Elliot Wolfson views the kabbalah as able to reconcile the problem of causation with the absence of substance indicated by a theory of privation. He writes:

> In an effort to preclude the positing of metaphysical dualism, Kabbalists eschewed the notion of evil as an autonomous power struggling indiscriminately against the good, primal darkness pitted against the equally

[74] Nietzsche, ibid., §201.

[75] Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar,* vol. II, 458.

[76] Arthur Green suggests a different dichotomy: one between Neoplatonism as privation theory and Gnosticism which posits evil as real and embodied. He argues that both approaches are contained in the Zohar. Green, *Introduction to the Zohar*, 117.

[77] Hallamish, *Introduction to the Kabbalah*, 167–182, essentially follows Tishby's argument here. For Hallamish, dualism is the pessimistic version, while evil and good conceived as binary opposites is part of the optimistic view.

> primal light. Conversely, Kabbalists have been keenly aware of the reality of evil as a potent force in human experience, and thus for the most part they did not explain misfortune merely as the absence of good.[78]

Which would be a greater untruth: to see evil as illusion, contradicting actual experience, or as real, followed by an etiological narrative which locates its cause outside the human realm, and in the first instance, outside the realm of God? For Tishby, the only solution for the kabbalah was to construct a mythology of evil:

> The mythological solution places the root of evil in the uppermost stratum of the emanatory system, and sees the growth of "the other side" as the product of an upheaval within the Godhead, which resulted in the purification of the divine thought. This is not the most commonly held view in the Zohar, but it does contain elements that recur in different forms in the solutions usually offered to this problem: (a) the connection of the growth of evil with the existence of Judgment with the Godhead, and (b) the idea of evil as refuse that has come away from the divine being.[79]

Although the *Zohar* develops an elaborate mythology of evil with evil figures and locations emanating from the *sitra achra*, it appears that the *Zohar* cannot maintain complete equanimity with the position that God and the other side are contingent and therefore co-equal. There is evidence to suggest that the other side is also in the service of the right side and appears in the world as merely its dutiful messenger, rather than the source of the message.

In Hallamish's view, the *Zohar* distinguishes between the appearance of evil as having autonomous causation and an essence which is still located in God. This is expressed in the relationship between the *kelippah* (peel or husk) and the core of evil as being a relationship of unequals, and thus responding to the problem of creation raised by gnosticism. Following the principle of a negative by-product of creation, evil is here nourished by 'effluence flowing down through the Sefirot'.[80] Scholem describes this effluence as being caused by a fire

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[78] This comment is made in reference to Lurianic kabbalah but I believe it can be presented as a general statement. See Wolfson, 'Divine Suffering and the Hermeneutics of Reading: Philosophical Reflections on Lurianic Kabbalah', in: Gibbs & Wolfson (eds.), *Suffering Religion*, 108. See also Wolfson, 'Left Contained in the Right' and *Venturing Beyond*.

[79] Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. II, 458.

[80] Hallamish, *Introduction to the Kabbalah*, 175. There appears to be a translation error. The sentence reads 'effulgence [sic] flowing down through the Sefirot' but surely the word effluence is meant.

of divine severity within the 'other side', which is 'externalized and made independent, where it becomes an entire hierarchical system, a counterworld ruled by Satan'.[81] However, this process does not offer sufficient autonomy of the evil realm. Both its independence and ability to rebel are withdrawn with this image of evil sustaining itself on the effluence of the divine sphere. 'Thus, the fact that sitra ahra is part of Divine Creation mandates its sustenance, and even man is summoned to contribute to its cause'.[82] In this case, the dynamics between a concept of evil with teeth and substance is mitigated by a narrative of its life-force being dependent on the excess of the divine.[83] For Tishby, this is the 'mythological solution' to the problem of evil. Myth offers an avenue to address the vivid nature of evil without completely solving the problem of origins, not to speak of Nietzsche's critique of privation and the issue which the *Treatise of the Left Emanation* raises regarding parity and causation. By contrast, in the Zohar:

> The mythical motifs are introduced in a very direct manner without any theoretical reservations and without any philosophical or symbolic disguise. The terrors of life and death, and the hope of an eternal salvation through the decisive victory of good over evil, are put before us in a tangible imagery and in dramatic incident—the most primitive methods of human expression.[84]

The 'mythological solution' is the means by which the kabbalah seeks to resolve the conflict between the origin of evil and the autonomy of God. Once deemed real, a practical method can be applied in the internalization of evil, and we see this in the Lurianic notion of the overcoming of *erev rav*, the 'mixed multitudes' or creating beings which have parts good and evil within them.[85] Shaul Magid describes Lurianic kabbalah as the weaving of a 'dialectical understanding of evil' into the heart of biblical narrative and thereby seeking a vehicle for its abolition.[86] As this method takes on new forms in later Hasidism, the overcoming of evil is measured through the Lurianic concept of disencumberments (*berurim*).

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[81] Scholem, *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 73.
[82] Hallamish, ibid., 175.
[83] On the externalization of evil and the theodicy of a pure divine realm, see 'No Evil Descends from Heaven: Sixteenth Century Jewish Concepts of Evil', in: Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. III*: The Modern Period*, 329–348.
[84] Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. II, 470.
[85] Magid, 'The Politics of (Un)Conversion', 660.
[86] Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 84–88.

Rachel Elior has shown how the purpose of prayer in Habad theology is the reconciliation of good and evil in this world. The aim of prayer is to 'raise the worlds of their true place by the separation between good and evil, or "disencumberment" of the good from within the evil, a process meant to restore the good to its source and to remove evil by destroying its vital force'.[87] The dualism of Lurianic notions of divine evil is interpreted by the Habad thinkers as a paradox which can only be resolved by human action: the 'primary assumptions on which worship through inversion is based reflect the ambivalence between the dualistic Lurianic ontology, which views evil as a metaphysical entity, and the Habad conception, which views evil as an epistemological' myopia.[88] To some degree, the overcoming of the duality of good and evil anticipates the convergence of mysticism and morality in modernity.[89] But as the kabbalah enters the modern world, it is remarkable how contemporary narratives remain true to their original source. Commenting on Primo Levi's *Lilit e altri raconnti* (appearing in English as *Moments of Reprieve: A Memoir of Auschwitz*), Moshe Idel refers to how little kabbalistic motifs 'change when they are enlisted in the historical project to reflect or to explain the horrors of the Holocaust: the Jewish myth has been adopted quite faithfully' in Levi's rendition of Lilith.[90]

5. Antinomia and the Future of Illusions

Jürgen Habermas recalled a meeting with Scholem shortly before his death.[91] While flipping through an English translation of his study on Shabbatai Zvi, Scholem paused on page 1000 and looked up at Habermas intently. The act appeared to have particular significance, as Habermas recalls: 'The intentional ambiguity of [Scholem's] gesture is typical of the scholar's work as a whole. As a historian, he musters in his arsenal all the techniques of critical literary scholarship in order to

[87] Elior, *Paradoxical Ascent to God*, 121.
[88] Elior, ibid., 201–202.
[89] See the discussion of the unity of philosophy and mysticism in Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 199–231.
[90] Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 139.
[91] 'Tracing the Other of History in History: Gershom Scholem's Shabbatai Sevi' in: Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 139. First appeared as 'In der Geschichte das Andere der Geschichte aufspüren. Zu Gershom Scholems Shabbatai Zwi", in: *Vom sinnlichen Eindruck zum symbolischen Ausdruck: Philosophische Essays*, 73–83.

search for a truth which is distorted by the historical tradition, rather than disclosed'.[92] The work of the historian of the kabbalah resembles that of the archaeologist, in which an uncovering can create historical meaning beyond the immediacy of an excavation. Habermas suggests that research into the kabbalah participates in the 'reversal of religion into Enlightenment',[93] its antinomian effect rendering the development of a counter-history to transcend history. The uncovering participates in a reversal of value. In freeing a distorted truth of history and allowing it to ascend to the light of reason from under the culture of past primacy—for example, the once well-entrenched myth that Jewish culture is bereft of independent religious thought—the scholarship of the kabbalah participates in a reversal of myth into Enlightenment.

Thus, in sum, if modernity is the result of a dialectic of Enlightenment, with the dislocating principle as one of the salient features of our times, then what becomes relevant is not only the impact of modernity on the kabbalah but rather the impact of the kabbalah on modernity. Kabbalah has in this sense a clandestine affinity with modernity. We know they share a commonality when narratives of the former unexpectedly rise to the surface of intellectual and cultural life at the *fin d'siecle* of the twentieth century. The rationalist objectives of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school of the nineteenth century and the cultural and nationalist aims of the counter-historians of Jerusalem in the twentieth find common ground as Jewish studies enters an entirely new phase which neither Gershom Scholem nor others in the counter-historical turn considered possible.[94]

A relationship of affinity emerges within the experience of modernity. The dislocation of modernity parallels the religious anarchism of the kabbalah. It is for this reason that the study of the kabbalah harbors not only historical or descriptive narratives, but normative impulses. Its normative value lies in the fact that it is part of a greater movement within modernity which is engaged with dislocation and relocation. In particular, the dislocation of the canon and the introduction of the

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[92] *Religion and Rationality*, 139. (modified trans.)

[93] Habermas, ibid., 145.

[94] 'Counter-history' is used here to describe the historiography which reflects a generation of Jerusalem scholars. See Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*. Moshe Idel presents Scholem at the center of this historical-critical school in 'Subversive Catalysts', 40–43. Whether this historiography is truly antinomian is a question which requires further investigation. See the questions raised by Boaz Huss in his 'Authorized Guardians'.

margins into the center. It is not 'counter-history' which should be considered antinomian but rather modernity itself.

With the realization of the existence, and more extraordinary perhaps, the possibility of Auschwitz, modernity has returned to the question of evil with renewed urgency. The primacy of rationality in the thought of the Enlightenment coincided with the notion of the reducibility of substance. The idea of the lack of substance or privation naturally shifted the location of evil to the realm of substance i.e., a theory of good or ethics rather than a systematization of evil. In the neutralization of evil as substance and the advocacy of progress as the reduction of all things to the one, modernity returns to the world of myth with new illusions—racial supremacy, unwavering laws of progress, fascism, and anti-Semitism—to replace the foundational tropes of the past. 'If you want to expel religion from our European civilization', writes Freud, anticipating the rise of National Socialism, 'you can only do it by means of another system of doctrines; and such a system would from the outset take over all the psychological characteristics of religion—the same sanctity, rigidity, and intolerance, the same prohibitions of thought—for its own defence'.[95] Enlightenment, through its own instrumental and positivistic excess, created the groundwork for a new mythological narrative that comes to fruition in modernity.

On the grounds of a future of illusions and the relevance of cultural margins in the decline of past primacies, our time has revealed an elective affinity with the mythic world of the kabbalah: the 'mythological solution' (Tishby) breaks into our world as an act of revenge ('*die Rache des Mythos*'—Scholem), the subaltern world in revolt against the illusions of the Enlightenment. It is here that the kabbalah maintains an advantage over every philosophy of modernity incapable of addressing the problem of evil.[96] That the research into kabbalah cannot be considered merely descriptive is an objective feature of the impact of the work on modernity, but also, and more importantly, of what I have sought to understand here as its participation in the dislocation of past primacy. In the neutralization of the power of previous

[95] Freud, *Future of an Illusion,* 84.

[96] It is, for this reason, not entirely surprising that Hans Jonas felt the need to resort to what he calls his "myth"—which is essentially Lurianic—to think about the concept of God after Auschwitz. Jonas, 'The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice', which originally appeared in English in *The Journal of Religion* 67 (1987), 1–13, and reprinted in *Mortality and Morality: A Search for Good after Auschwitz*, 131–143.

locations of cultural primacy, the kabbalah participates in a normative enterprise.

Today, as perhaps never before, we are prepared to entertain the thought that the Western canon is not only the product of Christian theologians and mystics, but also of Jewish narratives. This is naturally true of many other areas at the margins of civilization which move closer to the center with the decline of central narratives. Yet Jewish thought, with its unique interaction with both Hellenism and Christianity, plays a particular role in the dislocation of the past primacy of the models of classical civilization. Here the scholarship of the kabbalah participates in an historical overturning whose meaning extends beyond the history of Judaism to the margins of culture. It has meaning for all of the histories of European culture which have been relegated to the margins. As cultural research expands and the old primacies give way to a new hybridity—revealing a multiplicity of influences that had once contributed to these primacies—former cultural authorities lose their uniform claim to the past.

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PART II

ROMANTIC AND ESOTERIC READINGS OF KABBALAH

KABBALAH AND SECRET SOCIETIES IN RUSSIA (EIGHTEENTH TO TWENTIETH CENTURIES)

Konstantin Burmistrov

Jewish mystical doctrines became a noticeable factor in Russian spiritual history in the second half of the eighteenth century, even if one can discern some traces of interest in this topic also in earlier periods among the old believers and sectarians, as well as in Russian magical literature.[1] There are two moments in the influence of kabbalistic ideas in Russia that are directly connected with the development of secret societies. After the establishment of the first masonic lodges in the middle of the eighteenth century, Russians became acquainted with various ideas and works related to kabbalah. The impact of these ideas especially intensified with the advent of the Rosicrucian lodges in the 1780s. The first period was interrupted with the official prohibition of freemasonry in Russia in the 1820s, but some underground masonic activity continued until the 1850s–1860s. The second period, between the 1880s and the 1930s, is characterized by an increased interest in the occult sciences, which culminates in the 1910s–1920s. In the 1930s, most of the members of various secret societies and occult groups were arrested and executed by the communist regime. Each of these periods developed its own attitude towards kabbalah, with some typical preferences and objects. We will discuss below these basic attitudes focusing our attention both on the differences and on the problem of possible historical genealogy.

1. The Age of Freemasonry

The eighteenth century in Russia can be called the age of freemasonry. Many of the best minds in the country—scientists, philosophers, writers, public figures, and even Orthodox theologians—were at that time active members of masonic lodges and aspired, "working the rough stone", to improve the commonwealth, the society, and mankind

[1] See Burmistrov & Endel, 'Kabbalah in Russian Masonry', 11–15.

as a whole. Some of them, having reached high degrees of the so-called theoretical freemasonry, investigated secret sciences, including a masonic version of kabbalah. Because we have already described the basic features and sources of this version of Christian kabbalah in Russia elsewhere,[2] only the basic characteristics of what it is possible to call a masonic kabbalah in Russia will be discussed here.

The first point that should be noted is that most of the Russian masons who studied kabbalah belonged to the intellectual and state elite. They usually had a good general education, knew some languages, and were often knowledgeable in theology. Despite its geographical remoteness, in Russia there was no scarcity of sources on kabbalah, both printed and hand-written. Judging from the catalogue of Nikolay Novikov's personal library,[3] and by the extant hand-written masonic archives, Russian freemasons had access practically to all sources of Christian, occult, and masonic kabbalah existing at that time. They translated some of them into Russian and made interesting comments.[4]

It is especially important that there were some kabbalistic texts at the disposal of Russian masons, probably translated directly from Hebrew. As far as I know, western European freemasons did not make any translations of this kind, relying mostly on the works of Christian kabbalists. It is possible to suggest also that Russians were much indebted to their (unidentified) Jewish instructors for these translations and for their knowledge of Jewish esoteric doctrines. Among the translated kabbalistic texts, one can mention a unique Russian translation of the book *Shaare Orah* ('Gates of Light') by R. Joseph Gikatilla (thirteenth century) with a classical commentary written in the sixteenth century by R. Mattatia (Mattityahu) Delacrut.[5] Another text translated into Russian, *An Oration of the Man of Eziless*, represents a loose translation of the treatise *Ma'amar Adam de-Atzilut*, a short and enigmatic Aramaic text with a commentary, which was included by the Praguese

[2] Ibid., 33–43; Burmistrov & Endel, 'The Place of Kabbalah', 38–45; Burmistrov, 'Kabbalistic Exegetics and Christian Dogmatics'; Burmistrov, 'Kabbalistic Cosmogony in Russian Freemasonry'.

[3] N.I. Novikov (1744–1818) was a famous writer, Enlightenment thinker, and freemason. He was also the leader of Moscow Martinists and Rosicrucians.

[4] See a review of the Russian masonic literature related to Kabbalah in Burmistrov & Endel, 'Kabbalah in Russian Masonry', 23–33.

[5] The Russian translation of this basic kabbalistic work was composed c. 1780 and is extant in two copies: Division of Manuscripts of the Russian State Library (DMS RSL), F. 14, N 1655 and F. 147, N 208. This Russian translation is still unpublished.

kabbalist R. Moshe ben Menachem Graf in his anthology *Va-Yakhel Moshe* (Dessau, 1699).[6] It contains a detailed description of the doctrine of the *Parzufim* and teachings on *Tzimtzum, Malbush*, and *Tikkun* that are so characteristic for Lurianic kabbalah.

A curious register of kabbalistic texts found among the manuscripts enables us to evaluate the range of kabbalistic sources available to Russian freemasons.[7] It contains not only some classical works of kabbalah such as the *Sefer Yetzirah, Zohar, Shaʿare Orah* and *Ginnat Egoz* by R. Joseph Gikatilla, *Pardes Rimmonim* by R. Moshe Cordovero etc., known both to Christian kabbalists and scholars, but also a number of texts belonging to the Lurianic tradition, which were rather little known to the non-Jews (like *Etz Hayyim, Sefer ha-Gilgulim, Shefa Tal*).[8] Also noticeable are the works of Hayyim Vital's school, *Mevo Sheʿarim* and *Otzerot Hayyim*, composed in the mid-seventeenth century and first published in 1783/84 in Koretz, as well as the treatise *Kisse Melekh* ('The King's Throne'), composed in 1769 by R. Shalom Buzaglo, a rabbi and kabbalist from Morocco, and hardly known to non-kabbalists. Until now, only two of the books mentioned in this register have been found in Russian translations among the extant masonic manuscripts: these are *Shaʿare Orah* and *Va-Yakhel Moshe*. It is reasonable to assume, however, that this register was a kind of list of recommended books for the most advanced degrees of Russian freemasonry. If so, the scope of their knowledge of kabbalistic issues seems to be unprecedented in a masonic context.

There is additional evidence of the interest Russian freemasons might have had in original kabbalistic writings. Several early editions of kabbalistic books once belonging to a Russian Rosicrucian library were found recently in the Hebrew Department of the Russian State Library.

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[6] See Endel, 'On a Rare Kabbalistic Codex'; Endel, 'Some Original Kabbalistic Concepts'.

[7] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1655, pp. 550–562; F. 147, N 208, ff. 144v–147.

[8] These books were known, however, to Christian Knorr von Rosenroth and his collaborators, and were quoted in the Latin anthology *Kabbala Denudata* (1677–1684). Knorr included some quotations from Vital's book *Ez Hayyim* ('The Tree of Life') in the first volume of this anthology, and published the Latin translation of *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* ('The Book of Reincarnations') in the second volume (*Tractatus […] de revolutionibus animarum*, vol. 2, pp. 243–478). He referred also to *Shefa Tal* ('The Flowing Dew', 1612), the work of Praguese kabbalist Shabtai Sheftel Horovitz (see 'Liber Schepha Tal', in *Kabbala Denudata*, vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 79), which might have been known to Russian masons also via the writings of the Order of the Asiatic Brethren (cf. Scholem, 'Ein verschollener jüdischer Mystiker', 268–269).

Among them, the first editions of R. Abraham Cohen de Herrera's *Beit Elohim* (Amsterdam 1655), *Me'orot Natan* by R. Meir Poppers (Frankfurt/M. 1709) and some other important works of Lurian kabbalah printed between the seventeenth and the early eithgeenth centuries. All these books contained on the flyleaves bookplates with a typical Rosicrucian symbol.[9]

It is known that Russian freemasons also wrote their own original compositions inspired by kabbalistic traditions. To this group of texts there belong, in particular, some manuscript writings of Johann Schwarz (1751–1784), Professor at Moscow University and head of the Rosicrucians in Moscow, and Senator Ivan Elagin (1725–1793), the first Provincial Master of Russian regular freemasonry.[10] In Schwarz's lectures and short treatises we find many examples of interpretation of kabbalistic concepts (about the sefirot and the lights, the four worlds, etc.) in the traditional masonic manner.[11] Elagin's *Explanations of the Mystical Meaning of* [*the text*] *about the Creation of the Universe in the Holy Scripture*[12] and the chapters on kabbalah in his voluminous *Doctrine of Ancient Philosophy and Divine Knowledge, or The Knowledge of the Freemasons*[13] represent probably the most developed kabbalistic interpretation of Christian dogmas in Russian masonic literature. There are also some smaller treatises, whose titles speak for themselves:

(1) *A Short Description of Kabbalah*. An overview of several topics, including the rules of *notaricon, gematria*, and *temurah*, different methods of *tzerufim* (*atbash*, etc.), the doctrine of the sefirot, the four worlds (*Atziluth, Beriah, Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*), the transmigration of the souls, practical kabbalah of divine names, etc.[14]

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[9] These books were purchased in the late nineteenth century by the famous Russian orientalist and bibliophile Baron David Günzburg and are stored now in the Günzburg Book Collection of the Oriental Center of the Russian State Library. About this collection, see Burmistrov, *Jewish Mysticism and Hasidism*. The title pages of these kabbalistic books are reproduced ibid. on pp. 58 and 60.

[10] See Burmistrov, Endel, 'The Place of Kabbalah', 48–57; Serkov, *Russian Masonry*, 323, 888.

[11] See DMS RSL, F. 14, N 685; F. 147, N 142; F. 178, N 9179 (a collection of his lectures).

[12] Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RSAAA), F. 216, N 8, Pt. 6, f. 41–70r.

[13] RSAAA, F 216, N 8, Pt. 3, f. 2. See about this work Pekarski, *Supplements to the history of Masonry*, 96–97; Burmistrov, Endel, 'The Place of Kabbalah', 51–52.

[14] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 992 (28 f., early 19th c.).

(2) *On the Ten Sefirot according to the Jews.* A detailed description of the doctrine of the sefirot, with charts of the sefirotic tree.[15]
(3) *Notes on Kabbalah.* A collection of texts discussing the mystical meaning of the Hebrew letters (with references to the *Zohar* and quotations from *Sefer ha-temunah*), the system of the sefirot, the channels (*tzinnorot*) and the divine names (with nice images), the complete translation of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, etc.[16]
(4) *On the Oral Tradition of the Jews, or, On Kabbalah.* An interpretation of kabbalistic materials derived from Johann Reuchlin, Athanasius Kircher, and other Christian kabbalists (*Ma'aseh Merkavah* and *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, the hierarchies of the angels, the tree of the sefirot, the correlation between the sefirot and the limbs of the human body, incantations and divine names, etc.).[17]
(5) *A Handbook on the primordial kabbalistic teaching and the symbolic science of calculations.*[18]
(6) *A Treatise on the Name Yehovah.* On the four-, twelve-, forty-two-, and seventy-two-letter names of God.[19]
(7) *The Basic Elements of Magic-Kabbalistic and Hermetic Works.* On the divine names, etc.[20]

All this testifies that kabbalah was not a casual theme for Russian freemasons but was considered by them an important esoteric doctrine.

2. Masonic Kabbalah as an Ancient Esoteric Tradition

The worldview of the so-called *theoretical* masons, engaged in studying kabbalah and other secret doctrines, was very complex and looked like an amalgam of different, sometimes even contradictory, elements borrowed from various religious, philosophical, and mystical traditions. It is curious, however, that they did not find it problematic, from a religious point of view, to study the occult sciences and to "practice"

[15] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1116 (16 f., c. 1783).
[16] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 676 (70 f., 1830s). This translation has been published with commentaries in: Burmistrov & Endel, 'Sefer Yetzirah in the Christian and Jewish Mystical Traditions'.
[17] DMS RSL, F. 147, N 204 (23 f., 1780s).
[18] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 990 (97 f., early 19th c.).
[19] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1843 (12 f., 1810s).
[20] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 920 (13 f., 1816).

them, while at the same time belonging to the Orthodox Church. As it is known, they were not Christians only formally: their religious devotion was deep and genuine. Moreover, they tried to find in various traditions the grains of perennial revelation that would solve the deep religious and intellectual crisis suffered by Russian society in the 18th century. They perceived the occult sciences and kabbalah in particular as an invaluable repository of ancient wisdom. Paradoxically enough, kabbalah helped them to read not only the Old Testament, but also the New Testament, and even the works of the Church Fathers—as it was the case with Pico della Mirandola and some other Christian kabbalists. We can see a fine example of this approach to kabbalah in Ivan Elagin who, in my opinion, expressed the masonic attitude to the Jewish secret lore in the clearest way. According to this author,

> Kabbalah is considered […] the true knowledge of allegories, symbols, and hieroglyphs of the Divine words […]. We read in *The Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach* (Ben Sira) (39:1): 'But he that giveth his mind to the law of the most High, and is occupied in the meditation thereof, will seek out the wisdom of all the ancient, and be occupied in prophecies. He will keep the sayings of the renowned men (that is, the words of the forefathers, prophets and Greek historians) and where subtle parables are, he will be there also. He will seek out the secrets of grave sentences, and be conversant in dark parables'. Thus, the true kabbalah is the knowledge of secrets, parables, hieroglyphs and images which are in the words of God […]. And inasmuch as everything comes from God, the gift of understanding the true wisdom comes from the same source. According to the *Talmud*, 'Moses received Kabbalah from God Himself, from His divine Mouth'. And then the *Talmud* says: 'Everybody should remember well that Moses […] was the only man among the elected who was granted to know the truth directly from the mouth of God' […]. Thus, the main essence of kabbalah is to leave the external and literal sense of the Holy Scripture and the word of God, and to penetrate the interior thoughts of the Holy Ghost.[21]

My assumption is that the interest of Russian masons in Jewish mysticism was far from superficial, as might seem to be the case at first glance. They looked at kabbalah as a tradition that preserved the core of ancient wisdom in the most precise way, a true knowledge that had been granted to humankind through revelation. In some texts, even the very tradition of ancient wisdom is probably identified with kabbalah (that is "tradition" in the strict meaning of the word). Therefore, kabbalah gradually became an integral part of the masonic doctrine.

[21] RSAAA, F. 8, N 216, Pt. 6, f. 54–54v.

The theosophical issues seemed to be the most important for masons, particularly the concepts of the sefirot and the divine names. It is typical that they considered the doctrine of the sefirot as the most ancient and authoritative Jewish tradition, going back to Moses and the revelation on the Sinai:

> The ancient Jewish theologians, who are true and uncorrupted kabbalists, and who had been taught by divine Moses and his successors […] discussing the relationship between God and creatures and analyzing His deeds […], attributed to Him various names […]. They arranged these ten divine names and disposed them in the likeness of a tree, with a root, a stump and the branches […]. Later they called these names numerations […] as well as flowings (emanations), because they are as if flowing out from the essence of God […]. These are the names and the designations of the ten sefirot, which are glorified by the kabbalists. They ascribe to them also other names, for instance garments […]. They call the three upper [sefirot] the work of the Chariot [i.e. Maaseh Merkava], and the three[22] lower [sefirot] the work of Creation [i.e. Maaseh Bereshit], because the first [three] are related to the knowledge of the One God, whereas the last [three are related] to the knowledge of God and the creation, for they are cognizable only in connection with the created beings.[23]

Interestingly enough, Russian freemasons appreciated highly 'the original and ancient' doctrine of sefirot, and at the same time sharply criticized 'the later distortions of these system' in the works of kabbalists who 'fall into absurdity', fabricating 'countless channels, paths, and gates of sefirot'.[24] In any case, their interest in kabbalistic doctrines, like that of the sefirot, was mainly theoretical; as a rule, they were unwilling to use their knowledge of kabbalah for practical purposes. Thus, the introduction to the Russian translation of *Sha'are Orah* contains a clear warning against kabbalistic practice:

> Do not use the divine names for any other purpose than the education of yourself and of those who are worthy thereof; because if you begin to apply them [i.e. the names] to some other ends, you will not be able to evade the abyss dug out by vanity and arrogance […]. These names are used in our science only for the best instruction of those who are entering this School; but if you have already entered this Temple, then the eyes of your own soul will reveal to you the imperfection of our explanation.[25]

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[22] Probably "seven".
[23] DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1116 (1780s), pp. 3–4.
[24] Ibid, p. 5v.
[25] DMS RSL, F. 14, N. 1655, pp. 6–7. This quotation seems to be a paraphrase of a similar fragment in the Introduction (*hakdamah*) to Gikatilla's *Sha'are Orah*.

3. Masonic Adoption of Lurianic Concepts

With its complex theoretical structure, kabbalah seemed to have corresponded well to the general masonic tendency to search for a united and coherent system of the universe. Besides, various Jewish hermeneutic methods—such as *gematria, notaricon*, and *temurah*—became very popular in the masonic milieus. Of course, these methods were not a characteristic of kabbalah alone, but for freemasons they served as the essential part of the secret Jewish tradition. Disclosing deeper meanings in the Bible and in other sacred texts corresponded also well to the masonic doctrine of hieroglyphs, that is, the idea of a ciphered structure of the universe. Anyhow, kabbalah helped masons to understand the structure of the divine and of the terrestrial worlds, and the relationship between them, and assisted in revealing the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. Kabbalistic concepts of the universal Man (*Adam Kadmon*) and universal improvement (*tikkun ha-olam*) served as an ideological basis for the masonic program of radical reformation of social, political, moral and religious conditions in Russia.

Russian masons were particularly fascinated by the kabbalistic concept of the primordial man, Adam Kadmon, since in their view 'Adam was born before all other creatures, he is the beginning of all beings created by God; all the powers of the Divine Being in their totality were concentrated within him [i.e. Adam Kadmon] as in a point'.[26] As we noted elsewhere, it was precisely this idea that underlay the masonic doctrine of the primordial unity of humankind, which has been destroyed and must be repaired.[27] This symbol is very important for the masonic myth. Being a syncretic one—it includes elements drawn from biblical, apocryphal, hermetic, Gnostic, Christian, and other traditions—the concept of Adam Kadmon is interpreted by the Russian masons in accordance with Jewish kabbalah. Thus, they conceive Adam Kadmon as the source of the subsequent emanation of sefirot: 'All the heavenly (supernal) things […] descended from […] the sefirot, or the sources of Light […]. This is the source of four worlds—*Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*, i.e. the worlds of ema-

[26] RSAAA, F. 8, N 216, pt. 6(1), f. 68 (Elagin, *Explanations of the Mystical Meaning of [the text] about Creation*).

[27] Cf. Burmistrov & Endel, 'The Place of Kabbalah', 38–41; id., 'Kabbalistic Exegetics and Christian Dogmatics', 104–107.

nation, creation, formation and construction. One should also know that every world has its own ten sefirot springing from [the same] Adam Kadmon'.[28]

At the same time, Russian masons elaborated an original idea about the two Adams. The first Adam, often called *Adam before the Fall*, was the universal Adam Kadmon, the perennial supernal being, the archetype of the man and the manifested world in general; it is stated that his soul contained the souls of all people. The first Adam is conceived also as the perennial Jesus, whereas the second Adam, or Jesus incarnated (Jesus of Nazareth), is considered a manifestation, or hieroglyph, of the first Adam.[29] At the same time, the incarnated Jesus is the Messia who is to repair the sin committed by Adam, who separated 'the last letter *he* from the word *Jehovah*, or *Malkhut* from *Tiferet*, which were connected in the beginning; through the Adam's sin, *Malkhut* moved down'. The ordinary man is not able to accomplish 'this great task, that is, to join *Malkhut* to *Tiferet*', and only the Christ, who is the incarnation of the sefirah *Tiferet*, can restore the broken unity of the divine world.[30]

It was essential for freemasons that man purifies the spheres of the universe accessible to him; special groups of initiates were to play a crucial role in this process. For the mason, his personal salvation may be possible only in the course of the general harmonization and improvement of nature and of mankind. This would be like a universal *tikkun*, and each mason should take an active part in this process. This impulse induced them to be engaged in charity, national education, to struggle for the correction of morals and manners, and at the same time to study kabbalah and to participate in alchemical experiments trying to refine the base metals. At the same time, when speaking about a prospective inclusion and adaptation of the Lurianic concept of *tikkun* into masonic doctrine, it is necessary to remember, that masons have taken from this doctrine (via the Christian kabbalists) only those elements which suited the Christian notion of redemption.

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[28] DMS RSL, F. 14, N. 1644 (*Philosophical considerations*, the early 19th c.), book 5, pp. 23–24.

[29] RSAAA, F. 8, N 216, pt. 6(1), f. 67v–69; cf. Burmistrov, 'Christian Orthodoxy and Jewish Kabbalah', 39–40.

[30] DMS RSL, F. 14, N. 1655, p. 532 (*Upon Christ*, 1780s); see Burmistrov & Endel, 'Kabbalah in Russian Masonry', 52.

4. Kabbalah Studies in the Nineteenth Century

The study of the kabbalah in Russian freemasonry was interrupted after the prohibition of any masonic activity in the 1820s. At the same time, kabbalah continued to be a subject of continuous attention in the groups of theoretical masons, who worked underground until the last third of the nineteenth century. It was a time of inertia after the period of flourishing. As in the 18th century, among the people occupied with esoteric doctrines in the middle of the 19th century in Russia there were high officials, scholars, and renowned priests. At one point the head of clandestine Russian freemasonry was prince Sergey Lanskoy (1787–1862), Minister of Interior of imperial Russia, who became also one of the main proponents of the governmental reform of the Tsar Alexander II. Interestingly enough, a number of public officials who supported liberal reforms in Russia, were known to be members of esoteric groups studying kabbalah in particular. Thus, Sergei Maslov (1793–1879), secretary of the progressive Imperial Moscow Society for Agriculture, was a high ranking Rosicrucian, and translated in the 1850s into Russian a voluminous work, *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition*, by the philosopher and Christian kabbalist F.J. Molitor.[31] Molitor, who had an intimate knowledge of kabbalah, discussed in his book the significance of Jewish mysticism for the Christian tradition, believing that 'it is impossible to comprehend Christianity in its true depth without a serious and thorough understanding of Judaism, which is the basis and the source [of this religion]'.[32] It is not surprising that Molitor's ideas became so attractive for Russian masons, who strived to find a link between Orthodox Christianity and a tradition of ancient wisdom, which they referred to as "true kabbalah".

In the second half of the nineteenthh century, interest in kabbalah rose in the Russian clergy and in the ecclesiastical schools. There are several dissertations on kabbalah and hasidism defended at that time in the ecclesiastic schools of Kiev, Moscow, and St. Petersburg (unfortunately, they were not published). A Russian translation of the famous book *Kabbalah, the Religious Philosophy of the Jews* by Adolphe Franck

[31] See DMS RSL, F. 14, N 441, 995, 1918 (1840–1850s). Cf. Burmistrov, Endel, 'The Place of Kabbalah', 60–61.

[32] Molitor, *Philosophie der Geschichte oder über die Tradition*, 312. About Molitor and his kabbalistic studies and sources see Koch, *Franz Joseph Molitor und die jüdische Tradition.*

was published in 1873 by a church publishing house. Several Russian books on kabbalah published in that period were mainly the rendering of some western European scholarly works, such as those of A. Franck, I. Jost, H. Graetz, M. Landauer, etc. Although these facts seem to bear no relation to secret societies as such, they facilitated the new outbreak of interest in Jewish esotericism in the late nineteenth century and the first decennia of the twentieth century.

5. Attitudes to Kabbalah in Russian Occultism of the Early Twentieth Century

In the last quarter of the 19th century, more and more Russians became enthusiastic about occultism, spiritualism, oriental mysticism etc. At the same time, freemasonry and all other secret societies were prohibited as before, whereas severe religious censorship prevented the dissemination of esoteric doctrines. This situation changed dramatically in 1905, after the first Russian revolution. Then for the first time a constitution was adopted and a parliament was elected. This was a liberal period in Russian history, and at once, numerous esoteric societies and masonic lodges began to appear. The general attitude to kabbalah at that time, however, differs essentially from that of the Russian masons of the earlier period.

A wide popularity and influence of the theosophical and later anthroposophical movements in Russia[33] resulted in a certain indifference, sometimes even hostility towards Jewish mysticism from the members of occult societies. It is well known that the Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, had a very syncretistic doctrine. It incorporated elements of various traditions and mythologies, both ancient and modern, but with a particular focus on oriental religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism. Of course, Helena P. Blavatsky was a broad-minded person with many interests, including kabbalah, which was, in her opinion, an important and ancient element of the "Secret Doctrine". She was familiar with some scholarly and occult books about kabbalah and some translations of kabbalistic texts,[34] and even wrote

[33] Cf. Carlson, *"No Religion Higher than Truth"*; idem, 'Fashionable Occultism'; von Maydell, 'Anthroposophy in Russia'.

[34] In particular, she was well acquainted with the *Kabbala Denudata* and repeatedly quoted in her works fragments from the *Zohar* and Lurianic texts in the Latin

several papers on this topic.[35] However, after moving the center of the Theosophical Society from the United States to India and establishing the headquarters in Adyar her successors turned entirely to the oriental wisdom, while western esotericism, including kabbalah, almost ceased to interest them. The situation with Anthroposophy was quite different. As is known, Rudolf Steiner, who for a number of years was the head of the German section of Theosophical Society, dissented from the leaders of the Society, and insisted that the purity of a Christian ("Aryan") esotericism should be preserved, while the excessive passion for the East should be rejected. He was quite tolerant towards paganism, or, more exactly, to what he termed "mysticism" and the "mysteries", but Jewish mysticism (as well as Islamic) was absolutely alien to his concept of "white" and "primordial" mystical Christianity. This is especially curious, because almost all of 19th century occultism, from which the Theosophical Society and other occult organizations had originated, had inherited from freemasonry a keen interest for Jewish mysticism. Leading occultists such as Antoine Fabre d'Olivet, Eliphas Lévi, Stanislas de Guaita, and others considered kabbalah as the supreme wisdom of mankind, and devoted their major works to kabbalistic doctrine, even if transformed and misunderstood. However, theosophists and anthroposophists increasingly rejected Jewish elements from the doctrines of their predecessors. All this led to the absence of interest for kabbalah among the majority of Russian followers of the theosophical and anthroposophical movements, who were also members of various masonic and quasi-masonic institutions.

6. Esoteric Groups in Late Imperial Russia

But there were also some Russian esoteric groups that appreciated kabbalah and its occult interpretations strongly. These groups were

translation. Besides, she often used the German translation of the *Sefer Yetzirah* made by Johann F. von Meyer (Leipzig 1830) and some other translations. Blavatsky apparently had an especially vivid interest in kabbalah in the closing stages of her life. A close examination of her writings shows, however, that her understanding of kabbalah was mainly based on two dubious "occult" works: S.L. MacGregor Mathers' introduction of his abridged translation of the 2nd vol. of *Kabbala Denudata* (1st ed. 1887; see: Macgregor Mathers, *Kabbalah Unveiled*, 1–42), and the phantasmagoric work of Isaak Myer, *Qabbalah*.

[35] See, e.g., her papers 'The Kabalah and Kabalists at the Close of the Nineteenth Century' (publ. in *Lucifer*, May 1892) and especially 'Tetragrammaton' (publ. in *The Theosophist*, Nov. 1887).

ideologically and sometimes even directly connected with western European esoteric institutions, such as the Ordre Martiniste, headed by Papus,[36] the Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose+Croix,[37] the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn,[38] etc. Occultists more positively inclined towards kabbalah grouped around the publishing house Isis (*Izida*) and a monthly magazine of the same name, where many classical works of Christian and occultist kabbalah were published (including those of Agrippa of Nettesheim, Heinrich Khunrath, Lenain, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, Papus, and even Erich Bischoff, a popular German interpreter of kabbalah).[39]

Another circle was formed around Gregory von Moebes (1868–1934), a renowned occultist, mathematician, and head of the Russian branch of the Ordre Martiniste.[40] Moebes was one of the most authoritative Russian esotericists; in 1910 he was appointed Inspecteur General (i.e., secretary) of the Petersburg branch of the Order, but in 1912 he declared the independence of Russian Martinists and established a "Grand Council of Russia". In 1916 he created the Autonomous Order of Russian Martinists.[41] According to another renowned Russian occultist, A.M. Aseev, Moebes reconstructed Russian initiatory organizations in three different branches or traditions—Masonic, Rosicrucian, and Martinist—being at the head of all of them. Some of these groups remained active in the underground until the end of 1930s.[42]

Moebes seems to have been the most devoted adept of kabbalah in Russian occultism. In his book *The Encyclopedic Course of Occultism,*[43]

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[36] See Introvigne, 'Martinism: Second Period'. The activity of Martinist lodges in Russia is analyzed in detail by Andrei Serkov in *History of Russian Freemasonry*, 67–84.

[37] See Laurant, *L'Esotérisme chrétien en France au XIXe siècle*, ch. 4–5.

[38] See Ellic Howe's *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, and Gilbert, 'Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn'.

[39] See, e.g. Antoshevsky, *Bibliography of Occultism*.

[40] The first Martinist lodge in Russia was established in 1899 by the prince Valerian Mouraviev-Amursky, the first local representative (delegate) of the Order. In 1910 prince Cheslav von Chinski (1858 until after 1913), who took the name "Punar Bhava" in the Order, was appointed official representative. He was also head of the St. Petersburg branch. Moebes took the name "Butatar" in the Order.

[41] The Moscow branch, headed by P. and D. Kaznacheevs, kept faithful to the Paris Order until 1920, when all Martinist lodges in Russia were closed. See Brachev, 'Petersburg Martinists'; id., 'Leningrad Freemasons and the OGPU'; Serkov, *History of Russian Freemasonry*, 77–81.

[42] Aseev, 'Initiatory Orders', 433. Cf. also idem, 'Occult Movement in Soviet Russia'.

[43] Published privately with limited circulation in St. Petersburg in 1912; reprinted by the Russian emigrants in Shanghai in 1937–1938.

which was arranged as a commentary to the 22 arcana of the Tarot, Moebes discusses at length a number of kabbalistic doctrines, including the system of the sefirot and its reverberation on different levels of being. It should be noted that his views differ significantly from Jewish kabbalah in some very important aspects. Thus, while exploring at length the system of the five partzufim—'The Supreme Androgyne (Macroprosopus), the Father, the Mother, their Child (Microprosopus), and his Wife (or Bride)'—he notes:

> Every closed family is preceded by some other family, etc., right up to the Primary Source. Jewish kabbalists rose only to the family of the primeval sefirotic System of the Universe, regarding this System as a manifestation of an inconceivable Essence […] Ein-Sof. They did not dare to analyze the Ein-Sof. Rosicrucians, however, allowed themselves to refer to not only the earliest sefirot of the Universe, but also to the Members of the Family who are located between Ein-Sof and Sefirot […]. Thus, in their scheme the Inconceivable Source expresses Itself in an active way.[44]

According to Jewish kabbalah, Ein-Sof is the Absolute Reality, unknowable and unutterable, to which it is impossible to assign any positive attributes. Moebes differs significantly from this negative (apophatical) understanding. In his book he describes in detail its internal structure and a series of various positive attributes. Hence, Ein-Sof loses its abstractness. It is possible to find many other differences between traditional Jewish kabbalah and the "neo-Rosicrucian" reverberations in Moebes' work, especially when he offers explanations for the "practical" significance of kabbalistic doctrines.

This book, which gained popularity as the best Russian handbook of occultism, was mainly based on the texts and instructions of the Ordre Martiniste elaborated by Papus. It seems, however, that Moebes was much more versed in kabbalah than his master, who, in Gershom Scholem's opinion, 'had an infinitesimal knowledge of kabbalah that did not prevent [him] from drawing freely on [his] imagination instead'.[45] In 1918–1921, during the hard times of the Civil War in Russia, Moebes gave a course on the *Sefer ha-Zohar* to his closest disciples in St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, these lectures were confiscated and disappeared, together with other manuscripts and archives, in 1926,

[44] Moebes, *Course of the Encyclopedia of Occultism*, vol. 1, 78–79.
[45] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 203. See also Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalistica*, xv–xvi.

when Moebes and his followers were arrested by the Soviet secret police (United State Political Office, OGPU). Only the text of twelve lectures from the ones he delivered in 1921 has survived and has been published recently.[46] These lectures contain exceptionally important material concerning the relationship between various aspects of the occult sciences, kabbalah and the Tarot. It is clear from these texts that Moebes and his audience had a good knowledge of Hebrew; some of these lectures deal with the kabbalistic and occult meaning of Hebrew letters and vowels, cantillation points, minutest details of Hebrew phonetics and grammar. One can say without exaggeration that Moebes not only knew Hebrew well enough but was also its propagator in occultist circles. Moreover, in his book Moebes argues that he has taken *Jewish* kabbalah as a basis of his doctrine because the secret tradition of the Jews 'is especially concerned with *philology*', that is, with the idea of a sacred language (i.e. Hebrew) underlying the whole Universe and corresponding to its innermost structure.[47] It is also important that Moebes in his lectures did not confine himself to theoretical issues, but laid special emphasis on the practical aspects, such as meditation and visualization, including the contemplation of Hebrew letters and divine names. He paid special attention to colors and sounds,[48] as well as to the shape of separate Hebrew consonants. These studies were probably aimed at the achievement of supernatural abilities (telepathy etc.) and paranormal states of consciousness.

It should be stressed that those members of secret societies who were interested in kabbalah in the beginning of the twentieth century, had quite a different social status than that of the masons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Usually, they belonged to the middle class and were professional workers such as scientists, physicians, engineers, lawyers, and artists. They treated the Orthodox Church at best neutrally, but more often negatively—as in the case of Moebes and his group—and certainly did not wish to reform the life and doctrine of the Church. Politically, they were mostly verging to the left wing, being mystical socialists or anarchists, sometimes with nationalist overtones. One can also find strong apocalyptic moods in the milieu, especially during the First World War and the Russian Civil

[46] Moebes, *Meditation on the Arcana of Tarot*.
[47] Ibid., 228–229.
[48] On this topic in kabbalistic tradition see Scholem, 'Colours and Their Symbolism'; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 103–111.

war (1914–1921). At that time, a peculiar interest for kabbalah was characteristic of the Russian symbolist poets and representatives of the movement for religious revival, in particular Pavel Florenski, Sergei Bulgakov, and Alexei Losev, but as a rule they did not belong to any secret societies or occult groups.[49] Generally speaking, the ideology of secret societies was perceived at that time rather as an alternative to the Church doctrine, than as a reformed and refined version of it, as was the case in eighteenth-century Russian masonry.

One more point that is important is the anti-Semitism widespread among Russian esotericists. It may seem strange and paradoxical, but the enmity to Jews did not prevent them to be interested in kabbalah, which they saw as a *non*-Jewish doctrine. This notion of kabbalah as a non-Jewish doctrine was based in Russian occultism on the so-called "Egyptian myth". According to this idea, kabbalah is a most ancient secret knowledge, which was possessed by the Egyptians and which the Egyptian priest Moses handed down to the Aryans using a Semitic population of wild nomads, i.e. the Jews, only as a mediator. This myth has ancient roots, going back at least to the seventeenth century (in particular, to Athanasius Kircher's ideas); its most zealous preacher, however, was a French esotericist, Antoine Fabre d'Olivet. He and the authors later influenced by him, such as Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, Stanislas de Guaita, and Edouard Schuré, were highly esteemed in Russia. Thus, kabbalah ceased to be Jewish, as in the writings of some theosophists who discussed about "Egyptian", "Greek" or even "Chinese" kabbalah, or of the Ariosophists such as Guido von List or Lanz von Liebenfels who wrote about an "Aryan" or "German" kabbalah.

7. Neo-Rosicrucians in the Early Soviet Period

In the 1920s, after the Russian Revolution and the ensuing Civil war, esoteric activity in Russia went underground again. This period is of special interest for the history of kabbalah in Russia. At this time, regular freemasonry in Russia disappeared, and studying esoteric subjects was limited to small groups of intellectuals, who, as a rule, had no sympathy for the Soviet regime. It was not a pleasant, glamorous

[49] See Burmistrov, 'Interpretation of Kabbalah'; idem, 'Andrei Bely and Kabbalah'; Nefediev, 'Russian Symbolism and Rosicrucianism'.

affair anymore: every member of these groups ran the risk of being imprisoned or expelled from the country.

The aims pursued by the members of Russian esoteric groups were strongly determined by their occult background. They strove to acquire supernatural powers by means of practical exercise, meditation, visualization, ceremonial magic, as well as scientific means. As a rule they respected very much the pioneering discoveries of modern science such as electrical technology, radio-electronics, psychology and psychotherapy, organic chemistry, genetics, eugenics, and racial studies. Many of them believed that their occult studies would soon be accepted by science, and that telepathy, indefinite prolongation of life, improvement of the human species and even resuscitation would one day be available to the whole of humanity.[50] Kabbalah was especially attractive for them as a magical system underlying various incantations, the methods of letter combinations, the magic alphabets and ciphers, which allow the adept to communicate with other realms of being and to exert an influence on them as well as on our world. In addition, they evidently expected to gain visions and revelations through kabbalistic visualization of divine names. Therefore, they gave special attention to practical kabbalah (*kabbalah ma'asit*) and pseudo-kabbalistic European magic (various grimoires, quasi-Hebrew works such as the *Clavicula Salomonis* and *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*). It should be noted, however, that the aim of their activity was usually not the attainment of personal perfection and power over other people; they honestly believed to benefit the whole of humanity through their work. Therefore, in this respect they may well be seen as the children of the age of early communist utopianism in Russia.

In addition to the groups headed by Moebes, which continued their activity after the revolution (they were crushed in 1926),[51] there were at least three Russian esoteric institutions whose members were especially interested in kabbalah, both theoretically and practically:[52]

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[50] On the experiential nature of the Russian esotericism of the early Soviet period and its relationship to scientific life in Russia, see: Agursky, 'An Occult Source of Socialist Realism'; Vanchu, 'Technology as Esoteric Cosmology'; Hagemeister, 'Die Eroberung des Raums'.

[51] Investigatory materials related to Moebes and his groups have been found in the secret police archives and have been published recently; see Nikitin, *Esoteric Masonry in Soviet Russia*, 7–245.

[52] I set aside here another underground group of esotericists active in the 1920s in Soviet Russia, whose leader, Vladimir Shmakov (d. 1929 in Buenos Aires), was a

Emesh Redivivus, Lux Astralis, and The Order of Moscow Rosicrucians-Manicheans. Members of these groups called themselves neo-Rosicrucians. Most of them were subjected to persecution at the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s, and perished in concentration camps. Almost all we know about them and their doctrines is to be found in the archives of Russian secret services. Unfortunately, now as before, significant parts of these archives are not open to researchers, allegedly because they contain secrets of the state. It is no wonder, therefore, that the present article is the first scholarly discussion of this material. Below we will briefly examine how Russian neo-Rosicrucians treated kabbalah without dwelling more on the historical context.

The first thing I would like to point out is the self-identification of Russian esotericists as kabbalists or even Christian kabbalists. They called themselves kabbalists considering their activity a continuation of an ancient tradition. The first word of the name Emesh Redivivus consists of three Hebrew letters—aleph, mem and shin. It is clear that these letters are the 'mother letters' (*shalosh imot*) of the *Sefer Yetzirah*.[53] According to this neo-Rosicrucian tradition, the first letter designates all mental (intellectual) forces of the universe, the second one the astral and spiritual world, and the third the level of physical life.[54] The instrument enabling to control completely the mental, astral and physical forces is practical magic, and it comes as no surprise that Emesh Redivivus held as its main aim a restoration of the theory and the practice of magic. The practical orientation of the order is especially significant and rather unusual for a Russian esoteric group. Its members established an underground laboratory where they carried out experiments with magical objects, drugs, and so on; they also worked on telepathy. Their experiments related to ceremonial magic and the invocation of the spirits of the planets seem to be especially significant, in particular in view of the fact that their illegal laboratory was located in the basement of a building located in immediate proximity to the building of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), the headquarter of the security services. The practitioners

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renowned Russian occultist. Shmakov's doctrine is very original and also has close relation to some kabbalistic concepts. I hope to analyze this topic in detail elsewhere.

[53] *Sefer Yetzirah*, III.

[54] On the other hand, as Moebes points out, the numerical value (the "small number") of the word *Emesh* (341 = 8) is equal to that of the Tetragrammaton (26 = 8). See Moebes, *Meditation on the Arcana of Tarot*, 233.

most likely hoped to make use of the "waves" or vibrations of horror and fear emanating from the building.

The ideas and structure of the order went back to the secret group founded by the aforementioned Cheslav von Chinski in 1910. This occultist, a Pole by birth, was a pupil of Stanislas de Guaita, the founder of the Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose-Croix, one of the most kabbalistically inclined occult institution of that time. In this case we see a straight line of historical continuity between the Ordre Kabbalistique and the Emesh Redivivus, not only from an organizational point of view, but also from an ideological one.

A few words on the place of kabbalah in the teaching of Emesh Redivivus are in order. According to the order's doctrine, there is a hierarchy of four worlds, or universal substances. First, there is the divine world, *Olam ha-Atziluth* (the World of Lights), *Ein-sof* (the Upper Abyss); this is God, a real pole of life, an archetype. Then second, the mental world, *Olam ha-Beriah* (the World of Divine Creation), the world of transcendental reason, or of primary causes; it comprises ten sefirot and ten names of God. The third is the astral world, *Olam ha-Yetzirah*, the world of spiritual hierarchies, the world of formation, or of transcendental emotional principles and secondary causes; it comprises also seven "planets" and the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The fourth is the physical or material world, *Olam ha-Asiyah*, the world of the elements, or of creation, an illusionary stratum which resembles the Maya of Hinduism. Beneath these worlds, the lowermost abyss is situated.[55]

It is evident that the basis of this scheme was taken from Jewish kabbalah, but, according to the ideologist of Emesh Redivivus, Vadim Chekhovsky (1902–1929), one can find similar patterns in almost every religion, because it is universal.

Then there is a universal law of cyclic development governing the world, and the basic principle of this law is that of quaternary or tetradic manifestation, expressed and concealed at the same time in the four-letter name of God, the Tetragrammaton. Chekhovsky affirms that the person who knows how to pronounce this name has a magic power over it, and therefore holds the key to the whole universe.

[55] Chekhovsky, *Story of My Life*, 45–46. Chekhovsky composed this work in prison by request of investigating officers; it contains a detailed exposition of the Order's doctrine and rites (see ibid., 30–73).

Chekhovsky calls this person *Baal Shem*, Master of the Name, and discusses in detail different practices concerning the pronunciation of the holy names.[56]

The next point, which was especially important for Chekhovsky and his colleagues, is the multiple meaning of the Hebrew text of the Bible. They note that there are several levels of interpretation, from literal to symbolic (a clear reference to the four-fold scheme of *Pardes*), and that one can change the meaning of the text by changing the vocalization or dividing the sequence of consonants in some other way. According to Chekhovsky, '[t]he translations of the Bible are really terrible [...]. The symbols [...] are interpreted by illiterate translators in naïve, ridiculous way'.[57] It follows that, in order to understand the Bible, one should become proficient in Hebrew, as well as in kabbalistic hermeneutics and letter symbolism.

Curiously enough, some kind of magic anti-Semitism was characteristic of the doctrine of this group. Thus, the leaders of the Order believed in the reality of ritual murders committed by Jews. They supposed that in this way Jews exerted a harmful magical influence. The police investigators found, during a search in the order's headquarters, a statuette of Andrey Yushchinski, a boy killed in 1913 in Kiev, whose death gave cause for the famous Mendel Beilis case.[58] Thirteen small marks, looking like wounds, had been made on the head of this figure. Russian occultists claimed that there was a special ritual of blood sacrifice, and that the configuration of the wounds on the head of a victim is a ciphered message, related to the ritual. In this context, the wounds would represent certain Hebrew letters and, at the same time, the tree of the sefirot.[59]

It is also interesting that the idea of ritual murder was put into practice by the members of the Emesh Redivivus using the same kind of pseudo-kabbalistic methods. They made figures of a specially prepared wax, baptized them with a real church ceremony, conducted by a real Orthodox priest, and then ritually pierced them with needles with the purpose of killing the victims or bringing them to madness.[60] Prob-

[56] Ibid., 46.
[57] Ibid., 53.
[58] See Nikitin, *Rosicrucians in Soviet Russia*, 86, 93, 96, 143, 151.
[59] This issue is expounded in detail in Vassily Rosanov's book *On the Attitude of the Jews to Blood*, 215–261; cf. Burmistrov, 'Blood Libel in Russia', 29–31.
[60] A detailed description of this ritual is contained in the interrogatory records of V.V. Preobrazhensky, member of the Emesh Redivivus. See Nikitin, *Rosicrucians in Soviet Russia*, 94–95.

ably, the targets of this ritual were the leaders of the state or the members of the Order who had turned into traitors. Chekhovsky frankly declared that the Soviet regime is 'an empire of Satan', and that 'it is necessary to struggle with this regime, but as this empire is not from this world, one should struggle with it not by terrestrial means (such as wars, weapons, and murders), but by superterrestrial ones, that is, by the establishment of secret orders and societies'.[61] Needless to say, Jews would not be allowed to join these occult institutions.

During the interrogation, Chekhovsky said that 'freemasonry is composed of Jews, who aspire to seize power all over the world'.[62] The spiritual leader of the Emesh Redivivus, Evgeny Teger (1890 until after 1942), also declared that he hated Jews, and that it had been Jews who had led Trotsky, Mussolini and Chamberlain to power.[63] The enmity towards the Jews was accompanied by strong apocalyptic expectations and anxiety, which had been quite alien to Russian freemasons in the previous periods. The neo-Rosicrucians were anti-Semites and at the same time took a great interest in kabbalah as a means to gain great magical power, which they thought would enable them to reorganize and improve our world.

8. Kabbalah and Historiosophy

The head of the Lux Astralis, Boris Zubakin (1894–1938), was a talented poet and archeologist.[64] Like Chekhovsky, he was imprisoned and executed by shooting. He was even more attracted by kabbalistic doctrines and openly declared himself a Christian kabbalist. He described the teachings of his Order as a 'spiritual-kabbalistical' doctrine, and said that the main condition of admission to the Order was a 'long-term study of kabbalistic doctrines and secrets'.[65] The extensive and complex cosmogonic treatises composed by the members of the Order of Moscow Rosicrucians-Manicheans, a neo-Rosicrucian group headed by V. Bellustin (1899–1943?)[66] and F. Verevin (1899 until after 1967) that was crushed by the Soviet secret police in 1933, bear

[61] Ibid., 93–94.
[62] Ibid., 91.
[63] Ibid., 94.
[64] See about him: Nemirovsky & Ukolova, *Light of Stars*; Nikitin, *Rosicrucians in Soviet Russia*, 368–420.
[65] Nikitin, *Rosicrucians in Soviet Russia*, 408.
[66] See about him Nikitin, *Mystics, Rosicrucians, and Templars*, 176–192.

evidence not only of gnostic but also of kabbalistic influences.[67] Thus, they contain long discussions on the Ein-sof, the emanation of the sefirot, the Adam Kadmon and so on. The most interesting aspect is probably their ideas on metahistory, where the whole history of the world is examined as an antagonism between the forces of light and the infernal forces, manifesting themselves in governments, churches, and other social institutions. It is claimed that the law of universal balance, which is described by means of the scheme of the sefirot (the "Arbor Sephiroticum"), is at the basis of world history. Using this scheme, Bellustin, "the Russian Saint-Germain" and the putative author of the main order's documents, interprets concrete periods in the history of Russia. He affirms that 'the evolution of every nation, race or planet can be divided into ten sefirotic moments'. Thus, the development of the Russian Empire under the rule of the Romanov dynasty (1613–1917) is depicted in the following way:[68]

> כתר (Keter)—Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich (the founder of Romanov dynasty)—the Beginning.
> חכמה (Chokhmah)—Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich—the Peaceful Tsar.
> בינה (Binah)—Tsar and Emperor Peter the Great—Creation, Revelation.
> חסד (Chesed)—Empress Catherine the Great—Supreme Humanity, the last flash of light in this thrice-poisoned House of Romanovs.
> גבורה (Gvurah)—Emperor Pavel (Paul)—Crazy Judge.
> תיפרת (i.e. תפארת, Tiferet)—Emperor Alexander I the Blessed.
> נצח (Netzach)—Emperor Nicholas I—Tsar the Corporal.
> הוד (Hod)—Emperor Alexander II—Love.
> יסוד (Yesod)—Emperor Alexander III—Delusive Greatness…which resulted in the crash of Malkhut.
> מלכות (Malkhut)—Emperor Nicholas II—The End.

Bellustin based this scheme on a good perception of peculiar features of the Russian tsars and their politics, and in my opinion, he drew the correlation between the tsars and the sefirot quite skillfully. Thus, the founder of the dynasty, Mikhail Feodorovich, corresponds to the first sefirah *Keter*, "Crown"; an easy-tempered and pacific Alexei Mikhailovich, who bore the nickname "Tishayshiy" ("the Gentlest"), to the sefirah *Chokhmah*, "Wisdom"; and the enlightened emperor Alexander I, who tolerated freemasonry and esoteric studies, to the central sefirah of the Tree of the sefirot, *Tiferet*, "Beauty" and "Mercy". This example

[67] Nikitin, *Rosicrucians in Soviet Russia*, 241–307.
[68] Ibid., 278.

seems to me quite unusual, because the scheme of the sefirot is used not for explaining the origin of the world and its inner structure, but to reveal the evolution of historical processes. Moreover, according to Bellustin, the balance of the universe was broken on every level of being—a notion related to the Lurianic concept of "breaking the vessels" (*shevirat ha-kelim*)—and therefore 'every esoteric worker strives to restore the balance' on his 'place'.[69] 'At the moment', he writes, 'there is no equilibrium on earth'.[70]

There are some other important aspects of the penetration of kabbalistic ideas into the doctrines and practices of esoteric groups in the early Soviet era. In particular, mention can be made of a magical-kabbalistic theory of the hieroglyphs, which underlies their mystical linguistics and hermeneutics, including the development of artificial alphabets, ciphers, and incantations. The practical application of kabbalistic studies in the rituals and magical operations of these groups is also worthy of special examination.

9. Conclusion

Let me summarize my argument. As we have seen, the attitude towards the Jewish mystical tradition in secret societies in Russia has undergone an essential evolution from the end of eighteenth century until the first decades of the twentieth. Masons and Rosicrucians of the classical period concerned themselves mostly with the problems of internal self-perfection and the improvement of the state, the society and the Orthodox Church, on the basis of an ideal of universal brotherhood. With this aim in view, they borrowed theoretical concepts that seemed relevant to their plans from different sources, including kabbalah and its Christianized version. The very concept of kabbalah as a set of esoteric doctrines and as a specific system for their transmission and interpretation, had a certain influence on the masonic concept of tradition. The kabbalistic doctrine of language and its methods of interpretation of the Bible were also important for Russian freemasons.

By the early twentieth century, the situation changed significantly. It was now mostly the various magical aspects of kabbalah, both authentic and fictitious, that fascinated Russian occultists of that time:

[69] Ibid., 279.
[70] Ibid.

invocations of spirits, magic spells and exorcism, amulets, talismans, and so on.[71] They were not so interested in social reform anymore. Their views were very syncretic with a touch of anarchism; sometimes they even verged on agnosticism. In this case kabbalah was considered as a magical tool enabling to achieve the full knowledge of everything and to obtain supernatural powers, without any direct reference to God or anything numinous. In principle, this transformation was a symptom of spiritual decline in Russia. The Orthodox tradition, which had been the foundation of Russian culture and society over the ages, at that time gradually lost its prestige, and people aspiring for spiritual goals tried to find the desired truth and the solution of their problems in other traditions and schools of thought. It seems quite natural that Russian occultists of the early twentieth century, rejecting traditional religious doctrines, might become at the same time zealous adherents of a quasi-religious utopianism, which underlay their expectations of radical transformation of mankind and of the whole nature through magic. Not only utopianism, but also a strong apocalypticism and a tendency to describe historical and metahistorical events in terms of magic and kabbalah can be observed in this milieu—traits that had not been typical of Russian masons in the classical period. This evolution could not but result in an unavoidable confrontation with the atheistic communist regime and, finally, in the total extinction of esoteric movements in Soviet Russia.

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[71] In a way these two approaches to kabbalah in Russian esotericism seem to correspond well to the classification of kabbalah proposed by Moshe Idel. Traditional Russian freemasonry was mostly interested in the topics developed by the theosophical-theurgical type of kabbalah, whereas Russian occultists and neo-Rosicrucians of the early 20th century were mainly attracted by the ideas and practices of the magic and talismanic kabbalah with some elements derived from the ecstatic school. See, e.g., Idel, 'Kabbalah: A Short Introduction', 12–29.

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THE BEGINNINGS OF OCCULTIST KABBALAH: ADOLPHE FRANCK AND ELIPHAS LÉVI

Wouter J. Hanegraaff

1. Introduction: Misunderstandings and the Politics of Identity

In the opening chapter of his *Major Trends* of 1946, Gershom Scholem called attention to the creative potential of misunderstandings and misinterpretations in the history of kabbalah.[1] And in a brilliant chapter of his *Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma* of 1998, Andreas Kilcher further analyzed this category of "productive misunderstanding", showing that it recurs in Scholem's writings until the end of his life.[2] From the perspective of historiography, it is only by means of misinterpretations and misunderstandings that new creative developments take place. This phenomenon is full of paradox and irony, as Scholem certainly realized, for the implication is that the very tradition of kabbalah can continue and stay alive only insofar as the materials handed down by tradition are misunderstood by new generations. Perfect understanding, one has to conclude, would logically imply the death of tradition.

Although the category of "productive misunderstanding" was basic to how he looked at history, Scholem himself was not entirely consistent in applying it,[3] due to a latent conflict in his thinking between a strictly historical/philological approach on the one hand, and a metaphysical concept of "true kabbalah" on the other. In the terms of a famous letter of 1937, the historian of kabbalah finds himself wandering around in the nebulous fogs of history, but he does so because he believes in the real and solid mountain of truth that stands in the

[1] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 24–25.

[2] Kilcher, *Sprachtheorie*, 23–29, with further reference to Scholem, 'Die Stellung der Kabbala', 13; and manuscript notes in the Gershom Scholem archive in Jerusalem, Arc 18.

[3] In fact, even Kilcher is not: see Hanegraaff, review of Kilcher, 116. For the same point about Scholem, see also Pasi, 'British Occultism and Kabbalah'.

middle but is hidden from his sight.[4] The conflict between mountain and nebula becomes visible, for example, in Scholem's great Eranos lecture on Alchemy and Kabbalah of 1977, where productive misunderstanding is described not so much as a historical fact that requires analysis, but as a regrettable perversion due to which the true nature of kabbalah is obscured and misperceived. In the wake of the Christian interpretation of kabbalah, we read,

> [t]he name of this mysterious discipline, presented and venerated as humanity's oldest and highest mystery wisdom by its first Christian mediators such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Reuchlin, became a popular catchword in all Renaissance circles with theosophical and occultist interests, and their followers in the baroque era. It became something like a flag under which…more or less anything could be offered to the public: from truly Jewish through vaguely Judaizing meditations of deeply Christian mystics up to the latest products of geomancy and cartomancy on the popular market. The name kabbalah, while evoking feelings of respectful awe, covered everything. Even the strangest elements of occidental folklore, and the somehow occultistically-oriented natural sciences of the time, such as astrology, alchemy and natural magic, became "kabbalah". And this heavy ballast, which often completely obscured its actual content, remains connected to popular opinions about the kabbalah up to the present day, among laypersons and theosophical adepts, in the language of many European writers and even scholars. In particular, as late as the 19th century, French Theosophists of the martinist school (Eliphas Lévi, Papus and many others), and in this century charlatans like Aleister Crowley and his English admirers have created the maximum that is humanly possible in generally confusing all the occult disciplines with the "holy kabbalah". A large part of the writings which carry the word kabbalah on their title page have nothing or almost nothing to do with it.[5]

Obviously this final sentence, and indeed the passage as a whole, implies that there is such a thing as the true or correctly-understood kabbalah, and that it can be distinguished from a false or pseudo-kabbalah which misunderstands and therefore distorts the truth. In other words: we are dealing here not with a case of "productive" but of *destructive* misunderstanding. Of course this begs the question: by what criteria could the former be distinguished from the latter?

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[4] Scholem, 'A Birthday Letter'.
[5] Scholem, 'Alchemie und Kabbala', 19–20.

From a strictly historical point of view, I would argue, there is no such criterium: Scholem's very distinction is normative and implicitly metaphysical, and logically contradicts his own concept of historical/philological research. However, if we look at the early development of the study of kabbalah from the perspective of academic identity politics, it becomes easier to understand why, in spite of this, Scholem could not afford to include occultist interpretations as legitimate objects of research in the study of "kabbalah". The development of the academic study of kabbalah could be described as a series of polemical exclusions and inclusions. Thus, the great nineteenth-century scholar of Judaism Heinrich Graetz, in his monumental eleven-volume *History of the Jews* (1853–1876) described 'pharisaean Talmudism' as the 'hard core' of true Judaism, and opposed it in the sharpest possible terms against the perversion of Jewish mysticism in all its forms. He used drastic images of illness and infection to describe how the healthy body of Judaism had been threatened throughout its history by the parasitic 'mushroom growths' of the irrational:[6]

> The image of the kabbalah as a 'fungous layer' [*Schimmelüberzug*] recurs frequently. Judaism, according to Graetz, is like a 'noble core' surrounded by several crusts. The core is the 'sinaite' and 'prophetic' doctrine of Judaism, which is surrounded by the triple layer of 'sopheric', 'mishnaic' and 'talmudic' exegeses and demarcations. But these (healthy) layers are 'surrounded by an ugly crust, a mushroom-like growth, a fungous layer, the kabbalah, which gradually nested itself in cracks and openings, insidiously spreading and branching off from there'.[7]

Although Graetz himself would not have seen it this way, the identity of Judaism as understood by him therefore relied, for defining itself, upon a concept of mysticism as its rhetorical "other". Gershom Scholem's oeuvre, in contrast, can be seen as a successful attempt to

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[6] See the excellent analysis in Schäfer, '"Adversus cabbalam"'. For the language of exclusion, see for instance Graetz, *Konstruktion*, 56–59 (quoted in Schäfer, o.c., 190), where in one short quotation we find mention of the 'talmudischen Umzäunungen', the Jewish home as a 'scharf umgrenztes Palästina', which 'isolates' Judaism within the situation of the diaspora by drawing 'unverrückbare Grenzen' with the outside world, and where the Talmudic 'Beschränkungen' result in a Talmudic 'Isolierungssystem'. Later on in the same text there is mention of the 'ausscheidende' function of Talmudism, which repels the 'schädlichen Bestandteile' and 'fremde Einflüsse' (Schäfer, o.c., 191).

[7] Schäfer, '"Adversus cabbalam"', 204, quoting Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, vol. 10, 114.

integrate back into Judaism what had been excluded from it by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* of scholars such as Graetz.

But the identity of Jewish mysticism as conceived of by Scholem implied a rhetorical "other" as well. As already suggested by the quotation given above, in his case this was the universalist understanding of "kabbalah" as a perennial wisdom that was supposed to have been widely present in many traditions of the ancient world. It is well known that the origins of that concept are to be found in the Christian interpretation of kabbalah since Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, leading to what has sometimes been called a "metaphorical kabbalah" (or a "second kabbalah"),[8] the permutations of which can be traced from the fifteenth century to the present. Reflecting on that phenomenon, Scholem wryly observed that 'as far as the essence of the kabbalah is concerned, it [could] supposedly be anything except Judaism', and accordingly, to find its origins one could look anywhere, as long as it was as far away from Judaism as possible.[9]

Just as Graetz had defined the identity of Judaism by emphasizing its rationality and sharply opposing it to mystical *Schwärmerei*, Scholem for his part defined Jewish mysticism by emphasizing its Jewishness and sharply opposing it against the idea of a "universal kabbalah" with non-Jewish origins. As I hope to demonstrate in this article, in the nineteenth and indeed until far into the twentieth century such a concept of kabbalah was by no means limited to esoteric or occultist circles. On the contrary: we will see that, at the time, recognized scholars of kabbalah, such as the French pioneer in this field Adolphe Franck, held very basic assumptions in common with occultists like Eliphas Lévi or Papus. Across the board—from popular esotericism to the academic establishment—we encounter during this period the idea of a "universal kabbalah" with non-Jewish roots, and it is against this widespread consensus that Scholem developed his work.[10]

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[8] Kilcher, *Sprachtheorie der Kabbala*, 21–22, and for the concept of a "second kabbalah" see his reference to Menninghaus, *Walter Benjamins Theorie*, 199.

[9] Scholem, 'Die Erforschung der Kabbala', 256: 'Was dem heutigen Beobachter solcher Auffassungen im Rückblick auffällt, ist, dass in den meisten dieser Deutungen die Kabbala ihrem Wesen nach alles andere eher sein soll als gerade Judentum und ihr Ursprung dementsprechend auch möglichst weit weg vom Judentum gesucht wurde'.

[10] From the discussion in Dan, 'Gershom Scholem', one may conclude that to a greater extent than often assumed, even Scholem himself was still influenced by such concepts in the first decades of his career.

2. Adolphe Franck

Moshe Idel noted in 1988 that Adolphe Franck, with his monograph *La Kabbale ou la philosophie religieuse des Hébreux* of 1843, 'contributed more to the knowledge of Kabbalah in modern Europe than did any other work prior to the studies of Scholem';[11] and Paul Fenton has called it 'a milestone in the annals of Qabbalistic research', which 'had the effect of a bombshell [and] gave an unprecedented impetus to Qabbalistic studies'.[12] The book was translated into German almost immediately, by Adolf Jellinek, and went through three editions in France; it was translated into Hebrew in 1909 and into English in 1926.

Adolphe Franck was born in Liocourt in 1809. He originally studied for the rabbinate, but changed his direction in favor of philosophy. Having moved to Paris, he became a protégé of the famous philosopher of eclecticism Victor Cousin, and embarked on a brilliantly successful academic career. He has been described by Charles Mopsik as 'a model of integration':[13] the first French Jew to receive an *agrégation* in philosophy, his book on kabbalah was called a 'masterwork of criticism' by Jules Michelet and earned him his prestigious election, at the young age of 36, to the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, one of the five academies of the *Institut de France*. His career found its culmination in a professorship for "Droit de la nature et des gens" at the Collège de France, from 1854 to 1881. While a typical representative of the French academic establishment, he was also actively involved in the cause of Judaism, becoming president of the *Société des Etudes Juives* and contributing to the *Archives Israélites* for over half a century. He died in 1893 at the age of 48.

In philosophy, Franck is best remembered as editor of a 1800-page *Dictionnaire des Sciences Philosophiques*, which appeared from 1844 on. In the line of Victor Cousin's eclecticism, he believed that metaphysics had the task of demonstrating the four basic tendencies of human thought—naturalism, idealism, skepticism, and mysticism—to be four aspects of one and the same reality. Franck is known to have

[11] Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 8.

[12] Fenton, 'Qabbalah and Academia', 48. On p. 49 he writes, perhaps a bit hyperbolically, that it 'had the effect of a tidal wave'.

[13] Mopsik, 'Quelques remarques', 241.

been a vehement opponent of atheism and positivism, and has been criticized for never having come to terms with Kantian philosophy.[14]

Perhaps the most mysterious aspect of Franck's intellectual interests, and quite relevant for us here, is his relation to the various "esoteric" currents that existed in France at the time. Thus, among many publications devoted to straightforward academic philosophy, we find that in 1853 he lectured on Paracelsus and sixteenth-century alchemy,[15] and even devoted a book-length study to Martinez de Pasqually and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin in 1866.[16] Towards the end of his life, finally, he appears to have developed friendly contacts with the neo-Martinist occultist circles around Gérard Encausse, better known as Papus. He went as far as contributing a preface to Papus' *Traité méthodique de science occulte*, where it happens to be printed right after a photograph of Eliphas Lévi on his deathbed.

This letter is quite interesting for our concerns. For Papus it was obviously useful to have his book prefaced by an academic of such prestige (the "Lettre-préface de Ad. Franck, membre de l'institut" is mentioned on the cover), and for his part Franck is at pains to point out that his collaboration does not imply an endorsement of occultism: the idea of an occult science different from, and more fundamental than, the normal one he considers 'absolutely irrational' and 'anti-scientific'.[17] However,

> if under the name of occult science you mean to speak about the first efforts and first discoveries of science, those discoveries that are based on analogy rather than on reason and analysis, and which have been provoked by man's intuition about the universal order of nature and by the similitude of the laws of the universe with the laws of his own thought, then I completely agree with you.[18]

Franck wants to see in Papus a defender not so much of the occult, as of 'le mysticisme'. He explains that although he is not himself a mystic, he has always been inspired by it; and more than that, at the high age that he has now reached (Franck is 82 years old), he dares to admit that mysticism not only inspires deep respect in him, but even

[14] Fouillée, 'M. Adolphe Franck', 291–292.
[15] Franck, 'Paracelse et l'alchimie'.
[16] Franck, *La philosophie mystique en France*.
[17] Franck, 'Préface', v–vi.
[18] Ibid., vi.

feelings of 'devotion mixed with tenderness'.[19] What Franck believes he has in common with Papus is, furthermore, a vehement opposition against the 'bad doctrines' of positivism, atheism, and pessimism. To find a real alternative to those perversions, one needs to seek the very divine ground and essence of being, and that is what Franck believes the Martinists are doing:

> It is in these [divine] depths that you and your collaborators of *L'Initiation* love to descend, while calling upon all kinds of mysticism, both from the East and from the West, from India and from Europe! These depths have their shadows and their dangers [...]. But I much prefer these audacious speculations over the blindness of positivism, the nothingness of atheist science and the more or less hypocritical despair of pessimism. In my eyes they are like an energetic appeal to the seriousness of life, to the re-awakening of the sense of the divine.[20]

Two years earlier, in 1889, Franck had written a foreword to the second edition of his book on kabbalah, which indicates that it was the very phenomenon of popular occultism that had inspired him to republish the book. The first edition of 1843 had quickly sold out, and during the following decades Franck felt it was out of touch with the spirit of the times. In addition, his critics wanted him to give priority to 'certain questions of bibliography and chronology', which hardly interested him, since he saw the philosophical and religious system of kabbalah as by far the most important. Now, however, the situation has changed:

> Disgusted by the positivist, evolutionist or brutally atheist doctrines that nowadays dominate our country, and which seek to play the boss in both science and society, many people turn towards the East, the cradle of religions, the original fatherland of mystical ideas, and among the doctrines that they try to bring back to honor, the kabbalah is not forgotten.[21]

What follows is a long list of examples. First, there is the Theosophical Society, its 'highly interesting' journal *Lotus*, and its French branch "Ysis" that has recently published a translation of the Sepher Yetzirah. Franck quotes with apparent approval the statement of the translator—not mentioned by name, but it is actually Papus—that

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[19] Ibid., viii.
[20] Ibid., ix.
[21] Franck, 'Avant-propos de la deuxième édition', ii.

'the *Kabbalah* is the unique religion from which all the others have emanated'.[22] In another theosophical journal, *L'Aurore*, published by Lady Caithness, kabbalah is described as 'Semitic theosophy' and its method of esoteric hermeneutic is presented as a possible means of overcoming the differences between Buddhism and Christianity.[23] In both cases Franck states that he gives no opinion about the merits of the argumentation, but his general attitude is quite positive. Franck then turns towards Papus' new journal *L'Initiation*, which has existed for only four months, and often associates Theosophy with 'la sainte Kabbale'. He highlights an article by René Caillé which discusses the *Zohar* in the context of a Christian kabbalah along the lines of Saint-Martin, 'the unconscious renovator of the doctrine of Origen'.[24] And finally there are the various Swedenborgian journals. Here Franck is slightly more critical, pointing out (correctly) that kabbalah and Swedenborg have nothing in common except that they both give esoteric interpretations of Holy Scripture.[25]

The final page of Franck's new foreword is devoted to a strong restatement of the ancient origins of both the *Zohar* and the *Sepher Yetzirah*, with reference to some recent publications. He believes that these origins go back even much farther than argued there:

> Is it not true that the numbers and letters that are basic to the entire system of the *Sepher Yetzirah* play a very large role in Pythagoreanism and the earliest systems of India as well? We have this fashion nowadays of wanting to make everything young, as if it were not true that the systemic spirit and, most of all, the mystical spirit are as ancient as the world and destined to endure as long as the human spirit.[26]

Such a statement of kabbalah as perennial truth might as well have been written by the occultist Eliphas Lévi. If we now turn to Franck's book on kabbalah of 1843, we find there essentially the same concept. According to Franck, the entire history of humanity demonstrates that all truths about the nature of man and the universe have their origin

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[22] Ibid., ii.

[23] Ibid., iii. Franck's formulations are a bit ambiguous: 'à l'aide d'une interprétation ésotérique des textes sacrés, les deux religions sont mises d'accord entre elles et présentées comme le fonds commun de toutes les autres. Cette interprétation ésotérique est certainement un des principaux éléments de la *Kabbale*'.

[24] Ibid., iv.

[25] On this question of the relation between Swedenborg and kabbalah, cf. Hanegraaff, 'Emanuel Swedenborg, the Jews, and Jewish Traditions'.

[26] Ibid., vi.

not in human reason, but in a universal 'power' (puissance), known as "religion" or "revelation". This power is essentially One, but manifests itself differently according to the changing conditions of time and space. It does so in three different ways: as orthodoxy, as rational theology or philosophy, and as mysticism. In the Jewish context, mysticism has taken two forms: Hellenized Judaism as represented by Philo of Alexandria, and kabbalah. The kabbalah he describes as

> [...] a truly original system, a truly great one, which does not resemble other systems, whether religious or philosophical, except by the fact that it comes from the same source, has been provoked by the same causes, and responds to the same needs; in short, by the general laws of the human spirit. These are the kabbalists.[27]

What we have here is a religionist or even "perennialist" perspective: kabbalah may be a specifically Jewish phenomenon, but its ultimate source and essence is universal. As for its manifestation in Jewish culture, Franck immediately reduces it to only two books: kabbalah, for him, means the *Zohar* and the *Sepher Yetzirah*. For example, it is remarkable how negative Franck is about Isaac Luria, who was not a serious kabbalist but merely 'a sick spirit' whose writings are 'unbearable'.[28]

In his overview of previous studies of kabbalah, Franck mentioned Johann Georg Wachter's famous thesis about kabbalah as pantheism, and hence atheism: the comparison may have been superficial, he writes, but it did contribute significantly to a better understanding of kabbalah.[29] Indeed, Franck's interpretation of the *Sepher Yetzirah* and *Zohar* shows a dominant preoccupation with reducing kabbalah to a metaphysical 'system', and he repeatedly draws parallels with Spinoza and with the philosophers of German idealism.[30] He ends up summarizing kabbalistic metaphysics in four points, which

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[27] Franck, *La Kabbale*, 35.

[28] Ibid., 4 (Luria has a mind 'sans originalité' who constantly gives free rein to 'ses propres rêveries, véritables songes d'un esprit malade, *aegri somnia vana*'), and 7 ('les commentaires d'Isaac Loria, dont un homme en jouissance de sa raison ne soutient pas la lecture').

[29] Ibid., 23. See also his dismissal on p. 25 of Freystadt, *Kabbalismus und Pantheismus*, who argued against the pantheism thesis.

[30] For example ibid., 170: the kabbalists 'auraient pu dire aussi comme un philosophe moderne issu de leur race: *Omnia, quamvis diversis gradibus, animata tamen sunt*' (reference to Spinoza's *Ethica*). See also the references to Hegel, ibid., 24–25.

emphasize a pantheist and emanationist system incompatible with theistic creationism:

> The belief in a creator God distinct from Nature […] they replace by the idea of a universal substance which is actually infinite, always active, always thinking, which is the immanent cause of the universe, but is not enclosed within the universe; a substance for which […] creating is nothing but thinking, existing and developing itself. Instead of a purely material world, distinct from God, emerging from nothing and destined to return to nothing, [the kabbalah] posits innumerable forms under which the divine substance develops and manifests itself according to the unchanging laws of thought.[31]

The value and originality of kabbalah for Franck lies entirely in this philosophy, and certainly not in its exegetical techniques: the procedures for permutating letters and numbers that would become central to Eliphas Lévi's perspective are dismissed by Franck as a series of bizarre manipulations without deeper significance. They are merely the 'gross envelope' in which the kabbalists clothed their 'original and profound ideas'.[32]

Finally, there is the question of the origins of the kabbalah. Franck spent much energy on proving that the *Zohar* was not written by Moses de Leon, 'an obscure rabbi from the 13th century' and 'a miserable charlatan':[33] on the contrary, at least the essential metaphysical core of the *Zohar* must be traced back to the first centuries, if not further back. It should be noted that although such an opinion has been definitely discarded by scholarship since Scholem's *Major Trends* of 1946, it was still very respectable and even dominant at the time—to such an extent that Scholem himself still defended the *Zohar*'s great

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[31] Ibid., 193–194. Franck was harshly criticized for these interpretations later, notably by le chevalier Drach, a Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism who published a small but much-noted booklet against Franck in 1864 (Drach, *La Cabale des Hébreux vengée*; see discussion in Fenton, 'Qabbalah and Academia', 52–53).

[32] Franck, *La Kabbale*, 15, here with reference to Athanasius Kircher: 'les idées originales et profondes, les croyances hardies qu'elle renferme […] sont entièrement perdu[e]s pour sa faible vue, frappée seulement de ces formes symboliques dont l'usage et l'abus semblent être dans la nature même du mysticisme. La kabbale est pour lui tout entière dans cette grossière enveloppe, dans ses mille combinaisons des lettres et des nombres, dans ses chiffres arbitraires, enfin dans tous les procédés plus ou moins bizarres au moyen desquels, forçant les textes sacrés à leur prêter leur appui, elle trouvait un accès dans des esprits rebelles à toute autre autorité qu'à celle de la Bible. Les faits et les textes que j'ai rassemblés dans ce travail se chargeront de détruire ce point de vue étrange et me dispensent de m'y arrêter plus longtemps'.

[33] Ibid., 73.

antiquity against Heinrich Graetz (who correctly saw it as medieval) at an occasion as important as his inauguration speech at the Hebrew University in 1925.[34]

Nor was it at all unusual, as we already saw, to argue that the kabbalah had non-Jewish origins. For example, Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), the virtual founder of the history of philosophy, who dominated that discipline throughout the eighteenth century and whose influence reaches far into the nineteenth century, traced the kabbalah back to ancient Egypt.[35] Adolphe Franck, in the final part of his book, devoted separate chapters to a comparison of the kabbalah with Plato, Neoplatonism (referred to as the "Alexandrian School"), Philo of Alexandria, Christianity, and finally the Chaldaeans and Persians. The comparison fell out negative far all of them except the last, for he ended up arguing for a 'perfect resemblance' between all the essential elements of the kabbalah and the metaphysical principles of Zoroastrianism. His reference was, predictably, Anquetil-Duperron's famous 1771 edition of the *Zend Avesta*. Franck emphasized, however, that the Persian/Zoroastrian origins of kabbalah did not make the kabbalists into mere servile imitators: on the contrary, they significantly improved Zoroastrianism by putting its principles into the new context of monotheism: 'The framework, the exterior design of the *Zend Avesta* remains, but the foundation has changed its nature completely, and the kabbalah offers us […] a curious spectacle: that of a mythology progressing to the stage of metaphysics, under the very influence of the religious sentiment'.[36]

Franck sees these religious sentiments as secondary to the true essence of kabbalah. Its true destiny is to shed the trappings of Jewish theology and show its 'true face' as a natural product of the human spirit, for only thus will it be able to 'enter the history of philosophy and of humanity'.[37] In the end, or so we have to conclude, the enduring

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[34] See discussion in Dan, 'Gershom Scholem', 38–41. It must have been very painful for Scholem to finally have to admit that he had been mistaken and Graetz, of all people, had been right: Dan remarks that '[d]uring the many years that I spent in Scholem's courses and in his company, nobody ever dared to mention this article [i.e., the publication of his inauguration speech]. It was the stain on Scholem's scholarly work' (o.c., 40).

[35] See Hanegraaff, 'Western Esotericism in Enlightenment Historiography'.

[36] Franck, *La Kabbale*, 290.

[37] Ibid., 291. These statements are made in relation to the assimilation between kabbalah and Alexandrian philosophy, leading to Neoplatonism; but it is clear that Franck also means a general process of progress in which the true universal metaphysical

value of the kabbalah for Franck is not its specific Jewish manifestation, but it universal essence, which happens to coincide with the idealist metaphysics to which he himself adheres.

3. Eliphas Lévi

As far as I have been able to ascertain, the founder of "occultist kabbalah" Eliphas Lévi does not refer even one single time to Franck's famous book on kabbalah, which had appeared about ten years before he started publishing his own works on occultism. Given Lévi's fascination with 'la sainte Cabale', it is hard to imagine that he did not know of it; but if he did, any direct influence will be very difficult to demonstrate. If we approach Franck and Lévi as parallel but independent authors, a comparison is all the more interesting, since the significant resonances between their ideas suggest a common background that was not limited to esoteric milieus.

Eliphas Lévi Zahed is the pseudonym adopted (in his later occultist writings) by Alphonse-Louis Constant, who was born in a very poor family in Paris in 1810, and is therefore an almost exact contemporary of Adolphe Franck. He attended seminary to study for the priesthood, but never made it to the ordination due to a series of events and conflicts that have been described in detail by his biographers[38] but do not need to detain us here. Suffice it to say that during the first part of his life, Constant maintained a highly complex relation with the Church, while at the same time getting involved in various movements working for social and political reform: his socialist and utopian writings, including high-minded ideals about the emancipation of woman, led to conflicts with the authorities and several prison sentences. It was in the wake of the revolution of 1848 that he made his decisive move towards the study of esotericism. The three central works documenting his occultist worldview were published in 1854–1856, 1860 and 1861 respectively, and made his name as an authority of 'magic and kabbalah'.[39]

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essence develops out of the narrow and limiting constraints of nationalistic or religious commitments.

[38] Most complete in this regard is Chacornac, *Eliphas Lévi*. Another good monographic treatment is McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi*. Of rather doubtful quality are Uzzel, *Eliphas Lévi*, and Williams, *Eliphas Lévi*.

[39] Apparently he came to be seen as an authority even outside occultist circles, as suggested by the fact that he was asked to contribute articles on kabbalah and Knorr

Gershom Scholem, in his *Major Trends*, characterized Lévi's view of kabbalah as 'brilliant misunderstandings and misrepresentations',[40] and that description is more to the point than one might think. That Lévi misunderstood and misrepresented most of what he read is beyond any doubt, and this fact is admitted even by his admirers; but the brilliance of his literary style, and arguably of his synthesis as a whole has not always received the appreciation it deserves. A notable example is François Secret, who in 1988 did a hatchet job exposing Lévi's faulty references and shocking ignorance of elementary Hebrew: 'il faut insister sur l'ignorance de Lévi'.[41] Most of Secret's criticisms were certainly correct; but there is hardly much reason to be impressed by his high-handed demolition of such an easy target—and even less so considering the fact that his own article is filled with incomplete or faulty page references,[42] and written in a prose that is so bad as not even to allow comparison with the French of his victim. It seems rather pointless to judge Eliphas Lévi by the standards of academic philology and critical historiography. It makes more sense to see him as what he was: an intelligent and creative amateur of considerable although unsystematic erudition, driven by sincere idealism and an enthusiastic joy of discovery, who had to work with scattered and chaotic fragments of learning but somehow managed to create something new and quite original out of it.

A complete overview of Lévi's synthesis is not necessary here. Rather, I will concentrate on what we need in order to understand his concept of "kabbalah". This means that I will have to ignore almost completely the concept that is perhaps most central and innovative in his magical worldview as a whole: the *lumière astrale* or astral light, closely connected to the powers of the imagination. And as a result, I will also have to pass over his many polemics—which become more intense from volume to volume—against mystical ecstasy in all its forms, which he sees as a dangerous perversion resulting from a failure to

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von Rosenroth to a reference work as famous as the *Larousse* (see Kilcher, 'Verhüllung und Enthüllung', 354–355).

[40] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 2.

[41] Secret, 'Eliphas Lévi et la Kabbale', 83.

[42] For example, on page 83 "rusé" should be "subtil"; on page 85, n. 3, the page reference should be 364–378, not 346–378; most of the quotations are not referenced; the article is full of sentences that are incomplete, grammatically impossible, or completely obscure; and finally Secret blames Lévi for quoting a non-existing book, which however does exist and was quoted correctly by Lévi (Mosheim, *Observationes sacrae et historico-criticae*, 1721; see Secret, 'Eliphas Lévi et la Kabbale', 86).

dominate the astral light by the disciplined will. Likewise, I will not go into Lévi's highly ambivalent speculations about Satan and the nature of evil: one of his main preoccupations, to which he has devoted some of the most inspired pages in his oeuvre.[43]

What, then, does Lévi understand by kabbalah? In the introduction to his *Dogme et Rituel de la haute magie*, we find the following passage, which contains all its essential elements and also gives us a taste of Lévi's Romantic prose:

> One is seized by admiration, when penetrating into the sanctuary of the kabbalah, and at the sight of a dogma so logical, so simple and at the same time so absolute. The necessary union of ideas and signs; the consecration of the most fundamental realities by elementary characters; the trinity of words, letters and numbers; a philosophy that is simple as the alphabet, profound and infinite as the Word; theorems more complete and luminous than those of Pythagoras; a theology that one summarizes by counting on one's fingers; an infinite that one can hold in the palm of an infant's hand; ten numbers and twenty-two letters, a triangle, a square and a circle: those are all the elements of the kabbalah. They are the elementary principles of the written Word, the reflection of that Word that has created the world.
>
> All truly dogmatic religions have their origin in the kabbalah and return to it; all that is scientific and grandiose in the religious dreams of all the illuminés, Jacob Boehme, Swedenborg, Saint-Martin etc., is derived from the Kabbalah; all the masonic associations owe their secrets and their symbols to it. Only the kabbalah consecrates the alliance of the universal reason with the divine Word; by the counter-point of two apparently opposed forces, it establishes the eternal balance of being; it alone reconciles reason with faith, power with liberty, science with mystery: it has the keys of the present, the past and the future![44]

For Lévi, the very value and interest of the kabbalah resides precisely in its *universality*, by dint of which it can function as the key that unlocks the secrets of all religions and philosophies: if the kabbalah were a specifically Jewish phenomenon, it might have been an object of historical curiosity, but could not possibly have commanded the enormous authority it has for our author. And this authority, in turn, is grounded in a metaphysical concept: the kabbalah is the direct reflection of "the Word": the *Logos* that has created the world accord-

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[43] A particularly good example is the 'Introduction' to his *Rituel* (*Dogme et rituel*, 159–171; all page references will be to Lévi, *Secrets de la magie*, edited by Francis Lacassin, which contains Lévi's three main magical texts in one volume).

[44] Lévi, *Dogme et rituel*, 47.

ing to the opening of the Gospel of John. This Logos, according to Lévi, manifests itself on the highest level of creation as a symbolism of numbers; and their meanings and dynamics can serve as a universal hermeneutical key at all ontologically lower levels of reality, according to the logic of correspondences or universal analogy.

Thus Lévi's *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* has two parts devoted to theory and practice, which mirror and complement each other according to what Lévi calls the law of equilibrium; each of the two parts has twenty-two chapters, one for each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. As explained at length in several places of the book, these letters in turn correspond with the twenty-two cards of the Tarot known as the Major Arcana. In various parts of his works, Lévi develops elaborate tables of correspondences for each of them; but if one compares these various tables and tries to reduce them to one system, one finds that they do not add up. Although Lévi speaks of these correspondences in terms of a universal system of classification for all possible kind of knowledge, the general principle *that* such a system exists seems more important to him than presenting the reader with one specific and final system.

Why is this? It would be incorrect, in my opinion, to interpret the inconsistencies of his table of correspondences as merely a failure or weakness on Lévi's part; on the contrary, I would argue, they tell us something essential about Lévi's thought. Presenting the reader with one final and complete table of correspondences would imply, in his eyes, a kind of reductionism incompatible with the infinite complexity of the invisible divine reality. The Logos is incarnated in our world; but by no means does this mean that it is exhausted by, or can be reduced to, its visible manifestation. Early on in his *Dogme et rituel*, Lévi writes that

> there is only one dogma in magic: the visible is the manifestation of the invisible, or in other words, in the things that can be judged and seen, the perfect Logos exists in exact proportion with the things that cannot be judged by our senses or seen by our eyes.[45]

Hence the universal correspondences revealed by the kabbalah should be seen as signs of the Absolute as revealed in creation, but not as a means to "solve the riddle": any attempt to do so would imply a fatal confusion between essence and manifestation, which inverts the

[45] Ibid., 58.

hierarchical order of reality and interprets the higher, invisible world in terms of its visible reflection in the lower world.[46]

This brings me to a crucial and controversial aspect of Lévi's thinking: the relation between his magical and kabbalistic beliefs and his profession of Roman Catholicism. If one reads his *Dogme et rituel*, *Histoire de la magie*, and *Clef des grands mystères* in that order, one notes an increasing emphasis on the truth of Catholicism as essential to any correct understanding of magic and kabbalah. Readers who expect Lévi to criticize the Church for having suppressed magic and paganism will be surprised to see that he in fact endorses it throughout. For example, he describes the gnostics as deluded heretics, and goes to great lengths to defend the necessity of the atrocious so-called *Vehmgerichte* against heretics under Charlemagne; in his *History of Magic*, we even find several formal declarations of submission to the authority of the Church,[47] and his *Clés des grands mystères* abounds in references to the absolute truth of hierarchical authority.

Arthur Edward Waite has argued at length that *Dogme et rituel* preached an occultist doctrine opposed to and incompatible with Roman Catholic orthodoxy, and that his later works reflect a "failure of nerve" which actually betrays that worldview.[48] I believe this is a mistake, which ignores the deeply dialectic manner in which Lévi conceives of the "equilibrium" between good and evil, truth and error, God and devil, orthodoxy and heresy, and so on. His many discussions of Satan are the best example, but too complex to discuss in the present context. What makes Lévi's work intellectually interesting is, precisely, the fact that he does not present magic and kabbalah dualistically, as a counterculture against Christianity, but dialectically, as the hidden truth of Roman Catholicism which both reveals *and* conceals itself in the very *coincidentia oppositorum* of light and darkness. Lévi's basic law of equilibrium (the law of two) implies, as he often repeats, that there can be no truth without error, no light without darkness,

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[46] In this regard, the underlying logic of Lévi's concept of correspondences is quite similar to Swedenborg's; see in that regard Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant*, 3–11.

[47] Lévi, *Histoire*, 358 ('nous soumettons notre œuvre tout entière au jugement suprême de l'Eglise'); 421 ('Nous ne dogmatisons pas, nous soumettons aux autorités légitimes nos observations et nos études'); 481 ('Nous ne prétendons ici nier ni affirmer la tradition de la chute des anges, nous en rapportant comme toujours en matière de foi aux décisions suprêmes et infaillibles de la sainte Eglise catholique, apostolique et romaine').

[48] Waite, 'Preface to the Second Edition'; idem, 'Preface to the English Translation'.

and no concept of God without a concept of Satan. The hidden unity of the divine is revealed to us under the sign of the ternary, Lévi's number of "manifestation", and obviously linked to the Trinity, which paradoxically reconciles these opposites without sacrificing either one of them to the other. It is only from the divine perspective of absolute Unity that all these dualities are mysteriously resolved. The temptation for us as creatural beings is to misunderstand the law of equilibrium and thereby lapse into a Manichaean dualism of good and evil as independent absolutes.

Because the dualistic doctrine destroys the very law of equilibrium, it necessarily destroys the very unity of the divine, of reality, and of truth as well. It is against this fundamental heresy of heresies, Lévi argues, that the Church has defended its trinitarian doctrine, grounded in unity and the universal law of equilibrium. From this perspective it becomes much easier to understand the internal logic of Lévi's history of magic. Like Adolphe Franck, but for different reasons, Lévi, too, traces magic and the true kabbalah (which to him are one and the same) to Zoroaster; but he distinguishes the latter from a *second* Zoroaster, the inventor of the material fire-cult and of the 'impious dogma of divine dualism', who is ultimately responsible for the later decline of true magic.[49] As Michael Stausberg has shown in his fundamental study on the "memory of Zoroastrianism" in Western culture, this topos of the two Zoroasters is an old one, but Lévi's use of it is new.[50]

If the false Zoroaster is the father of materialism and dualism, the true Zoroaster is his exact opposite. The former taught the cult of material fire, but the latter revealed what Lévi calls a 'transcendental pyrotechnique',[51] focused on the great agent of magic: the astral light. Very interestingly, Lévi supports this view by extensive quotations in French from the Renaissance hermetist Francesco Patrizi, whose *Magia philosophica* of 1593[52] contains a Latin translation of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, sometimes referred to as the "bible of theurgy", which had been (falsely) attributed to Zoroaster ever since Gemistos Plethon in the fifteenth century. Since the true doctrine of Zoroaster is presented as the "Chaldaean" Oracles, Lévi predictably concludes that when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldaeans, he must have taken

[49] Lévi, *Histoire*, 383.
[50] Stausberg, *Faszination Zarathushtra*, 334.
[51] Lévi, *Histoire*, 383–384.
[52] Ibid., 384–385. The quotation is from Patrizi, *Magia philosophica*, 43v–45r.

those teachings with him and this is how they entered Jewish culture. The doctrine also spread to Egypt, where it was translated into the hieroglyphic language of images and symbols, leading to an elaborate science of correspondences between gods, letters, ideas, numbers and signs; and just as Abraham had saved the doctrine before it began to degenerate in Chaldaea, Moses did the same for Egypt. This is how the kabbalah became the hidden doctrine of the Hebrew Bible.

And then everything changed. '[A] breath of charity descended from the sky',[53] Lévi writes, with the birth of Christ. From that moment on, the magic of the "ancient world" became obsolete: 'a sad beauty spread over its dead remains [...] a cold beauty without life'.[54] And as for Judaism: just like Rachel died at the birth of her youngest son Benjamin, the birth of Jesus as the youngest son of Israel meant the death of his mother:[55] henceforth Christianity became the legitimate carrier of the true kabbalah, and its survivals outside the Church lack such legitimacy. This is why the rest of Lévi's history of magic turns out to be essentially a history of heresies: the teachings of the false Zoroaster lived on in such currents as gnosticism and the Order of the Knights Templar, in witchcraft and black sorcery, and in various kinds of ecstatic cults up to and including the contemporary current of spiritualism.

Although Roman Catholicism has been the legitimate carrier of kabbalah and true magic since its very origins, this great truth still remains hidden even to its adherents: 'Considered as the perfect, realized and living expression of kabbalah, that is to say, of the ancient tradition, Christianity is still unknown, and that is why the kabbalistic and prophetic book of the Apocalypse remains unexplained. Without the kabbalistic keys, it is perfectly inexplicable, because incomprehensible'.[56] These keys are now revealed to the world by Eliphas Lévi. He claims to find them in the *Zohar* and *Sepher Yetzirah*,[57] but given the universality of the kabbalah, he feels no less free to find them in a

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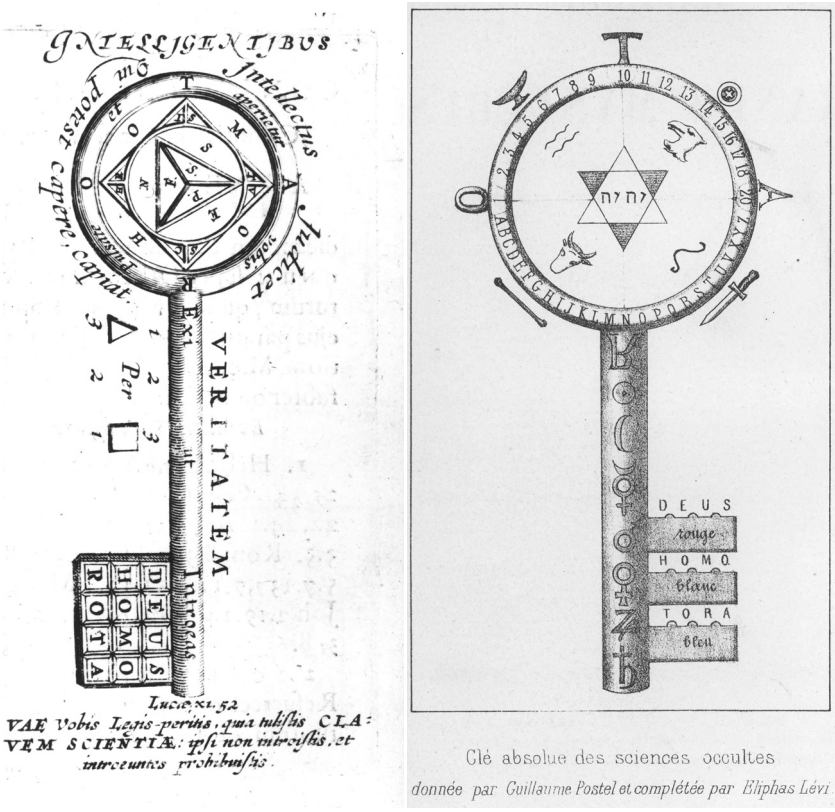
[53] Ibid., 456.

[54] Ibid., 457.

[55] Ibid., 461. See also e.g. Lévi, *Clef*, 866: 'Ainsi, toutes les absurdités apparentes des dogmes cachent les hautes et antiques révélations de la sagesse de tous le siècles, et c'est pour cela que le christianisme, enrichi de tant de dépouilles opimes, a prévalu sur le judaïsme desséché et appauvri, qui ne comprenait plus même les allégories de son arche et de son chandelier d'or'.

[56] Ibid. 458. Cf. Lévi, *Clef*, 865: 'Le dogme catholique est sorti tout entier de la kabbale, mais sous combien de voiles et avec quelles étranges modifications!'

[57] On Lévi's reception, by means of the *Kabbala Denudata*, of the *Zohar* in general and the *Sifra di-Dzeniuta* in particular, see Kilcher, 'Verhüllung und Enthüllung', 353–362. Kilcher also shows how Lévi lay the foundations for the subsequent career of



Images: Courtesy Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica

variety of other sources as well, including the *Clavicula Salomonis* and the Tarot. Few discoveries seem to have impressed him as much as a figure printed in a 1646 edition of Guillaume Postel's *Absconditorum a constitutione mundi Clavis*.[58]

On the left, one sees the original, and on the right the way it appears in Lévi, who describes it with disarming honesty as 'The absolute key of the occult sciences (given by Guillaume Postel and completed by Eliphas Lévi)'. The four letters in the upper circle can be read both as TORA and as TARO[T]: what better proof could there be, then, that the ancient and mysterious "Genesis of Henoch" referred to by Postel was none

the *Kabbala Denudata* in esoteric Freemasonry, H.P. Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

[58] See the supplement 'Articles sur la kabbale' in *Clef*, esp. 862–863.

other than the hermetic *Book of Thoth*, better known as the Tarot? Lévi overlooked the fact that the picture was in fact a later addition by the editor, Abraham von Franckenberg;[59] but one suspects that even had he known this, it would not have caused him to change his mind.

4. Conclusion

Having taken a closer look at Adolphe Franck and Eliphas Lévi, one must conclude that the essential vision of kabbalah found in the writings of these two nineteenth-century pioneers are remarkably similar in many respects. Essential to their approach is that they both believe in a "universal kabbalah" with non-Jewish origins, and remarkably, they both trace those origins to the religion of Zoroaster. The similarity is perhaps even more interesting given the fact that they do so for *different* reasons: for Franck, Zoroastrianism means the *Zend Avesta*, whereas for Lévi it means the *Chaldaean Oracles*. In line with this, probably the most important difference between the two authors is that Franck sees kabbalah entirely as mysticism and never discusses magic; Lévi, on the other hand, sees kabbalah and magic as inseparable, while describing mysticism in wholly negative terms. This difference is linked to the fact that Franck sees kabbalah essentially as philosophy, whereas Lévi sees it as a science of correspondences grounded in the symbolism of numbers.

These differences are significant, and one should certainly not overemphasize the resonances between our two authors. Nevertheless, it remains that Franck the academic and Lévi the occultist present two variations on the same basic thesis of a "universal kabbalah" with non-Jewish origins: the very thesis, that is, against which Gershom Scholem posited the identity of kabbalah as specifically Jewish mysticism or esotericism. In the wake of Scholem's oeuvre, Franck's approach can nowadays be seen only as a dead end. Lévi's work, in contrast, laid the foundation for a new religious current that is still alive and well today. The countless misunderstandings of kabbalah that bedevil his writings from a perspective of critical scholarship have turned out to be highly constructive ones from the perspective of the history of religion. In this sense, Scholem was both right and wrong.

[59] As also noted in Laurant, *L'ésotérisme chrétien*, 106 and 116 note 208.

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PAUL VULLIAUD (1875–1950) AND JEWISH KABBALAH

Jean-Pierre Brach

To the memory of Charles Mopsik

In this chapter, I would like to offer an analysis of P. Vulliaud's intellectual attitude towards Jewish kabbalah. After briefly sketching his biography and cultural background, I shall attempt to give an outline of his views on Jewish mysticism[1] in general, and of the way it is presented in some of his more important published works. It is to be noted that his study of kabbalah stands in direct relation to his broader and long-standing preoccupation with the history of religion and of western esotericism as such, and I shall therefore concentrate my analysis on what Vulliaud himself perceives as constituting the major, more fundamental kabbalistic textbooks, themes and doctrines, as well as on the motives behind his "critical" choices. Finally, this will lead us to an evaluation of his thought, which stands at the crossroads of contemporary erudition and "traditionalist" thinking.

1. An Independent Painter and Thinker

Alexandre-Paul-Alcide Wulliaud (later, Vulliaud)[2] was born in Lyon on the 5th of February 1875. After attending high-school at the Lycée Ampère, he apparently went on to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, then left for Paris. There, he earned a living by teaching privately, and working for some time (as did also his wife) at the Librairie E. Nourry,[3] a well-known antiquarian bookseller and publisher, close—as was Vulliaud himself—to the Catholic liberal Left and the "moderniste" milieu,

[1] Whether the category of "Jewish mysticism" is in fact relevant or not to the academic study of kabbalah, is currently an object of debate among specialists; see, for instance, the ongoing discussion between B. Huss and S. Magid in *Zeek*: Huss, 'Jewish Mysticism in the University'; and Magid & Huss, 'Is Kabbalah Mysticism?'; and Garb 'Moshe Idel's Contribution'.

[2] Secret, 'Note bio-bibliographique'; Laurant, 'Wulliaud, A.-P.-A'.

[3] Emile Nourry (1870–1935), also a major folklorist writer under the pen-name of "P. Saintyves".

before becoming part-time archive keeper at the *Journal des débats*, until 1939.

After 1902, he followed some seminars given at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* by Mayer Lambert,[4] as well as at the recently founded "Institut Catholique". Until the publication of his first book,[5] and the foundation of his own periodical, *Les Entretiens idéalistes* (1906–1914), when their friendship apparently dissolved, Vulliaud was somewhat in admiration of another *lyonnais*, the famous French writer and occultist, Joséphin Péladan (1858–1918),[6] who had equally occupied himself with Leonardo da Vinci and other Renaissance artists and thinkers. A devout Roman catholic by birth and personal temperament, Péladan liked to present himself as a *chevalier de l'Idéal*, for whom all spiritual, occult, esthetic and/or literary activities were essentially intended as opportunities for a clamorous public display of Christian persuasion, in reaction to the naturalistic and positivistic atmosphere of contemporary French society. Such manifestations as the *Salons de la Rose-Croix* (1892–1897) or the public proclamation of his *Ordre de la Rose-Croix Catholique du Temple et du Graal* (1890), bathed in flamboyant neo-medieval aesthetics and phraseology, certainly exerted an amount of influence on the young P. Vulliaud, who also remained throughout his life an artist and a Catholic at heart, as well as an active painter. They disagreed, however, on the conception of catholic art and mysticism, as well as on the interpretation of Leonardo. Another strong influence was that of Pierre-Simon Ballanche (1776–1847),[7] yet another *lyonnais*, to whom Vulliaud dedicated his first published article, in 1905, as well as other works, a situation which makes our author appear, up to a point and as previously noted by F. Secret,[8] a late offshoot of what has been called "l'Ecole mystique de Lyon".[9]

In 1908, Vulliaud gave lectures at the Parisian branch of the Theosophical Society, which he privately published, two years later, as chapters of his *Le Destin Mystique*.[10] Although *Les Entretiens idéalistes* were

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[4] M. Lambert (1863–1930), had published, among other things, *Le commentaire sur le Séfer Yesira*; about him, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 10, 1361.

[5] Vulliaud, *La pensée ésotérique de Léonard de Vinci*.

[6] De l'Estoile, *Péladan*. Some pages of the posthumously published *Histoires et portraits* (n. 2) are dedicated to Péladan (113–121).

[7] Laurant, *L'ésotérisme chrétien*, 53–59; Marquet, *Philosophies du secret,* 301–347.

[8] Secret, 'Note bio-bibliographique', xii.

[9] Buche, *L'Ecole mystique de Lyon*.

[10] Vulliaud, *Le Destin Mystique*, ix.

declared "organe catholique" from January 1910 onward, their editor was denounced as "heretic" by the Reverend E. Barbier (1851–1925), a declared opponent of everything "modernist" and esoteric within the Church, in his book *Les infiltrations maçonniques dans l'Eglise*, published in Paris during the same year, to which Vulliaud responded in his journal, and later in a booklet.[11]

Vulliaud's interest in esotericism besides kabbalah, to which I shall of course return, continued to manifest itself after the First World War, when he successively published *Joseph de Maistre franc-maçon* (1926), and *Les Rose-Croix lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle* (1929), drawing his documentation from archives retrieved, and later offered for sale, by Nourry.[12] As with a good part of *Histoires et portraits de Rose-Croix* (written around 1933), these two books are mainly concerned with the history, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, of the illuminist masonry of the Rectified Scottish Rite, in Lyon and elsewhere, of which it is well-known that J. de Maistre, among others, was once a member. Vulliaud himself was never affiliated with the Order, and cannot either be considered as a true masonic historian, the more so as he peppers his works on the subject with a good measure of derisive, ironic and sometimes even downright derogatory remarks. But the important and rich historical documentation he is using and, partly, publishing there, allows his two studies to appear as important complements to the major treatises in the field.[13] His last important book, before the posthumous (and unfinished) *La Fin du Monde*,[14] dedicated to the history of eschatological doctrines and prophecies in western religion and culture, is *La clé traditionnelle des Evangiles*, of a purely philological content, about the controversies concerning the Greek-Semitic substratum of the written version of the canonic Gospels.

Other publications by Vulliaud include circumstantial studies on the crisis of the catholic Church in France, an essay on the Hebrew literary tradition of the *Song of Songs* (1925, with an annotated translation), a French version of Ibn Gabirol's poem *Kether Malkuth* (posthumous,

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[11] Vulliaud, *Les Prétendues infiltrations maçonniques*.

[12] Laurant, 'Avant-propos', lv, n. 9.

[13] Such as Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie templière et occultiste*; Hess, *Chevaliers et Francs-Maçons*.

[14] The book has a foreword by M. Eliade, whom Vulliaud had met through his Romanian-born physician, Dr. H. Hunwald, a friend of the German spagyrist Alexander von Bernus.

1953), a booklet about Spinoza's library (1934), and another (published only in 1988) on a French seeress of the French Revolution, Suzette Labrousse, as well as countless articles (on nearly every imaginable historical or literary topic) in various periodicals, including the famous *Mercure de France* (from 1919 to 1938).[15]

Vulliaud died in poverty on the 3rd of November 1950, in a clinic near Paris.

2. The Study of Kabbalah

Vulliaud's interest in kabbalah is manifest ever since the first years of *Les Entretiens idéalistes*, where he published several articles pertaining to this topic, either by himself (notably on the *Zohar*) or by the late J. de Pauly (1863?–1903),[16] to whom I shall return, mainly his studies on the doctrines of the Jewish convert J. Kemper,[17] who used the *Zohar* to establish his—not very original—claim that, at the core of Christian belief, there is the esoteric lore of Judaism. In Vulliaud's second book, *Le Destin Mystique*, kabbalah—considered mainly as a form of symbolical exegesis—is mentioned as an important aspect of Western esotericism, but it is really in *La Kabbale juive*,[18] in the introduction and notes to his translation of the *Siphra di-Tzéniutha* (an extract from the *Zohar*), and in his annotations to the small volume entitled *Etudes et correspondances de Jean de Pauly relatives au* Sepher Ha-Zohar, that Vulliaud presents and fully develops his views on Jewish kabbalah.

One is first compelled to note that there is little chronological evolution in his thought and appreciations on the topic, from one book to the other; only the general perspective, and the amount of information offered, are somewhat broader in *La Kabbale juive*, which is inevitable given the length of the work, but the author's basic views about the

[15] Secret, 'Note bio-bibliographique'; concerning S. Labrousse, see De Felice, *Note e ricerche*, 71–97 and *passim*.

[16] On J. de Pauly, see Bourel, 'Notes sur la première traduction française du *Zohar*', 120–129.

[17] Later reprinted, with some additional notes by Vulliaud, in *Le Voile d'Isis* (Aug.–Sept. 1933), 337–371. On R.J. Kemper, and the Latin abridgment of his work by André Norrel, *Phosphorus Orthodoxae Fidei Veterum Cabbalistarum*, which de Pauly is using and commenting, Wolfson, 'Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper'.

[18] 2 vol. (ca. 1000 pp.), and rather significantly subtitled 'Essai critique'. On this work, see Mopsik, 'Les formes multiples de la cabale en France au XXe siècle'.

nature and contents of kabbalah remain fundamentally unchanged. It being obviously impossible to go into minute details here, I shall limit myself to the broad outlines of Vulliaud's discussion of the doctrines and methods of Jewish kabbalah, as he understands them.

The first prominent feature of his presentation of the topic is his insistence on the *orthodoxy and authenticity of kabbalah*. From the outset, Vulliaud is determined to establish that 'la Kabbale est la doctrine mystique de l'orthodoxie juive' [Kabbalah is the mystical doctrine of the orthodoxy[19] of Jewish religion], meaning by this that, according to him, there exists a fixed, cross-temporal "orthodox" and traditional character of Judaism as such, of which kabbalah supposedly represents the "authentic" esoteric slope. Moreover, says he, the strong affinities that kabbalah appears to have with the Mishnah and Talmud, the kinship he perceives between their respective symbolism and exegetical procedures and the spirit of the *Zohar*: all this points for him to a development of kabbalah within a closed cultural atmosphere and preclude its appearance during the Middle Ages, as well as it having a foreign origin or a "heterodox" character within Judaism. Stating this, Vulliaud is of course belatedly opposing some earlier (and already relatively outdated) theories, which considered kabbalah as an inner deviation of Judaism, or as a contamination from outside, that is, from an alien religious culture (such as Persia's, for instance).[20]

By the same token, he defends the interesting and (by then) still relatively novel idea that esotericism in general constitutes an important, yet too often neglected, source of information for the scientific study of religion, and that the same goes for kabbalah, regarding the history of Judaism. On the other hand, he advocates the rather dangerous theory according to which, in the study of a given religion,

> c'est l'opinion de ceux qui sont restés fidèles à l'esprit de cette religion qu'il importe de consulter, et non ses réformateurs [...] encore moins ses négateurs et ses contempteurs[21] [it is the opinion of those who have remained faithful to the spirit of that religion which it is relevant to consult, not the opinion of its reformers [...] even less that of those who deny or scorn it].

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[19] An "orthodoxy" which has of course nothing to do with what is nowadays commonly understood as Orthodox Judaism.

[20] In both cases, and according to his perspective, he is explicitly targeting some of the most famous representatives of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, such as Zunz or Grätz. See also A.B. Kilcher's contribution to the present volume.

[21] *La Kabbale juive*, I, 120.

Such a conviction obviously depends on Vulliaud's uncritical preoccupation with "tradition", which moves him to rely preferably on authors such as M. Weill,[22] E. Benamozegh[23] or F.-J. Molitor,[24] rather than on A. Franck,[25] and to privilege what he understands as 'l'enseignement traditionnel' over the writings of scholars, whether official or independent.

The second important feature is the accent on the *antiquity of kabbalah and of the* Zohar. Vulliaud borrows from J. Abelson the idea that kabbalah represents the literature of Jewish Mysticism from Antiquity almost until modern times. Accordingly, he presents kabbalah as the *gnosis* of the orthodox Jewish tradition,[26] and the esoteric doctrine of the mishnaic period, although he does admit that the term "kabbalah" may only have been applied to these from the Middle Ages onward. Firmly convinced of the intrinsic identity of contents between kabbalah as such and the secret tradition(s!) alluded to by what he refers to as the 'témoignages rabbiniques' (i.e., the Talmudim, the Mishna, and various midrashim), he allows nonetheless—in an unusual attempt at historical precision—that the so-called "secret tradition" begins to appear as "kabbalah" in the writings of Isaac the Blind, an indication which, apart from reflecting an obviously pre-Scholemian state of the historiography of kabbalah, is taken as pointing to the beginning of its gradual emancipation from mysticism!

Third feature: the focus on the Zohar as the main textbook, or the "bible", of kabbalah. Quite obviously, this view is not a personal one of Vulliaud's, who admits that the Zohar has not been materially written by Shimon bar Yohai himself, but holds that it contains and per-

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[22] Michel Aaron Weill (1814–1889), rabbi in Algiers and Toul (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 16, 398), not to be mistaken with Alexandre Abraham Weill (1811–1899; *E.J.* 16, 397–398), who published the kabbalistically-oriented *Mystères de la Création* (Paris: Dentu 1855); Fenton, 'La cabale et l'académie', 2.

[23] See Guetta, *Philosophie et Cabbale*. Vulliaud shares with Benamozegh a sustained interest in the thought of the Italian liberal catholic theologian V. Gioberti (1801–1852).

[24] *Etudes et correspondances*, 140. Hallacker, 'Franz Joseph Molitor'; Kilcher, 'Franz Joseph Molitors Kabbala-Projekt'; Koch, *Franz Joseph Molitor und die jüdische Tradition*.

[25] Mopsik, 'Quelques remarques sur Adolphe Franck', and W.J. Hanegraaff's contribution to the present volume.

[26] *Kabbale juive*, I, 102; 380: 'La Kabbale n'est pas une recherche de la vérité philosophique et religieuse, c'est une "Gnose", c'est-à-dire une connaissance plus approfondie de la révélation transmise par la tradition' [Kabbalah is not a quest of philosophical and religious truth, it is a "Gnosis", i.e. a deeper knowledge of the (divine) revelation communicated through tradition].

petuates the teachings of his school, through a process of progressive compilation, fraught with deviations and alterations, on the basis of the original tradition.[27] The text is thus seen as composed of different strata and fragments, some dating back to antiquity, some more recent and belonging to various historical periods, yet all of them supposedly mirroring the contents of Jewish religious literature and traditions construed by Vulliaud (and Pauly, before him) as being antecedent to, and therefore recapitulated in, the Talmud. The outcome is that the presence of (pseudo-)Talmudic language and expressions detected in the Zohar, for instance, may be explained away while maintaining the intrinsic antiquity of the *Book of Splendor*, since such borrowings or imitations are in fact interpreted as reflecting only the presence of an earlier, ancient material, instead of denoting a proper Talmudic origin *per se* (from a chronological point of view), which would then necessarily point to a comparative posteriority of the Zohar.

The fourth feature concerns the theoretical background of kabbalistic doctrines and practices: *the use of symbolism and analogy*. As Vulliaud puts it: 'Le symbolisme est la science des rapports et des affinités mystérieuses qui relient les deux mondes (inférieur et supérieur)' [Symbolism is the science of the correspondences and mysterious affinities which bind the two worlds, the lower one and the upper one].[28] Behind the application of this otherwise quite commonplace definition[29] of "symbolism" to kabbalah, lies the traditional view—naturally mentioned by Vulliaud[30]—according to which what the Israelites accomplish on earth is but an image of the celestial, archetypal realities, on which the lower world depends, the supposed goal of religious practice and ritual being to reunite them.

Accordingly, the doctrine of the *berakoth* and of "spiritual influences" in general, as well as that of correspondences, hinge on such principles, and liturgical actions are seen as a concrete, practical application of the doctrine of symbolism. Letter and number symbolism

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[27] A quite widespread view at the time, and even twenty years later, as noted by G. Scholem in the first chapter on the Zohar of his *Major Trends*. This centering of kabbalistic studies on and around the *Zohar* persists (*mutatis mutandis*, obviously) even in Scholem's work, as remarked by Mopsik, 'Nouvelles approches du judaïsme', 340; Mopsik, 'Le Judéo-araméen tardif', 353–62.

[28] *Kabbale juive*, II, 5–9.

[29] A "definition" obviously redolent of the "As above, so below" of the so-called Emerald Tablet; see P. Lory, 'Hermetic Literature III'.

[30] *Kabbale juive*, I, 500.

are considered another fundamental expression of the same doctrine,[31] whereas magic itself is dependent on the use of analogy—the arch illustration of all this being, for Vulliaud (who, again, merely follows traditional views, here), the theme of the 'Unification of the divine Name', understood as the (re)instauration of a harmonious intercourse between the upper and lower worlds, the very root-concept behind the use of symbolism and analogy.[32]

The fifth and last general feature of Vulliaud's conception is the supposedly universal character of kabbalistic doctrines and of their instruments, symbolism and analogy. For him, such doctrines (and their basic conceptual tools) are present everywhere, and constitute a universal feature of the human mind and culture (considered, that is, as divested of their specifically Jewish garb).[33] Vulliaud holds that it is in the nature of the human mind to operate with them, since they are essential to the linking up of the material with the spiritual, a universal religious concern according to him.[34]

Again, for our author, ideas as such are not to be regarded as mere abstractions or *entes rationis*, but as capable of actually manifesting themselves as concrete realities: energies, life, light.[35] All these factors therefore represent a kind of objective pattern, thus turning kabbalah into a "universal doctrine" which may, in Vulliaud's eyes, offer a term of

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[31] *Kabbale juive*, I, 187: 'Par le symbolisme des lettres et des nombres, nous apercevons la théorie sur laquelle repose toute la symbolique des anciens' [Through letter and number symbolism, we apprehend the theory upon which the whole of the symbolism of the ancients lies].

[32] *Kabbale juive*, II, 35. See, on this point, Wald, *The Doctrine of the Divine Name*, which revolves around a passage from the Zohar (*Sithre Othioth; ZH*, Ib–7b).

[33] Conversely, as regards the hermeneutics of kabbalah: 'L'examen des procédés ésotériques d'interprétation accuse l'originalité de la Kabbale. Dans quelle autre tradition en trouverait-on de similaires?' [The scrutiny of the esoteric procedures of interpretation underlines the original character of Kabbalah. Which other tradition would present similar features?]. By 'procédés ésotériques d'interprétation', Vulliaud refers to *gematria, notariqon, temurah* and several other exegetical and symbolic procedures, some of which more or less "cryptographic". Unlike many early modern Christian kabbalists, who actually and mistakenly attributed intrinsic esoteric implications to such traditional (Talmudic, for instance) hermeneutics, he is nevertheless aware that these frequently antedate kabbalah anyway, and can be used independently of esoteric purposes. See *Kabbale juive*, I, 157–91.

[34] In his insistence on the widespread relevance of analogy and symbolism—as he understands them, at all events—in human culture, Vulliaud is mainly dependent on nineteenth-century authors, such as De Brière, *Essai sur le symbolisme* (whom he does mention by name). On the history of this question, see Brach & Hanegraaff 'Correspondences'.

[35] *Kabbale juive*, II, 414.

comparison between different metaphysical systems otherwise impossible to reconcile, even though they may present numerous affinities. In this way, he goes on to state that '[l]a Kabbale est le vêtement juif d'une tradition antérieure et universelle dont tous les peuples ont conservé plus ou moins le souvenir' [Kabbalah is but the Jewish garment of a prior and universal tradition of which all nations have more or less retained the memory].[36] Even though he fancies that kabbalah, like Christianity[37] (!), exists 'de tout temps' [from time immemorial] and perpetuates 'la Révélation primitive' [the primordial revelation], Vulliaud denies legitimacy to any apologetic use of kabbalah, stating that 'une influence de la Kabbale sur les Pères de l'Eglise ou réciproquement serait insoutenable' [an influence of kabbalah over the church fathers or conversely would be untenable].[38] He only admits to analogies of contents between the two, outside any reciprocal influence.

Yet, his position as regards the reality of a universal tradition, and of a correspondingly universal (and therefore unique) religious message, is definitely ambiguous, if not contradictory, since he asserts elsewhere: 'Nous nions seulement qu'il y ait, au-dessus des formes confessionnelles, comme on l'affirme, un sens mystique qui identifie les religions' [We deny simply that there exists, above the different persuasions, as some would have it, a mystical signification which manifests the identity of (all) religions].[39] And he denounces 'le rêve d'une conciliation des doctrines religieuses et d'une superconfession' [the fancy of reconciling religious doctrines and of a superdenomination].[40]

There is of course little doubt that such wavering mainly stems from the difficulty of combining the idea of the universal character of certain spiritual tenets, with the adherence to the belief in the supremacy of a given denomination—Christianity, in its Roman Catholic form—which Vulliaud strictly maintained all his life.[41]

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[36] *Kabbale juive,* II, 358–359.

[37] As regards Christianity, Vulliaud obviously has in mind the classic passage by Augustine, *Retractationes* I, XIII, 3, which serves as the main basis and authority for most nineteenth-century catholic and occultist elaborations on the theme of a theology of primordial revelation. See Laurant, 'Avant-propos'; and id., *L'ésotérisme Chrétien*, *passim*.

[38] *Kabbale juive*, I, 415.

[39] *Kabbale juive*, II, 448.

[40] *Kabbale juive*, II, 450. Although it is impossible to establish the fact with certainty, this last sentence could well allude to René Guénon and to certain considerations developed in his *Introduction générale* (1921).

[41] His position in this respect is made clear as early as *Le Destin mystique*, V.

3. Vulliaud's Intellectual and "Critical" Stance Regarding Jewish Kabbalah

As I have already noted above,[42] Vulliaud's major work on kabbalah is in fact subtitled *Essai critique*. This truly offers a meaningful insight into his book, since he is indeed critical of all and everything! He is also careful to underline that he considers his work as no more than an elementary treatise on kabbalah, a "critical introduction" to the topic, devoid—or so he likes to think!—of any theological agenda or 'tendances personnelles' [personal slant]. If one were to take him literally (although this is not to say that I believe him insincere, on the contrary), his sole aim and possible achievement in writing about kabbalah is 'analyser, constater, critiquer et surtout, y voir clair' [to analyze, ascertain, be critical and, mostly, to shed light (on the subject)].

To put it in a nutshell, his main disclaimer is about a possible temptation to study his object with the mind of a kabbalist, instead of writing about it in a strictly historical and detached perspective: 'En un mot, étudier la kabbale, tel est notre plan, mais non pas kabbaliser' [in one word, our purpose is not to do kabbalah, but to study it].[43] Faithful to the sometimes ambiguous stance I have pointed to above, and while upholding this strictly neutral approach, Vulliaud is at the same time very critical of scholars in general, and heedful to underscore the esoteric character of kabbalah, which makes it 'un enseignement crypté et réservé à des cercles d'initiés' [a coded teaching, restricted to coteries of initiates], emphasizing 'la nécessité d'être initié aux mystères de l'Esotérisme juif' [the necessity of being initiated into the mysteries of Jewish Esotericism], and actually going so far as to deplore: 'Or, de Pauly a abordé la version du *Zohar* sans posséder cette initiation'[44] [Now, de Pauly has taken up the translation of the Zohar without actually possessing such an initiation]!

On the other hand, it is to be remarked that Vulliaud never claimed for himself the benefit of such a traditional transmission, hardly reconcilable, it is true, with his "critical" position. As regards Vulliaud's bibliographical sources, we have seen that our man is prone to privi-

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[42] See n. 18.

[43] *Kabbale juive* I, 170, n. 3; 144: 'Etudiant la kabbale en critique […]'.

[44] *Traduction intégrale*, 25. In this work, mention is made as well of "notes critiques et commentaires initiatiques" [critical annotations and initiatic comments] accompanying the translation.

lege authors whose works he regards as scientifically valid, yet still imbued with the spirit of the tradition which warrants, in his eyes, a reliable and insightful understanding of kabbalistic doctrines. Among those, the most frequently mentioned or quoted by him are J. Abelson,[45] I. Myer,[46] C.D. Ginsburg,[47] F.J. Molitor, E. Benamozegh, J. de Pauly, whom Vulliaud rather sharply contrasts with scholars in (direct or indirect) relation with the "Science of Judaism" school,[48] such as A. Franck, D.H. Joel,[49] H. Grätz, M. Steinschneider, A. Jellinek,[50] L. Zunz.[51] As we may easily expect of him, Vulliaud is wary of what he calls "les effets du modernisme" [the consequences of (the spirit of) Modernity] on Jewish writers, especially when it comes to dealing with kabbalistic material, and I need hardly point out that this constitutes one of the main items of criticism he (among others) levels against the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which he repeatedly accuses of rationalism and misinterpretation of his beloved "tradition".

In passing, we may also remark that Vulliaud simply doesn't seem to possess any awareness of (or concern for) the Sephardic traditions and literature regarding kabbalah, and is only acquainted with bits of the most frequented and classic European, Ashkenazi *corpus* on the subject, a characteristic which—we must admit—is relatively unsurprising at the time of his writing, and given his own cultural background.

Another, more important point is that Vulliaud reveals himself to be quite familiar with a whole apparatus of Christian Latin literature concerning *Hebraica* in general, and—partially, at least—kabbalah as well, with the likes of Buxtorf, Buddeus, Rittangel, Schoettgen, Basnage, etc.[52] Now, it should be noted that such readings appear more numerous in his *exposé* than the actual Hebrew sources and that, moreover, a good number of the more famous, original kabbalistic texts which Vulliaud selects, analyzes or refers to precisely in the course of his

[45] J. Abelson (1873–1940), *E.J.* 2, 63.

[46] Isaac Myer, *Qabbalah*, 1888.

[47] C.D. Ginsburg (1831–1914), *E.J.* 7, 581–582. His *The Kabbalah* was first published in 1863.

[48] See above, n. 20. See also 'Wissenschaft des Judentums', in *E.J.* 16, 570–584.

[49] David H. Joel (1815–1882; *E.J.* 10, 134–135) has been among the first to insist on the "original" and intrinsically Jewish character of kabbalah in his *Die Religionsphilosophie des Sohar*, 1849.

[50] A. Jellinek (1820/1–1893), *E.J.* 9, 1337–1339.

[51] See Trautmann-Waller, *Philologie allemande et tradition juive*.

[52] Secret, *Le Zôhar chez les Kabbalistes chrétiens*; idem, *Les Kabbalistes chrétiens*; Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony*; Coudert & Shoulson, *Hebraica Veritas?*

lengthy study, was in fact available in translation—whether entire or partial, in Latin or in modern languages—at the time of his writing *La Kabbale juive*.[53] This is an element which, although mentioned *en passant* by G. Scholem,[54] has not often sufficiently been taken into account by the few authors of scholarly reviews or evaluations of Vulliaud's work.[55] One must observe, however, that it is rendered (unwittingly, no doubt) less directly discernible by an untidy scattering of the numerous textual references throughout the two volumes which, moreover and quite unfortunately, lack any form of indexation.

Another important factor that should be mentioned, in order to illustrate Vulliaud's understanding of Jewish kabbalah, is the considerable influence exerted on him by J. de Pauly, despite the amount of criticism he frequently addresses to the translator of the *Zohar*.[56] On the whole, nevertheless, our author's perception of themes such as the "antiquity of kabbalah", or the nature of the *Zohar* as a *repositorium* of ancient traditions, and as the focus-point of kabbalistic literature in general (the second and third main general features, mentioned above, of his presentation of kabbalah), clearly depends in some measure on Pauly's (unfinished) presentation and arguments regarding these topics.[57]

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[53] Including, for instance, the *Zohar*, and the *Sefer Yetsirah* which Vulliaud—after so many other Christian writers—firmly believes to be purely kabbalistic. This is of course not to say that I actually suspect him of not being able to read (at least at a relatively good level) Hebrew (as testified by some of the notes and scrapbooks in his *Nachlass* at the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris) but it is nevertheless a curious fact that he relies essentially on translations (or second-hand quotations) in his textual approach of kabbalah. In view of a more detailed assessment of Vulliaud's work than is intended here, this factor would entail a lengthier and closer scrutiny (that is, text by text, and including the possible impact on Vulliaud of the commentaries accompanying certain translations) of his numerous sources than is feasible in the present context.

[54] Who adds his name to those of other authors he otherwise accuses of mere "compilation, made entirely from second-hand sources", *E.J.* 10, 489–653 (here, 648). The comparison with the likes of A.E. Waite or S. Karppe is nevertheless perhaps a trifle hard on Vulliaud.

[55] Mentioned by F. Secret, 'Note bio-bibliographique', xxx–xxxii, and to which G. Scholem's review of Vulliaud's *La Kabbale juive* must be added, besides passages from the more recent and already quoted works of Laurant, *L'ésotérisme chrétien*; Fenton, 'La cabale et l'académie'; and Mopsik, 'Les formes multiples de la cabale en France au XXe siècle'.

[56] In particular, Vulliaud is opposed to Pauly's overt Christian apologetics in his interpretation of the *Zohar* and kabbalah, *Traduction intégrale*, 110–118; *Etudes et correspondances*, 140.

[57] *Etudes et correspondances*, 15–43. In a somewhat different order, Vulliaud's opinion on A. Franck is also influenced by (though not identical to) that of Pauly's (ibid., 91–132; 133–140).

But there is yet a more substantial manifestation of the said influence: a relatively similar, parallel structure is to be remarked between the projected structure of the second part of Pauly's very incomplete *Introduction générale au Zohar*[58] and the general plan of study of Vulliaud's *Kabbale juive*, even though the last is inevitably, as a whole, far more extended and detailed in comparison. Pauly's design rather predictably begins with the Godhead, equated with the Voice and the One; he would then have gone on to such themes as the operation of Creation (cosmogony), the Universe, Man, Israel and, finally, the Messiah. Merely indicative and sketch-like as it is, this succession nevertheless reveals the rather clear theological perspective at work behind his approach, from the Divinity downwards to the Creation, Macrocosm and Microcosm, the Community of Israel and the eschatological Messiah.

On the other hand, Vulliaud opens his *opus magnum*—equally predictably, given what we have already seen—with some preliminary remarks about the interest of kabbalistic studies, the general nature and orthodox character of Jewish esotericism, which he follows with his overview of Jewish exegetical procedures, before dedicating three respective chapters to the *Sefer Yetsirah*, Ibn Gabirol's supposed relation to kabbalah, and to the antiquity of the Zohar. It is only after such copious *hors d'œuvres* that he finally passes on to the doctrines of kabbalah proper, and begins in his turn with the Infinite, following up with what he calls the 'Intermédiaires métaphysiques' [metaphysical intermediaries], in other words the ten *Sefirot*, and then the 'Intermédiaires personnifiés' [personified intermediaries],[59] or the *Shekhinah* and *Metatron*, although not without having interspersed between them three other chapters, concerned with diverse aspects of kabbalah, such as *Kabbale et Panthéisme*![60]

Vulliaud then advances to the 'ritual',[61] and while these "liturgical" considerations are being immediately succeeded by remarks pertaining to Jewish amulets and magic,[62] the question of the mystery of the

[58] *Etudes et correspondances*, 14.

[59] Intermediaries, that is, between the Godhead, Man and the Creation.

[60] As with kabbalah eventually beginning with Ibn Gabirol (see I. Myer, for instance), the question of an intrinsically pantheistic nature of kabbalistic speculations was already a much debated topic of eighteenth and nineteenth century historiography of the field (Wachter, Franck).

[61] This constitutes volume two's first chapter.

[62] This curious order of notions is in fact explained by Vulliaud's conception of the practical consequences of the (individual or collective) use of symbolism and analogy, as examined above in the fourth general feature of his *exposé*.

messiah in the Zohar is raised in the next chapter. These fundamental chapters precede yet several others, respectively dedicated to the Zohar proper (again), to the history of S. Zevi and his movement, to Christian kabbalists in general, to J. Böhme and F.-J. Molitor specifically, and to freemasonry, before a final recapitulation on the origins of kabbalah, and some conclusions.

Now, even though our remarks must necessarily remain conjectural in part, the parallel course of both expositions seems to us too apparent to be merely circumstantial, at least if one considers the five chapters I have singled out in Vulliaud's book,[63] where the 'Ritual' chapter echoes Pauly's 'Israel', and the two sections concerning the different kinds of "Intermediaries" would correspond to the "Universe" and "Man", and to their creation and relations with their divine origin, in Pauly.

It goes without saying that the difference in nature, scope and ambitions between the two texts, not to mention the unfinished state of Pauly's *Introduction*, constitute clear motives to avoid drawing exaggerated conclusions from our comparison, but I believe nonetheless that the parallel may be construed as indicating the outline of a somewhat kindred general perspective in their approach of the topic of Jewish kabbalah.[64]

In an even more pronounced way than his predecessor (and however awkward might sometimes be Pauly's reasoning in this respect), Vulliaud's relative disregard for strictly historical and philological arguments (as regards kabbalah, at least) is all the more striking to observe given his claims, as we have seen, to a detached and purely critical approach of his object. Even when he does summon this type of considerations,[65] his reasoning is almost always dominated and biased by his desire of demonstrating, above all, the validity of his ideas regarding the "traditional" nature of kabbalah, its antiquity and orthodoxy, the universal character of symbolism and of the use of analogy, etc. Although Vulliaud himself may not have been aware of it, and beyond the proper issue of compilation as such, his outlook on kabbalah clearly reveals itself to be prominently a matter of preconceived

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[63] Against Pauly's six-fold (as it stands) development.

[64] Vulliaud attempts to give a complete list of Pauly's publications in *Kabbale juive*, II, 261–262, and *Traduction intégrale*, 49–50. See Vulliaud's own bibliography (by F. Secret) in *Histoires et portraits*, xlvi–xlviii.

[65] As noted above, and rather tellingly, he does so much more in works unrelated to the study of kabbalah proper.

and, moreover, historically decontextualized ideas, and his interpretations are mainly the result of the interplay between a limited set of decidedly essentialist assumptions, belonging to his personal worldview, regarding the intrinsic nature and religious function(s) of "tradition", projected onto his Jewish material and therefore, more often than not, blurring the limits between the study of kabbalah proper and the study of its historiography.

4. The First Traditionalist?

Such a conception of what he regards as "tradition", as well as the emphasis on its "orthodoxy" and on their supposedly paramount relevance to the intellectual framing and understanding of his topic, obviously betray the influence of Vulliaud's Roman Catholic persuasion and his fondness for the perspective of a perennial religious revelation, originating in the remotest antiquity, and of which Judaism and kabbalah are an important scion, and Christianity the definitive accomplishment.[66]

This category of "tradition", as he understands it, is clearly the golden thread which runs throughout his writings about kabbalah. In it resides the main reason why his approach, while pretending to be critical, is in fact essentially unhistorical, and much closer to religious apologetics than he actually realizes himself.[67] That such apologetics, coming from a declared Catholic author, who was not a convert, should manifest a quite positive stance towards the study of Judaism and, above all, of the only too often decried Jewish esotericism, is of course worthy of note. Whether we consider Vulliaud's period of activity, and the amount of open or rampant anti-Semitism at work in contemporary French society, including some of its Catholic milieus,[68] or the fact that our author certainly did not belong to any occultist circles—among the few to entertain a generally favorable view of

[66] See n. 37 above.

[67] Vulliaud is in fact confronted with more or less the same dilemma that Scholem evokes, with considerably sharper critical acumen and awareness (!), in the first of his 'Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah'; see Biale, 'Gershom Scholem's Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah'. More generally on this problem see Engler & Grieve (eds.), *Historicizing "Tradition"*; Lewis & Hammer (eds.), *Invention of Tradition*.

[68] Airiau, *L'antisémitisme catholique*.

kabbalah, albeit unscientific and frequently biased[69]—and had no wish whatsoever to be perceived as a member of them, his intellectual attitude is relatively atypical, and remarkable enough.

One should of course remember that, in these kabbalistic matters as in most other activities, except perhaps painting, Vulliaud was essentially self-taught, a fact which may well account for several symptomatic aspects of the way his *Kabbale juive* is written: the great disorder in the composition of the book, the excessive preliminaries and constant digressions (some of them occupying whole chapters!), the all too obvious desire to impress the reader with his extensive readings and erudition, the facile and continuous flow of jokes, irony and criticism towards other authors, whether Jewish or Christian, all is aimed at conveying to the reader the somewhat naive notion that Vulliaud is really the first person to properly understand the nature and contents of Jewish kabbalah, and the only scholar actually capable of accurately presenting it to the public!

There is a probable link between such a propensity to squander his erudition and nurture such a high regard for his own abilities, and his general tendency to write, besides Jewish themes, on an impressive variety of apparently disconnected topics, which allegedly caused Vulliaud to describe himself as 'le dernier des grands polygraphes' [the last of the great polymaths].[70] Up to a certain point, and notwithstanding his distaste for apologetic distortions of kabbalah, I feel that Vulliaud might rather be depicted as one of the last Christian kabbalists. As a matter of fact, his approach is dominantly heresiological, albeit in a very specific manner, since his doctrinal loyalty is not to Christian perspectives, in a narrowly denominational sense, but to his perception of "tradition" and "orthodoxy"—even though this is in turn assimilated into his own personal religious outlook—and of the manner in which they determine, according to him, the correct assessment of the doctrines of kabbalah. For, to Vulliaud, kabbalah is essentially and above all a single doctrine or system of ideas, a symbolic theosophy,[71] even if he is lucid enough to recognize and admit its unsystematic character, at least according to modern philosophical criteria. We have seen also

[69] For an assessment of certain aspects of occultist kabbalah, see Kilcher, '*Verhüllung*'; Asprem, '*Kabbala Recreata*'.

[70] Clavelle, *Quelques souvenirs*, 31; see also the Italian transl.: Clavelle, *Alcuni ricordi*, 68.

[71] He goes as far as asserting (quite wrongly, of course), that such topics as psychology, ethics, or anthropology, are altogether absent from kabbalistic discourses!

that part of his conceptions regarding the importance of the tenet of "tradition", and the meaning of "orthodoxy", he actually borrows from some of his favorite authors, such as Joel, Benamozegh, or Molitor.

This, again, cannot come as a surprise, since it must be observed that, in spite of the high esteem in which he holds himself and his work, and also as a consequence of his claim to an objective exposition of kabbalah, Vulliaud has little or no interest in presenting, or even appearing to present, ideas that might be construed as "original" or personal. On the contrary, he is, rather logically, inclined to identify his interpretation of kabbalistic tenets with an allegedly neutral presentation of *the* authentic and orthodox tradition of kabbalah, as he understands it.

Seen in this perspective, it seems to us that P. Vulliaud must be regarded as a direct precursor of the "traditionalist" school, later headed by thinkers such as R. Guénon and F. Schuon,[72] if not in fact as its very first public exponent.[73] His insistence on the categories of "tradition" and "orthodoxy", as well as on their assumed universal signification, is very much akin to Guénon's general intellectual attitude, even if, as we have seen above, the two men differ in their appreciation of the nature and the contents of a universal tradition, and of its relation to historical religious creeds, such as Judaism or Christianity. Moreover, it is certainly no mere coincidence that the motto of *Le Voile d'Isis*, the occultist monthly which Guénon's followers gradually took over in the 1930s,[74] alluding to 'la Tradition perpétuelle et unanime' [the perennial and unanimous Tradition] was in fact borrowed from Vulliaud himself, an occasional contributor to the journal.[75] The considerable influence exerted by Vulliaud's notion of kabbalah on Guénon and some of his later admirers, is otherwise a well-known fact,[76] even though a detailed account will require further research.[77]

All things considered, I would suggest that an interesting parallel may be drawn between what Vulliaud attempted to do for the study

[72] Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*; Laurant, *René Guénon*.
[73] Cardile, *La filosofia della Tradizione*.
[74] The journal took the title *Etudes Traditionnelles* from 1936 onward.
[75] Clavelle, *Quelques souvenirs*, 30; *Alcuni ricordi*, 67.
[76] Laurant, *René Guénon*, 161.
[77] On the importance of Judaism and its esoteric dimension within the later, mostly schuonian milieu, Fenton, 'Les judéos-soufis de Lausanne', 283–313.

of kabbalah, and Guénon's contemporary efforts regarding Hinduism.[78] This does not mean, however, that their goals or points of view were in every aspect identical, despite their common preoccupation with matters of traditional authority and doctrinal orthodoxy. In fact, it is important to note that Vulliaud likes to present himself as a "critic", without personal involvement in his object of study, whereas Guénon openly claims to be writing solely from an initiatic, consciously esoteric perspective.[79] On the other hand, such a parallel, it should also be emphasized, would equally apply to their respective attitude towards the opinion of scholars, and of the academic milieus in general—that of a lofty, contemptuous superiority, as well as a great disdain for the overall reaction of qualified critics, whether Semitists or Indologists, to their own works.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the chapters from *La Kabbale juive* which Guénon, in his review, finds particularly interesting and relevant—given of course his own outlook on the topic—happen to be precisely those devoted to what he considers as "pure doctrine", and to the practical and symbolic applications of it,[80] and also (and again) are exactly the very same pages I have singled out above in my attempt to draw a comparison with Pauly's unfinished introduction to the Zohar.

That the essence of kabbalah should be construed as consisting of "pure doctrine" (and, secondarily, of its liturgical applications) tells us as much, I think, about a certain—outdated if sympathetic—intellectual attitude to the study of Jewish esotericism, as it sheds some light on the nature of the early "traditionalist" perspective as applied to Judaism and kabbalah.

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[78] See n. 40 and Guénon, *L'Homme et son devenir*. See also Lardinois, *L'invention de l'Inde*, 185–212.

[79] In an unusually lenghty review of *La Kabbale juive* (first published in 1925 in Italian in the journal *Ignis. Rivista di studi iniziatici*, then republished in French in Guénon, *Formes traditionnelles*, to which I refer here), Guénon deplores Vulliaud's "exterior" attitude to kabbalah (82–83; 93) whereas he rejoices, in his review of *Siphra di-Tzéniutha*, at the signs of interest on the author's part for the concept of initiation (Guénon, *Formes traditionnelles*, 107). This happens, as could be expected, in the very same passages quoted above (n. 44) concerning Pauly and the Zohar. According to M. Clavelle, Vulliaud apparently resented Guénon's (mild) criticism of his book, under the assumption that no one was competent enough to criticize him on the subject (!):Clavelle, *Quelques souvenirs*, 32; *Alcuni ricordi*, 70.

[80] Guénon, rev. of P. Vulliaud, *La Kabbale juive*, 94.

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ORIENTAL KABBALAH AND THE PARTING OF EAST AND WEST IN THE EARLY THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Marco Pasi

1. The Problem of "Western" Esotericism

One of the most interesting aspects of the academic study of Western esotericism, as it has developed in the last twenty years, is precisely the qualification of this phenomenon as "Western", on which there seems to be general agreement among the specialists working in the field. It is in fact with the name "Western esotericism" that the field has developed and has gained increasing recognition within and without academic institutions. To give only a couple of significant examples, the most important reference work in this field bears the title *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, and the name of one of the two international scholarly associations devoted to it is "European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism" (ESSWE).[1] But what does "Western" mean in this context? And, most importantly, why should esotericism be necessarily qualified as Western in the first place?

An answer to the first question came in 1992 from Antoine Faivre, one of the authors who have done the most for the academic recognition of the field. In his introduction to what can be considered as the first serious handbook for the study of Western esotericism, *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (1992), he defined the "Westerness" of esotericism as follows: 'By the term "West" we mean the vast Greco-Roman whole within which Judaism and Christianity have always cohabited with one another, joined by Islam for several centuries'.[2] On the basis of this definition alone, one could have assumed that "Western esotericism" included most forms of esotericism that had developed in

[1] The other, American-based, association is the Association for the Study of Esotericism (ASE). Both associations organize biannual conferences in alternate years.

[2] Faivre, 'Introduction I', xiii. In an article published in 1995 together with Karen Voss, Faivre gave a slightly different formulation of the same concept: 'The term "Western" here refers to the medieval and modern Greco-Latin world in which the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity have coexisted for centuries, periodically coming into contact with those of Islam' (Faivre & Voss, 'Western Esotericism', 50).

the three Abrahamic religions. But this was not the case. In fact, in enumerating the actual currents that compose the historical landscape of Western esotericism, Jewish kabbalah was mentioned by Faivre only in so far as it had 'penetrated into the Christian milieu, especially after 1492, and celebrated an unexpected wedding with neo-Alexandrian Hermeticism'.[3] The use of a notion of the "West" that excludes Jewish and Islamic forms of esotericism is confirmed not only by Faivre's work in general, where actual research on these currents is absent, but also more explicitly by a later formulation, where he gives a slightly different definition of the "Westerness" of esotericism:

> "Western" indicates here a West "visited" by some Jewish, Islamic, or even far-Eastern religious traditions, with which it has coexisted but does not mingle; for instance, Jewish kabbalah is not part of this "Western esotericism" understood in such a way, whereas the so-called Christian kabbalah belongs to it.[4]

Interestingly, Jewish kabbalah here for Faivre becomes the paradigmatic example of what should *not* be included in Western esotericism.

The answer to the second question is also not so difficult to find. The reason why scholars like Faivre insisted on the importance of qualifying esotericism as "Western" is that they wanted to avoid universalist concepts of esotericism, which were widespread enough when the field emerged. We should not forget that, when esotericism began to be studied in an academic context in France, the influence of René Guénon's works and of traditionalism was particularly strong. In traditionalism the idea of a universal esotericism is a necessary consequence of the doctrine of primordial tradition, of *philosophia perennis*. Because this primordial wisdom is at the origin of all true religious traditions and represents their inner core or essence, it cannot be limited to a single geographical or cultural area. In this perspective, esotericism has always existed, and traces of it can be found in all cultures around the world. Outside of France, other universalist understandings of eso-

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[3] Faivre, 'Introduction I', xiii.

[4] '"Occidental" désigne ici un Occident "visité" par des traditions religieuses juives, musulmanes, voire extrême-orientales avec lesquelles il a cohabité mais qui ne se confondent pas avec lui; par exemple la Kabbale juive ne ressortit pas à cet "ésotérisme occidental" ainsi compris, alors que la Kabbale dite chrétienne, elle, en fait partie.' (Faivre, *L'ésotérisme*, 8). I quote here from the latest edition of Faivre's famous introductory monograph on the study of western esotericism. In previous editions his definition of the West was slightly different, being very similar to the one I have quoted from his introduction to *Western Esoteric Spirituality*.

tericism could be favored by the influence of the ideas of Carl Gustav Jung, especially of his psychological interpretation of alchemy. The empirical-historical approach advocated by scholars such as Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff rejected the universalist assumptions of these religionist approaches and, as a consequence, made the reference to a specific cultural framework (i.e., the "West") inevitable.[5] It should be noted, however, that this ended up in a sort of paradox. In fact, if esotericism is not a universal phenomenon, but is specifically rooted in, and limited to, Western culture, then it should not be necessary to qualify it as "Western". The very moment it is labeled as "Western", it becomes also possible to conceive that other, "non-Western" forms of esotericism exist, including—predictably—an "Eastern" one. The conceptual subtlety of this paradox has perhaps eluded those who have first created and promoted the concept of "Western esotericism" in a scholarly discourse, but it is significant, because it shows at least the difficulties with which this relatively young field is still struggling. This becomes even more problematic when one realizes that the study of esotericism is probably the only field within religious studies that defines its identity by using the tag "Western".[6] However, the objections derived from this paradox—justified as they may be from a theoretical point of view—appear in the end to be not as strong as the necessity to emphasize—even rhetorically—the idea that esotericism belongs to a specific cultural area.

Faivre's definition of Western esotericism has until recently dominated this field of research and has influenced its institutional development. It has become, to use the term suggested by Wouter J. Hanegraaff, a 'paradigm'.[7] When a new chair for the study of esotericism was created at the University of Amsterdam in 1999, the Western connotation was not neglected, even if it was less explicit than in Paris. The chair was called in fact "History of Hermetic philosophy and related currents", which becomes particularly significant when one keeps in mind that the tag "Hermetic" was used by occultist authors in the last

[5] See Faivre, *Accès*, 32–41; Hanegraaff, 'On the Construction', 19–28. Faivre has also reiterated the Western character of esotericism by questioning Henry Corbin's idea of a comparative study of esotericism in the three Abrahamic religions: see Faivre, 'La question d'un ésotérisme comparé'.

[6] For a recent, judicious overview of the methodological problems raised by labels such as "Western" and "Oriental" in the specific context of religious studies see Casadio, 'Studying Religious Traditions'.

[7] Hanegraaff, 'The Study of Western Esotericism', 507–508.

quarter of the nineteenth century precisely to identify a specifically Western esoteric tradition, as opposed to an "Oriental" one.[8] The other new chair for the study of esotericism, created at the University of Exeter in 2006, also carries the qualification "Western" explicitly.[9]

It is only recently that Faivre's occidental paradigm has been questioned by Kocku von Stuckrad.[10] Apart from the specifics of his criticism, on which I am not going to dwell here,[11] von Stuckrad does not seem to contest the 'Western' connotation of esotericism in itself (after all, esotericism is defined as 'Western' in the very title of his monograph devoted to the subject).[12] It is more the scope of this connotation that von Stuckrad finds problematic. In his opinion, Faivre's categories give an image of esotericism that is too limited and does not include the presence and the importance of non-Christian forms of esotericism, such as Jewish and Islamic esotericisms.[13] The implication is obvious: if the West cannot be identified only with Christianity, then it is not possible to include in "Western" esotericism only currents that have taken shape within Christianity or that have a Christian identity. The question that remains open is how the "West" should be defined, and where we want to set its boundaries. This concerns, most of all, the role of Jewish, but also of Islamic, religious traditions in the development of what we call "Western esotericism".

I will return to these methodological discussion and the problems it raises at the end of this chapter. What interests me more at this point

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[8] See Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, esp. 333–379.

[9] The formal title of the chair holder (currently Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke) is 'Professor of Western Esotericism'. See http://huss.exeter.ac.uk/research/exeseso/staff.php (retrieved 19 April 2009).

[10] Von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 3–5. See also von Stuckrad, 'Western Esotericism', 82–83.

[11] For a more detailed, critical discussion, see Pasi, 'Il problema della definizione'.

[12] Von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*. See also the preface of the book, where von Stuckrad points out that the book discusses 'Western esotericism' in the context of the 'religious pluralism' of 'Western culture' and focuses on 'the role of esotericism in Western discourse' (von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, xi). More recently, von Stuckrad has come to the conclusion that "esoteric discourse in Western culture" would be a better term for the object under study than "Western esotericism". He will elaborate on this in his forthcoming book, *Locations of Knowledge* (personal email, 31 May 2009). The introduction of this new term however does not affect my argument here. It is not so significant that von Stuckrad's definition of both esotericism and its western identity is radically different from that of Faivre (or even of other authors). What is significant is that both, in defining esotericism, feel the necessity to qualify it by referring to the cultural area of the "West".

[13] Von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 5.

is the fact that the relevance of the idea of "Western" esotericism seems to persist even in von Stuckrad's critical position, and can be assumed to be a largely shared opinion among specialists in the field. This leads me to the main object of this paper, which is the way in which the idea of Western esotericism has originally taken shape. It appears in fact that this concept, as is often the case, did not originate in a scholarly discourse, but in a religionist one. More precisely, this happened within occultism during the second half of the nineteenth century. It is in this context that a sharp distinction began to be made between a "Western" and an "Eastern" esoteric tradition. In the rest of this chapter I would like therefore to focus on one of the crucial moments of this story, when the idea of a Western tradition of esotericism took shape, and to question in particular the role of kabbalah in it.

2. The Role of Kabbalah in the Theosophical Writings of H.P. Blavatsky

Before the nineteenth century, esotericism in Europe was pursued both within and without the dominant religious tradition of Christianity. Therefore, for esoterically inclined authors no opposition seemed to be necessary between different sources of esoteric wisdom. This would have been incompatible with the notion of *philosophia perennis*, which was central in early modern esotericism. For many Renaissance authors, the Hermetic texts (the so-called *Corpus Hermeticum*) had their origin in Egypt, but expressed a revelation that was quite compatible with Christianity, and had in fact even anticipated and announced it. The same went for kabbalah when it was adopted and adapted in new Christian frameworks. It would appear then that an explicit opposition between a Western and an Eastern esoteric tradition did not exist before the nineteenth century, and is much more recent than one would be inclined to think. But this should not necessarily come as a surprise. It is in fact between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries that the very notion of the specific identity of the "West" takes definite shape, where the West is seen as a distinct civilization that has its own specific features and is not necessarily related to one single religious denomination.[14] This takes place in the

[14] On the historical development of the idea of the West, see Bonnett, *Idea of the West*; Corm, *Orient-Occident*; Gress, *From Plato to NATO*.

context of the spreading of Enlightenment ideas and of the influence of secularization, but it can also be seen as one of the consequences, by way of reaction, of that "Oriental Renaissance" famously described by Raymond Schwab.[15] It is interesting to see that we find a similar development taking place in the origin of the idea of "Western esotericism". It is therefore mostly as the reaction to an idea of "Eastern esotericism" that the idea of "Western esotericism" could develop. Now, it is interesting to see that in the creation of these new boundaries and identities, the concept of kabbalah played a significant role—a role, on the other hand, which was not necessarily related to the content of the tradition it expressed, but rather to its origins. Where did kabbalah come from?

The turning point in this story is the foundation of the Theosophical Society in 1875 by H.P. Blavatsky. It was Blavatsky who developed a model of Eastern esoteric tradition that had a tremendous influence on esoteric authors coming after her. It has been emphasized again and again that she was instrumental in importing certain religious and philosophical ideas from the East into the West,[16] and some scholars have spoken of "syncretism" to describe her movement and ideas.[17] But what has not been emphasized enough perhaps is the way in which she constructed her own image of the "Orient". What were her motives in the cultural context in which she operated? What were the boundaries she set between East and West and why? Was it a fixed image or did it evolve with time?

The first important thing to say is that, unlike many of her contemporaries, for Blavatsky the East, whatever she chose to include in this concept, possessed an undisputable superiority over the West. The West was identified for her mainly with Christian dogmatism and modern scientific materialism. Both phenomena were representative of the degeneration which in her opinion affected Western civilization, a kind of degeneration from which the "East", in particular the Middle East and India, had been more or less spared. It would be interesting to consider Blavatsky's attitude towards the East in the perspective of

[15] Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*.

[16] Bevir, 'The West Turns Eastward'; Neufeldt, 'In Search of Utopia'; Choné, 'Discours ésotériques'.

[17] Kraft, '"To Mix or not to Mix"'.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism.[18] Surely Blavatsky had a positive image of the East, and she seems to be distant from the mostly negative examples offered by Said in his famous book. In this sense, she might join the British Orientalists of the *Asiatic Researches* that David Kopf took as counter-examples in his criticism of Said's book,[19] and be considered as an early protagonist of what Colin Campbell has called the "Easternization of the West".[20] However, it would be fair to say that—positive as her appreciation may be—she still had an extremely essentialist, idealized vision of the East, which on the one hand praised the old traditional wisdom of the Easterners, but on the other placed her in a position of superiority with respect to the actual people living in Eastern countries.[21] It is a kind of Orientalism that perhaps bears a distant relationship with what Boaz Huss has identified in describing Gershom Scholem's position about kabbalah.[22]

An interest for kabbalah was present in the Theosophical Society from the very beginning. Some of the early members were particularly attracted to this topic. One of them was Seth Pancoast, who was also Mme. Blavatsky's personal physician in New York. In 1883 he published a whole book on kabbalah: *The Kabbala: or, The True Science of Light*. It is a very curious book, in which speculations about the divine and cosmic light are intermingled with considerations based on the latest scientific discoveries, while it seems to ignore any original source of Jewish kabbalah.

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[18] Said, *Orientalism*. For a discussion of the early Theosophical Society and Blavatsky in relation to Orientalism, see Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Theosophical Society'; and Marra, 'Un *Altrove* come specchio'.

[19] Kopf, 'Hermeneutics versus History'.

[20] Campbell, *The Easternization of the West*.

[21] This point has been made clear and argued convincingly by S. Prothero in his biography of Blavatsky's associate in the leadership of the Theosophical Society, Henry S. Olcott. See Prothero, *White Buddhist*, 1–13, 62–84.

[22] Huss, 'Ask No Questions'. Lately, there has been a lively debate among kabbalah specialists concerning the Orientalist attitude that some of them are supposed to show in their approach to the subject. Apart from B. Huss' considerations concerning Scholem in the quoted article, one of the most significant episodes in this debate has been the publication of an article by G. Anidjar, where "Jewish Orientalism" is used as a polemical key to interpret the work of some of the most prominent kabbalah specialists, including G. Scholem and M. Idel. The latter has responded by vigorously rejecting Anidjar's interpretation. See Anidjar, 'Jewish Mysticism'; and Idel, 'Orienting, Orientalizing or Disorienting'. On this debate, see Schäfer, 'Jewish Mysticism', 16–18.

It is interesting to see that kabbalah is more or less related also to the very foundation of Blavatsky's organization. In fact, on the evening of 7 September 1875 in a private apartment in New York City, the ex-army officer and inventor George H. Felt gave a lecture on "Egyptian Kaballah", which for him was somehow connected to the 'lost canon of proportion of the Egyptians' and therefore mostly related to art and architecture.[23] This must have impressed the small audience, which included not only Blavatsky and his future collaborator Colonel Olcott, but also Pancoast, and such a prominent figure of Anglo-American spiritualism as Emma Hardinge-Britten. The day after, the group convened again and decided to create the famous society. The interesting aspect is that Felt's role at the beginning was prominent enough, because the Society seemed originally to lay a certain emphasis on experimental and practical work. Felt had promised to show his abilities as a practical kabbalist, by evoking elementals and other entities at will. This shows one of the most important aspects of the reception of kabbalah in an occultist context, that is its strong identification with magical practices.[24] However, Felt seems to have had some trouble in fulfilling his promises, because there is no record of any attempted evocation in front of the other members of the newly formed society. He probably disappeared, and was never heard of again.[25]

Let us now give a closer look at Blavatsky's attitude towards kabbalah, and in particular towards the problem of its "geo-spiritual" identity. I would like to focus here on an article that is the very first occultist text written and published by Blavatsky.[26] The title is 'A Few Questions to "Hiraf"', and it was published in the *Spiritual Scientist*, an American spiritualist journal, on 15 and 22 July 1875, that is several months before the actual foundation of the Society. The article is a sort of response to another article published in the same paper under the peculiar pseudonym of 'Hiraf' by a group of persons who

[23] Santucci, 'George Henry Felt', 255–256. The "lost canon of proportion" seems to be one of the recurrent themes associated to kabbalah in the occultist discourse. See for instance also Stirling, *Canon*.

[24] More generally about the uses and interpretations of kabbalah in English occultism, see Asprem, 'Reception and Adaptation'.

[25] Santucci, 'George Henry Felt', 256.

[26] This text is also important because it is probably the place where the term 'occultism' made its first appearance in the English language.

were acquainted with Blavatsky.[27] It is possible that the whole thing was orchestrated in order for Mme. Blavatsky to have a convenient occasion for publishing her own article. Be that as it may, the authors of the article to which Blavatsky responds had expressed some skepticism as to the present existence of Rosicrucianism, which they claimed had completely disappeared. To this, Blavatsky retorts that 'colleges' where students can learn the Secret Science of Occultism do still exist. They may have declined and disappeared in the West, but they are still to be found in the East, that is to say 'in India, Asia Minor, and other countries'.[28] Rosicrucianism represents here a sort of Western occultism, or Western cabala. But then there is also an Eastern occultism, which Mme. Blavatsky calls 'the primitive Oriental Cabala',[29] and which is much older and more authentic than the other one. The Oriental Cabala still possesses in fact all the 'primitive secret powers of the ancient Chaldaeans'.[30] For centuries the

> mysterious doctrines had come down in an unbroken line of merely oral traditions as far back as man could trace himself on earth. They were scrupulously and jealously guarded by the Wise Men of Chaldaea, India, Persia and Egypt, and passed from one initiate to another in the same purity of form as when handed down to the first man by the angels.[31]

But then, a series of alterations began, at first due to human ambition, and later on due to the desire to commit the oral doctrines on paper. Moses seems to be the first one to be responsible for this alteration because of the ambition Blavatsky attributes to him. Then Blavatsky mentions Shimon Ben Yochai and the supposed origins of the *Zohar* from his teachings. Ironically, in this perspective, the Jews are seen not as the originators and authors of Cabala, but as merely responsible for the alteration of its primordial purity: 'While the Oriental Cabala remained in its pure primitive shape, the Mosaic or Jewish one was full of drawbacks, and the keys to many of his secrets—forbidden by the Mosaic law—purposely misinterpreted'.[32]

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[27] Hiraf, 'Rosicrucianism'. For the background to the writing of the article and the group hiding under this pseudonym, see de Zirkoff, 'The "Hiraf" Club and its Historical Background'.

[28] Blavatsky, 'A Few Questions', 103.

[29] Blavatsky, 'A Few Questions', 104.

[30] Blavatsky, 'A Few Questions', 107.

[31] Blavatsky, 'A Few Questions', 110.

[32] Blavatsky, 'A Few Questions', 111.

The status of Jewish kabbalah in this first article by Mme. Blavatsky remains slightly ambiguous. On the one hand it is not identified with the 'Oriental Cabala', which is supposed to represent a purer form of esoteric wisdom. On the other hand, it is not identified with Rosicrucianism either, which would represent Western esotericism. It seems, therefore, to fall somewhere between two stools: it is not really "Eastern" (it is in fact distinct from the real, i.e. "Oriental" kabbalah, and therefore does not deserve special praise), but it is not fully "Western" either, in so far as Rosicrucianism is taken as representative of Western esotericism. The problem, however, is that she does not explain precisely what she means by "Oriental Cabala", what are the contents of its teachings or who are the wise persons responsible for it. Later on, in her subsequent publications, this aspect will become clearer, and it will be evident that this wisdom of the East is composed mainly of those religious traditions that have originated in India, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism.

In *Isis Unveiled*, her first major work, published in two volumes in 1877, Blavatsky devotes an entire chapter to kabbalah (vol. II, chap. 5). In the book there are again references to an 'Oriental Kabala' supposedly much older and original than the Jewish one.[33] However, in the chapter itself things are less ambiguous, because this time it is explicitly Jewish kabbalah that is the object of the discussion, or at least Blavatsky's understanding of it. The image one can derive from this discussion is particularly garbled. Blavatsky focuses particularly on the structure of the sefirot and on the concept of Shekhinah, but there are some other aspects that should retain our attention. Blavatsky's major source for this chapter is certainly Adolphe Franck's book on kabbalah and surely also Eliphas Lévi.[34] In particular she seems to like the idea that kabbalah has its origins in Zoroastrianism, because this confirms her idea that Jewish kabbalah is a later derivation from a much older Oriental kabbalah. This is further confirmed by all the analogies that she is able to find between Jewish kabbalistic concepts and ideas taken from Hinduism. In the end, the opinion Blavatsky seems to have of Jewish kabbalah, despite the priority of another tradition, is positive.

[33] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 17.

[34] On these two authors and kabbalah, see Hanegraaff's chapter in the present book.

The chapter ends in the same way as the Hiraf article, that is to say, with an attack on Christianity and particularly against the priests.

This element leads me to conclude that one of the most interesting aspects of Blavatsky's attitude about kabbalah is the reversal that she operates to the traditional attitude of Christian kabbalah. Whereas Christian kabbalists saw kabbalah as a means to prove Christian truths by using the esoteric wisdom of the Jews (which is, by the way, a model that can still be acceptable for someone like Eliphas Lévi), Blavatsky does the opposite. She uses kabbalah in order to disprove the truths of Christianity, especially in its dogmatic and institutional forms. In fact it is evident that for her kabbalah stems directly from the Eastern sources of primordial wisdom, and has therefore nothing to do with the ways in which Christianity has developed in the West. Or, more correctly, almost nothing, because as a side effect of this reversal, Christian kabbalists now become witnesses not of the truths of Christianity through the use of the kabbalah, but of the truths of the kabbalah despite Christianity.

This becomes almost ironical in a later article, where Blavatsky writes that, through figures such as Pico della Mirandola, the 'Church' has proclaimed in the past the traditional wisdom of the kabbalah. Blavatsky, however, does not seem to be aware of the far from easy relationship that Pico had with the ecclesiastical institution.[35] This article, titled 'The Kabalah and the Kabalists', was published in 1892, after Blavatsky's death, but was probably written around 1886, not long before the publication of her other major work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). In this article Jewish kabbalah is no longer contrasted with an Oriental kabbalah, but more logically with what she calls 'Eastern Occultism'.[36] The whole article is an attempt at demonstrating the inferiority of Jewish kabbalah, by hinting at the alteration done to it by Christian authors. It concludes on a pessimistic note as to the viability of Jewish kabbalah as a means to obtain esoteric wisdom:

> What, then, is the Kabalah, in reality, and does it afford a revelation of such higher spiritual mysteries? The writer answers most emphatically NO. What the Kabalistic keys and methods were, in the origin of the *Pentateuch* and other sacred scrolls and documents of the Jews now no longer extant, is one thing; what they are now is quite another.[37]

[35] Blavatsky, 'Kabalah and Kabalists', 252.
[36] Blavatsky, 'Kabalah and Kabalists', 253.
[37] Blavatsky, 'The Kabalah and the Kabalists', 267.

The emphasis on the superiority of Eastern—particularly Indian—doctrines will be further accentuated in *The Secret Doctrine*. This, as Joscelyn Godwin has shown, was not without consequences and stimulated a reaction aimed at a better appreciation of what was considered to be the Western esoteric tradition, of which Jewish kabbalah was considered to be a part.[38] As it is known, this was started from within the Theosophical Society itself by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland with the creation of a short-lived Hermetic Society and the publication of *The Perfect Way* (1882). It is in this context that we should place MacGregor Mathers' translation of the *Kabbalah Denudata*, which was to become the major reference for all subsequent occultist works on kabbalah, and one of the foundational texts of the most famous occultist group in the English-speaking area, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[39] With the "Hermetic reaction" that develops in occultism as a response to Blavatsky's emphasis on the "Eastern" sources of esoteric wisdom, the idea of a specifically "Western" esoteric tradition takes shape. Jewish kabbalah plays a crucial role in this process. Whereas Mme. Blavatsky tends to devaluate Jewish kabbalah by considering it an inferior form of older "Oriental" traditions (which she calls alternatively "Oriental Kabbalah" or "Oriental Occultism"), later "Hermetic" occultists come to perceive it as one of the pillars of a distinctly "Western" esoteric tradition, together with phenomena such as Rosicrucianism, alchemy, and the tarot.

3. Conclusion

My intention here was to cast some light on the moment at which the idea of different esoteric traditions, one specifically Western and the other Eastern, take shape, and to emphasize the importance that Jewish kabbalah plays in this story. For both Blavatsky and the "Hermetic" occultists Jewish kabbalah is understood as belonging more to the "West" than to the "East". What changes is the preference for one of these two cultural identities over the other. For Blavatsky, however, the status of Jewish kabbalah maintains also a certain degree of ambiguity, because of the presence of a broader and older kabbalah firmly

[38] See above, n. 8.
[39] Mathers, *Kabbala Denudata*. On this text, and its context, see Kilcher, 'Verhüllung und Enthüllung'.

posed in the "East", from which Jewish kabbalah is supposed to have originated.

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in the ways in which Orientalism has interacted with the development of Jewish identity between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.[40] P. Mendes-Flohr has emphasized how, in this context, the "Oriental" character of Jewish culture, which had been and was still used in anti-Semitic discourse as basis for polemical characterization, could be perceived by some Jews as a source of ethnic pride: 'The presentation of Judaism as a form of Oriental wisdom served to help Jews of this period to reaffirm their ancestral identity. [...] Now with the positive evaluation of the Orient, Jews given to the Romantic mood of the *fin-de-siècle* could point with pride to their Asiatic provenance'.[41] What is interesting however is that scholars who have focused on this interesting development *within* Jewish culture have generally neglected the intersection of Orientalism and kabbalah *outside of* it, of which Mme. Blavatsky's speculations on Oriental vs. Jewish kabbalah offer a striking example. Given the pervasiveness of the ideas spread by the Theosophical Society at the turn of the twentieth century, it might turn out that further study on Blavatsky's particular form of Orientalism could help understanding the broader context in which those Jewish intellectuals referred to by Mendes-Flohr where moving.

I can now turn to some conclusive remarks on the contemporary development of the study of "Western" esotericism. It is perhaps significant that in the occultism of the "Hermetic reaction" Jewish kabbalah is considered as being central, whereas in contemporary, scholarly definitions of "Western esotericism" the same element is left out. As we have seen, this has found sometimes a justification in the "pragmatic reasons" advocated by the main editor of the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, which made it unpractical to include Islamic and Jewish mysticism in its pages.[42] But pragmatic reasons, understandable as they may be, are often unsatisfactory from a theoretical point of view, and make one wonder whether there is a full awareness of the conceptual problems they leave unsolved.

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[40] Mendes-Flohr, 'Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism'; Peleg, *Orientalism*; Davidson Kalmar and Penslar (eds.), *Orientalism and the Jews*.

[41] Mendes-Flohr, 'Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism', vii.

[42] Hanegraaff, 'Introduction', xii.

I have mentioned at the beginning von Stuckrad's criticism of Faivre's definition of Western esotericism. Faivre has responded to this criticism, by insisting on the need to avoid too broad definitions of esotericism.[43] This response as well, however, is only partly satisfactory, because it eludes the central problem: is it legitimate to talk about "Western" esotericism when in fact what one is talking about is only Christian and post-Christian forms of it? Eventually, one cannot help wondering if it would not be more consistent to use the latter label instead of "Western".

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[43] Faivre, 'Kocku von Stuckrad', 207–209.

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"THE SUFI SOCIETY FROM AMERICA": THEOSOPHY AND KABBALAH IN POONA IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY[1]

Boaz Huss

1. Introduction

Many years ago, when I was working on my PhD at the Gershom Scholem Library in Jerusalem, a small booklet caught my attention. It was a translation of the *Idra Zuta*, one of the most sanctified units of the *Zohar*, into Jewish Arabic. The volume, whose English title page read: '*Idra Zuta*, or the *Lesser Holy Assembly*, translated from the Aramaic Chaldee into Arabic (in Hebrew Characters) by Abraham David Ezekiel', was printed in Poona (Pune), India, in 1887, at the printing house of the translator.[2] On the front page of the treatise Scholem wrote in his handwriting: 'This book is very rare, as it was banned by the Rabbis of Bagdad, Jerusalem and Hebron, who pronounced the translation of the secrets of the *Idra* into Arabic a sacrilege, probably because they were anxious on account of its anthropomorphic imagery'.

I found some information about the book (which was the first of nine printed by the A.D. Ezekiel press in 1887–1888) and the controversy around it in Abraham Yaari's account of the Jewish press in Poona.[3] But I was still intrigued. Who was A.D. Ezekiel and what stimulated him to translate the *Idra Zuta* into Jewish Arabic? What

[1] I am grateful to Nurit Inbar and Sasson Somekh for helping me to translate the Jewish-Arabic texts included in this study. I would like to thank Mary Anderson, the secretary of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Randall C. Grubb, the leader of the Theosophical Society, Pasadena, and Jim Belderis, head librarian of the Theosophical Society, Pasadena, for sending me materials I could not find in the libraries in Israel. I am also grateful to Isaac Lubelsky, Don Karr, and Kocku von Stuckrad who read an earlier draft of this paper and offered important comments. The research for this study was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (grant no. 809/05).

[2] Scholem's copy of the book (which had been given to him by Isaia Oscar Rabinowitch in 1943), carries a dedication of A.D. Ezekiel to his brother: 'Presented to N.D. Ezekiel Esq. by his affectionate brother, the author, Poona, 4th January 1888'.

[3] Yaari, *The Hebrew Press in the Orient*, vol. 2, 83–85. See also Sassoon, *Ohel David*, 429–431.

was the cultural context and significance of his unique translation and printing enterprise that enraged the rabbinic authorities of Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Hebron? I sensed there was an interesting story behind this booklet but uncovered it only many years later.

A couple of years ago, while working on a study of the translations of the *Zohar*,[4] I returned to examine the Arabic rendition of the *Idra Zuta*. This time, I found the lead that directed me towards the story I was looking for. The pointer was the first (partial) translation of the *Zohar* into English, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, by Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers, one of the founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn. *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (based on Knorr von Rosenroth's translations of the *Zohar* in *Kabbala Denudata*)[5] was printed in London in 1887, and included renditions of three Zoharic units, including the *Idra Zuta* translated into English as *The Lesser Holy Assembly*.

Eureka! Two translations of the *Idra Zuta*, one made in London the other in Poona, both carrying the same English title, *The Lesser Holy Assembly*, both published in the same year, 1887! There must have been some connection between the two. The link, I suspected, was the Theosophical Society. I knew that Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers had been affiliated with the Theosophical Society,[6] whose international headquarters were established in the early 1880's in Bombay, India. Was Abraham David Ezekiel also related to the Theosophical Society?

A quick search in the online archives of the Theosophical Society revealed that A.D. Ezekiel had indeed been a prominent member of the Poona branch of the Theosophical Society and that in 1887 he had published an article entitled 'The Kabbalist from Jerusalem' in the journal *The Theosophist*. Later, I discovered the initials F.T.S.—Fellow of the Theosophical Society—in one of Ezekiel's publications, which I have traced in the British Library. From the introductions to two of his books, written in the Baghdadi Jewish Arabic dialect (which I read with the kind assistance of Ms. Nurit Inbar and Prof. Sasson Somekh),

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[4] Huss, 'Zohar Translations', 33–110. On the Arabic translation of the Idra Zuta see ibid., 55–57.

[5] Ibid., 57–58. Kilcher, 'Verhüllung und Enthüllung des Geheimnisses', 377–379.

[6] Mathers is referred to as a F.T.S. ('Fellow of the Theosophical Society') in *The Theosophist*, August 1887, 105. His wife, Moina, describes his meeting with Blavatsky in her introduction to the second edition of *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, XII. Previous to the founding of the Golden Dawn, Mathers was active in the Hermetic Society of Anna Kingsford, which branched off from the London lodge of the Theosophical Society in 1884. See Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 362.

I gleaned further information on his affiliation with the Theosophical Society, referred to by Ezekiel as 'the Sufi Society from America'!

In the present study, I intend to discuss A.D. Ezekiel's connection with the Theosophical Society and his printing enterprise. I will show that Ezekiel's interest in kabbalah followed on his joining the Theosophical Society, and that theosophy was of a major bearing on his perception of kabbalah and on his translation and printing venture. Finally, I will briefly discuss other examples of Jewish involvement and interest in the Theosophical Society, and the impact the Theosophical Society, as well as other related movements of the late nineteenth century, had on modern Jewish interest in kabbalah.

2. A.D. Ezekiel and the Theosophical Society

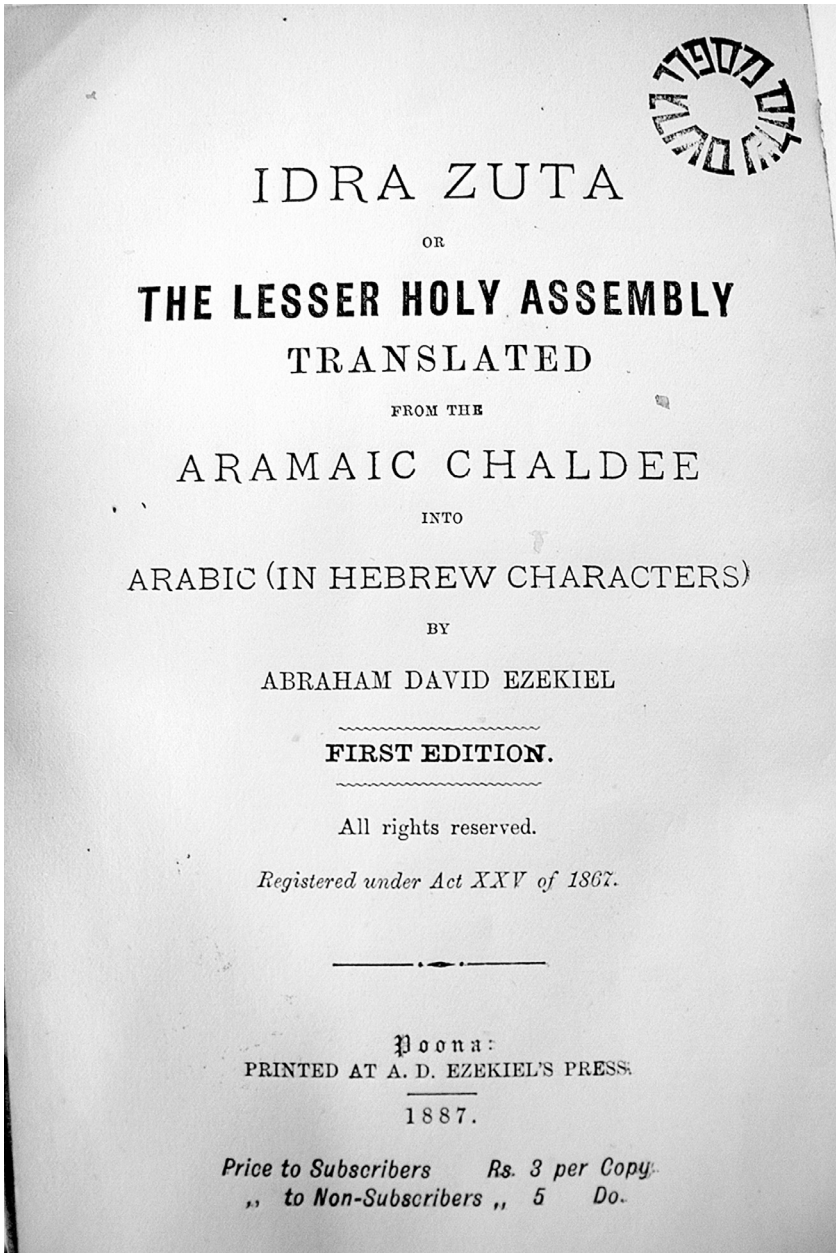
A.D. Ezekiel (his full name was Abraham David Salman Hai Ezekiel) was a member of a prominent family of the Jewish Baghdadi community residing in Bombay and Poona; he was related to the affluent Gabbai and Sassoon families.[7] His father, David Hai Ben Ezekiel Mazliah was a member of the *Beit David* benevolent Society in Bombay, and the owner of a large collection of books and manuscripts.[8]

It was probably in 1882 that A.D. Ezekiel joined the Theosophical Society. Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, the founders of the Theosophical Society, arrived in India in 1879, and established their headquarters in Bombay (afterwards, in 1882 it was moved to Adyar).[9] In 1882, Blavatsky and Olcott visited Poona, where, after two successful

[7] The term 'Baghdadi' (or, in Hebrew, '*Bavli*') refers not only to Jews who emigrated from Baghdad itself , but also to Jews who came to India from other Iraqi and Middle Eastern communities, and who in the nineteenth century established thriving communities in Calcutta, Bombay and Poona. On the Baghdadi community in India see Katz, *Who are the Jews of India*, 126–159.

[8] Ibid., 51, 195. On his library, which included rare manuscripts, see Sapir, *Even Sapir*, vol. 2, 41 (Sapir visited his house in Bombay in 1860). Manuscripts from his collection are extant today in the Shocken library (no. 37), and in the Sassoon collection (nos. 52, 550, 1049). On the *Beit David* Society, which was named after David Sassoon, see Ben-Yaacob, 'The Emigration of Babylonian Jews to India', 26–28. Abraham David's paternal grandfather Ezekiel Mazliah, emigrated from Basra to Bombay in the early nineteenth century (see: ibid., 51). His maternal grandfather was Moshe Ben Mordekahi Ezekiel Gabbai, from Bombay (see Sapir, *Even Sapir*, vol. 2, 41). Abraham David's sister, Kathrin, was married to Reuven Sassoon (see Ben-Yaacob, ibid., 51).

[9] On the early years of the Theosophical Society, see Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 1–29; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 277–331; von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 122–129.



IDRA ZUTA

OR

THE LESSER HOLY ASSEMBLY

TRANSLATED

FROM THE

ARAMAIC CHALDEE

INTO

ARABIC (IN HEBREW CHARACTERS)

BY

ABRAHAM DAVID EZEKIEL

FIRST EDITION.

All rights reserved.

Registered under Act XXV of 1867.

Poona:
PRINTED AT A. D. EZEKIEL'S PRESS.

1887.

Price to Subscribers Rs. 3 per Copy.
,, to Non-Subscribers ,, 5 Do.

Figure 1: Title Page of The Lesser Holy Assembly, A.D. Ezekiel's Press, Poona 1887 (courtesy of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, Gershom Scholem's Library).

lectures, they established a branch of the Theosophical Society, with twenty members. Judge N.D. Khandalvala related in his memoires of Mme. Blavatsky, published in 1929:

> In 1882 I asked them [Mme. Blavatsky and Col. Olcott] to come to Poona to my place, where I also invited a number of friends to whom I introduced them. Col. Olcott gave two public lectures at the City Town-Hall, and these were much appreciated. Afterwards a Branch Theosophical Society was established in Poona with 20 members. This Society still exists and is doing useful work. Thereafter Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott came to Poona on four different occasions, putting up twice at my place and twice at the house of the late Mr. A.D. Ezekiel.[10]

In the introduction to a book he published in 1888, Ezekiel gives an account of his joining the Theosophical Society, which he calls the 'Sufi Society': 'Ten years ago some people came from America who called themselves the Sufi Society. Their deeds and movement are famous amongst the Indian people. I met them and joined their society five years ago'.

Ezekiel was involved in the events surrounding the controversy over the Theosophical Society that erupted in 1884–1885, after the publication of incriminating letters Mme. Blavatsky allegedly wrote to her former aid, Emma Coulomb, and the critical report written by Richard Hodgson for The Society for Psychical Research (S.P.R.).[11]

In one of the Coulomb letters dated 24 October 1883 (first published in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, and *The Times of India* in September 1884), Blavatsky tells of a meeting A.D. Ezekiel arranged for her with his wealthy cousin, Jacob Sassoon, asking Mme. Coulomb to fabricate a message from the Mahatmas (the wondrous masters Blavatsky claimed to be in touch with), in order to secure a donation from Sassoon:

> Whether *something* succeeds or not I must try. Jacob Sassoon, the happy proprietor of a crore of rupees, with whose family I dined last night, is

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[10] Khandalvala, 'Madame H.P. Blavatsky As I Knew Her', 214. In an unsigned editorial note published in the supplement to *The Theosophist,* August 1882, it is mentioned that Damodar K. Mavalankar, the Manager of *The Theosophist*, visited Poona at stayed in A.D. Ezekiel's house. A picture of A.D. Ezekiel, with Blavatsky, Olcott, and other members of the Theosophical Society, which was taken during a convention in Bombay in 1882, can be found at: http://www.teosofiskakompaniet.net/DamodarKMavalankarPioneer_2003_.htm (accessed 16 September 2008).

[11] On the Coulomb affair and the Hodgson Report see: Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 87–95; Lubelsky, 'Celestial India', 129–136.

> anxious to become a Theosophist. He is ready to give 10,000 rupees to buy and repair the head-quarters, he said to Colonel (Ezekiel his cousin arranged all this) if only he saw a little phenomenon, got the assurance that the *Mahatmas* could hear what was said, or give him some *other sign of their existence (?!!)*. Well, this letter will reach you the 26th, Friday, will you go up to the Shrine and ask K.H. (or Christopholo)[12] to send me a telegraph that would reach me about 4 or 5 in the afternoon, same day worded thus: "Your conversation with Mr. Jacob Sassoon reached Master just now. Were the latter even to satisfy him still the doubter would hardly find the moral courage to connect himself with the Society. RAMALINGA DEB." If this reached me on the 26th even in the evening—it will still produce a tremendous impression.[13]

The publication of the Coulomb letters and the Hodgson report, which received worldwide attention, was a very serious blow to the Theosophical Society, causing a great stir amongst its followers. In a letter printed in the *Times of India*, Ezekiel denied the charges made by Emma Coulomb:

> In one of the letters my name has been mentioned, and you will allow me to make a few observations. I know in detail all the particulars of Madame Blavatsky's last visit to Poona. Some of the particulars have inaccurately been put into the alleged letter. The telegram referred to therein was not at all meant, even in the most distant way, to suggest the possession of phenomenal powers by Madame Blavatsky, and she never attempted to put before me or Mr. Sassoon the telegram in any such light. On carefully reading this paper I can plainly see that Madame Blavatsky could not have written the letter, much less have called for the telegram.[14]

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[12] K.H. is Koot Hoomi, one of two most prominent Mahatmas associated with the Theosophical Society (the other being Morya). The Shrine, which contained a portrait of Koot Hoomi, was located in the Society's headquarters in Adyar, and was the scene of many of the supernatural phenomena reported by members of the Theosophical Society.

[13] Patterson, 'The Collapse of Koot Hoomi', 204–205; Coulomb, *Some Account,* 69–70; Hodgson, 'Report', 211.

[14] *The Times of India*, 15 September, 6. The letter is cited in Price, 'First Report' (note on the Coulombs). A more detailed letter by Ezekiel, in which he gives his account of the 'Poona Telegram' was published in *The Times of India*, 18 September, 8. According to a letter Judge Khandalavala wrote to Blavatsky in December 1885, in which he tells of the reaction of Sassoon and Ezekiel to the publication of the Coloumb letters, he was responsible for sending (and writing?) these letters (from which we learn that one of A.D. Ezekiel brothers was also affiliated with the Theosophical Society): 'You are scarcely aware what a difficult task we had when the alleged letters appeared. Poor Sassoon wavering and ready to side with the public. Ezekiel's brother impatient to rush into print with a lot of matter collected haphazard from the conversation they had with you and scarcely knowing whether he was going to do you

Notwithstanding his defense of Blavatsky, Ezekiel was skeptical concerning some of the supernatural phenomena related with the Theosophical Society, especially, the mysterious appearance of letters from the Mahatmas. Dr. Franz Hartmann declared in his statement to the S.P.R. committee, that 'Mr. Ezekiel is a great sceptic, and he made me promise that if any occult phenomena should happen after my return to headquarters, I would let him know it'.[15] Ezekiel's skepticism concerning the wondrous appearance of the Mahatmas' letters is mentioned in Madame Coulomb's pamphlet:

> He was in company with others in Madame's apartment when a letter fell from the ceiling. Mr. Ezekiel formed the natural supposition that it must have been pulled down by some contrivance so he went and unburdened his heart to several Fellows of the Society giving this is a great secret.[16]

Ezekiel himself tells of his skepticism in a letter he wrote to the editor of The Times of India, after the publication of Coulomb's letters:

> Madame Blavatsky and several others knew but too well what an inveterate doubter I am regarding these phenomena and she must have been a thorough simpleton, and not the clever imposter she is represented to be if she called for the telegram to make a "tremendous impression" as alleged. It was only through me that she could hope to make any impression regarding the telegram upon Mr. Sassoon, but she knew my nature too well to expect anything out of me[17]

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or Sassoon harm. Ezekiel scarcely remembering all the details and I knowing nothing as to what actually happened during your two visits. In spite of all that, I made the best of the situation and sent two letters signed by Ezekiel to *The Times of India* which greatly restored the peace of mind of our fellows and sympathizers'. This letter was published in Barker, 'The Letters of H.P. Blavatsky to A.P. Sinnett', letter 93a.

[15] Printed in: Price 'First Report', appendix 37.

[16] Coulomb, *Some Account*, 73. Hodgson, 'Report', 249. According to Coulomb, Blavatsky, who heard of Ezekiel's suspicions, gave her husband orders to dismantle the device through which the letters were pulled down (for Blavatsky's comment on this, see Gomes, 'Blavatsky's Annotations'. This passage is cited by Hodgson, 'Report', 249. Hodgson writes that Ezekiel confirmed Coulomb's account. He also says that the details Ezekiel gave him concerning a communication he received from a *Mahatma* corroborated his suspicions of Blavatsky, but that Ezekiel did not give him permission to publish them. This is mentioned also in the report of the general meeting of the S.P.R from July 1885, found at: http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/spr62685.htm ('Mr. Hodgson described in detail the appearance of one of these envelopes, which showed clear traces of its having been opened surreptitiously; and mentioned a case described to him by Mr. Ezekiel, a Theosophist at Poona, which corroborated his own conclusions, but the details of which Mr. Ezekiel was unwilling to have published'; accessed 16 September 2008).

[17] *The Times of India*, 18 September, 8.

Blavatsky, who held anti-Semitic prejudices,[18] was infuriated by Ezekiel's skepticism. Coulomb relates how Blavatsky ignored Ezekiel when she passed through Poona, in February 1884:

> On route to Bombay the party was met at Poona by Mr. Khandalvala [...] and by Mr. Ezekiel also a Fellow of the Society. This last gentleman uttered a cry of joy when he saw the train stop saying: 'Oh, here is Madam'. But when she heard his voice she told me in a loud whisper and in French: 'Ne laissez pas entrer ce C [...] de juif; Je ne veux pas le voir. Qu'il aille au diable! Dites lui que je dors' [Do not let that [...] of a Jew come in. I will not see him, Let him go to [...]! Tell him that I am sleeping].[19]

Blavatsky, in her comments on Coulomb's account, denied she had said that, but admitted she did not want to see Ezekiel, because of his treacherous behavior: 'It is true I did not want to see him & told so to Khandalavala & others. But that was because Mme C. had told me that he had behaved treacherously that he pretended to believe, & then told his friends I was a swindler'.[20]

Notwithstanding his skepticism, and the tension with Blavatsky, Ezekiel remained a member of the Theosophical Society, and, as we saw above, defended Blavatsky after the publication of the Coulomb letters.[21] In 1885, Colonel Olcott spent a few days in Ezekiel's household in Poona. In his *Old Diary Leaves*, he gave a colorful description of his visit:

> I passed on to Poona with our colleague the late Mr. Ezekiel, a member of the great family of the Sassoons and an ardent Kabbalist. At his house I met a Rabbi Silbermann of Jerusalem and his wife [...] He wore the Oriental costume as also did Mr. Ezekiel senior, who lived in the other half of the little house [...] The old gentleman and I were sitting together one day, he watching me so closely that I thought something must be wrong about my dress, but he soon undeceived me. Beckoning me mysteriously into his bedroom, he took from a press a complete Jewish costume [...] and asked me to put them on. When I had done

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[18] Isaac Lubelsky described Blavatsky's attitude to the Jews as 'light anti-Semitism'. See Lubelsky, 'Celestial India', 153 (see also ibid., 150). In 1877 Blavatsky sent a letter to the New York Times, in which she defended the Russian authorities' attitude to the Jews. See ibid, 112 (the letter can be found at: http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/JewsInRussia.htm; accessed 16 September 2008).

[19] Coulomb, *Some Account*, 78.

[20] Gomes, 'Blavatsky's Annotations'.

[21] See also Coulomb's remark 'So I will leave him [i.e. Ezekiel] in Poona where he later busies himself to throw his stone at the Coulomb's' (Coulomb, *Some Account*, 78).

> so, he led me by the hand along the verandah to the adjoining rooms, intimating that he was going to pass me off as a Jew. Entering into the spirit of the joke, I gravely saluted the Jerusalem family after the Eastern fashion [...] The aged Rabbi [...] saluted me with great respect [...] He then began putting me a lot of questions in Hebrew, and refused to believe that I was a mere Gentile, when young Ezekiel, laughing heartily at his bewilderment, told them who I was [...] His wife [...] looked me over most scrutinisingly, and confirmed her husband in his belief of my Hebraic origins. "Why" said she to the maid, "who can deny it? See, has he not the *shekinah*?" meaning the shining aura the *tejas* as the Hindus call it. Both the Ezekiels were immensely amused at the success of the old gentleman's trick [...][22]

In July 1887, Ezekiel published in *The Theosophist* a story entitled 'The Kabbalist of Jerusalem'. The story tells of a friend of Ezekiel's, a Jewish merchant, a native of Jerusalem, a skeptic who did not believe in magic, the future life, or the kabbalah.[23] Yet, through a chance meeting in India with a mysterious woman with supernatural psychic powers (identifying herself as Sarah, a Jewess born in Constantinople), he becomes interested in kabbalah and theosophy. In his quest for occult knowledge, relates Ezekiel, his friend met with a medium in Paris, and later, after a long search, with an old kabbalist from the *Beth-El* synagogue in Jerusalem:

> He saw before him a thin-faced, white-bearded old man, clad in a ragged national costume, and squatted upon a mat in the darkest corner of the synagogue [...] his appearance was not that of one asleep, but rather of one whose attention was fixed upon an inner world. A holy calm seemed to have settled over him, and this internal beatitude made Rabbi Jacob think he saw upon his face and round his head that Shechina, or soul shine, which is believed to appear upon the face of the true seer [...][24]

The *Beth-El* kabbalist agrees to teach him kabbalah, only after his making a pilgrimage to hidden kabbalistic masters in Tunis. The story ends with the old kabbalist's declaration that the 'doctrines promulgated by

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[22] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. 3, 307–308.

[23] In the story the Rabbi is called Jacob, but Ezekiel says it was not his real name. It is possible that this character in Ezekiel's story is based on Rabbi Silbermann, whom Olcott met at Ezekiel's house in 1885. Interestingly, on the copy of 'The Kabbalist of Jerusalem' that Ms. Mary Anderson, the International Secretary of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, has kindly sent me, I found a handwritten note: 'Col's Diary for July 21st, at Bombay—1887 "Visit from Mr. Moses, the original of Rabbi Jacob in Ezekiel's story in the July Theosophist—'The Kabbalist of Jerusalem'".

[24] Ezekiel, 'Kabbalist of Jerusalem', 600.

the Theosophical Society are identical with those taught by the Kabbalists of our race'.[25]

In late 1887, Ezekiel opened a printing press in Poona, where, during the years 1887–1888, he printed nine books, which I will discuss in more detail below. In the supplement to *The Theosophist*, January 1888, Ezekiel appears on the list of the general council of the Theosophical Society. In 1892, his name is amongst other members of the Indian branch of the Theosophical Society on a notice concerning a prospective lecture tour of Annie Besant.[26] In July 1897 *The Theosophist* announced: 'We regret very much to record the departure from this life of brother A.D. Ezekiel [...] a very old and well known member of the Poona Branch'.[27]

3. A.D. Ezekiel's Press in Poona

At the end of 1887, A.D. Ezekiel opened a printing press in Poona.[28] His first publication, printed in December 1887,[29] was the translation of the *Idra Zuta* into Jewish Arabic (printed together with the Aramaic original, line on top of line). The *Idra Zuta* (the small assembly) and the *Idra Raba* (the large assembly) are special, highly revered, units of the zoharic corpus, characterized by their anthropomorphic depiction of the divine countenances (*parzufim*). The *Idra Zuta* relates the hidden secrets of the divine countenances, and their sexual relationships,

[25] Ibid., 601.

[26] *Lucifer: A Theosophical Magazine*, vol. 9, 1891–1892, 1.

[27] *The Theosophist* 18, June 1897, supplement, 35.

[28] Previously, in 1885, a lithography entitled *The Life of Moses in Egypt*, in Jewish Arabic cursive handwriting, was published in Bombay by S.A Ezekiel. See Yaari, *Jewish Press*, 60. Possibly, this is the work of A.D. Ezekiel, whose full name was Abraham Suliman David Ezekiel. A previous Jewish printing house, which served the *Bene Israel* community, and printed only two books, operated in Poona during the year 1870. Four more books, in Hebrew, English and Marathi, were printed by Vital Shakharam Arnighorty, Suvidya Prakash and Shivaji Presses, for the *Bene Israel* community in Poona during the years 1873–1878. On the *Bene Israel* community see Katz, *Who are the Jews of India*, 91–125.

[29] The preface to the book is dated 13 December 1887 (27 Kislev 5648). A printed invitation to become a subscriber to the forthcoming *Idra Zuta*, with a specimen page of the print, was issued by Ezekiel in September 1887 (see Sassoon, *Ohel David*, 430). As mentioned above, the copy of the *Idra Zuta* found in Scholem's library, carries a dedication to the author's brother from 4 January 1888.

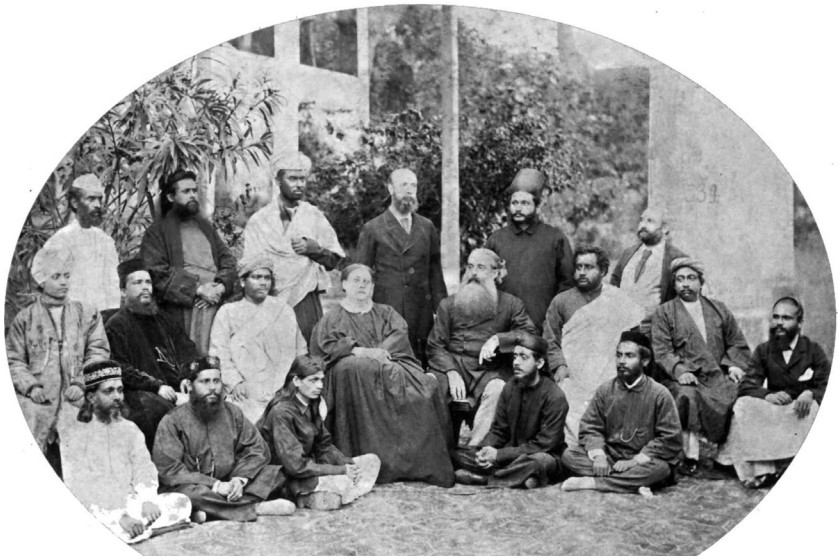

Figure 2: Convention Group, Bombay 1882, A.D. Ezekiel standing, 1st to the right. Sitting in the middle, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. http://www.teosofiskakompaniet.net/DamodarKMavalankarPioneer_2003_ .htm (courtesy of Teosofiska Kompaniet).

which were revealed by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the protagonist of the *Zohar*, on his deathbed.[30]

A.D. Ezekiel dedicated his translation of the *Idra Zuta* to the philanthropist in the Baghdadi community in Calcutta, Mazal Tov, wife of the wealthy merchant Elijah David Joseph Ezra.[31] In his introduction, Ezekiel declares that he does not intend to reveal the secrets of the *Zohar*, but only to explain the literary meaning of its words for those who read the *Zohar* without understanding its meaning. Ezekiel is referring to the custom of the ritualistic reading, on special occasions, of the *Zohar* in general, and of the *Idrot* in particular, common in Jewish communities, as from the eighteenth century.[32] In reference to the radical anthropomorphic imagery of the *Idra* and possibly, in anticipation of the controversy that would follow the printing of the translated

[30] See Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 154.

[31] On the activities of Elijah David Joseph Ezra and his wife, see Ben-Yaacob. 'Immigration of Babylonian Jews', 88–90.

[32] Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky*, 251–254, 261–264; idem, 'Sefer ha-Zohar', 295–300.

Idra, Ezekiel cites at length a passage from Rabbi Hayim Vital's (chief disciple of the 16th century kabbalist, R. Isaac Luria) *Shaar ha-Hakdamot* asserting that the zoharic (as well as biblical) anthropomorphism is a parable that should not be understood literally.[33]

Nonetheless, the translation of the *Idra Zuta* into Jewish Arabic did stir a fierce controversy against A.D. Ezekiel. Objections to the translation of the *Idra* were voiced by the Rabbis of Baghdad in a letter dated 5 January 1888 (21 Tevet 5648), published in the *Jewish Gazette Paerah*, in Calcutta.[34] In another letter, printed in the same periodical, the sages of Baghdad emphatically prohibited the publication of such a translation.[35] On 24 February 1888, a letter signed by both Rabbi Raphael Meir Panigel, the Sephardic chief Rabbi (*Haham Bashi*) of Palestine, and his son in law (who later succeeded him) Rabbi Yaacov Shaul Eliashar, was issued in the Jerusalem Hebrew newspaper, *Havatzelet*:

> Our soul has grieved to hear that the two *Idrot*, *Idra Rabba* and *Idra Zuta*,[36] were printed in the Arabic language in the town of Poona, a town in India. Who would believe such bad news? Who would not be upset and outraged by such a great sacrilege (*hilul ha-Shem*); whose hair will not stand on end when he sees such an evil thing, that the hidden secrets reach the hands of the multitude and the ignorant [...] Woe is us! How did the holy Torah become, God forbid, a scorn and derision for the nations! How did villains come and profane it! [...] Woe is us! How was such a great profanation committed in our days! We are thus obliged to decree in the power of the Divine Presence (*Shechina*) which never left the Wailing Wall, and in the power of the holy *Torah*, that no son

[33] See *Shaar ha-Hakdamot*, 2. A similar admonition concerning the anthropomorphism of the *Idra Rabba* and *Idra Zuta* is printed by way of introduction to the *Idra Rabba*, in almost all of the Zohar editions, since its first printing, in Mantua 1558.

[34] Cited in Sassoon, *Ohel David*, 429. According to Sassoon, the letter was printed in *The Jewish Gazette Paerah,* 10 (34). As the microfilm of the tenth volume of *The Jewish Gazette*, from the year 1888, has disappeared from the Jerusalem National library, I was not able to check the original letter (as well as many other letters concerning the printing of the *Idra Zuta* from that year). According to a letter of Ezekiel to Rabbi Meir Penigel, which I will discuss below, the Rabbis of Baghdad did not see the manuscript of his translation, but rather, a translation of the *Idra Rabba*, which was prepared by a friend of his.

[35] Cited by Sassoon, ibid., 430, from volume 10 (37).

[36] Actually, Ezekiel printed only the *Idra Zuta*. The Rabbis of Hebron, who also issued a decree against Ezekiel thought he printed the two Idrot. Both the decrees were issued before the Rabbis saw the book itself, an issue Ezekiel complained about in his response that will be discussed below.

> of Israel should be allowed to read the above mentioned printed *Idrot*, in other languages, under any circumstance. Furthermore, every person called by the name of Israel, has the obligation to make an effort to keep and hide the translations in a place where no foreign hand can reach them, and eliminate them from the world. We also decree, sustained by the power of the court, that Rabbi Abraham David Suliman David Hai [i.e., A.D. Ezekiel. B.H.] must make an effort to collect and conceal them in a hidden place (*gnizah*) […][37]

A similar decree, using even harsher terminology, signed by Rabbi Elijah Mani, and four other Sephardic Rabbis of Hebron, was published in *Havazelet* two weeks later (11 March).[38]

A.D. Ezekiel did not recoil in the face of his being denounced by the great Sephardic rabbinic authorities of his time. During 1888, he published several letters in *The Jewish Gazette Paerah*, defending his translation and attacking his opponents.[39] On 20 July 1888 (12 Av 5648), Ezekiel sent a communication to the Chief Rabbi, Raphael Meir Panigel, in which he defies his ban, and defends his translation:

> I have come to kiss the hands of my teacher and Rabbi, the crown of my head, to ask his permission to speak about the issue of the holy *Idra Zuta*, which I have dared to approach in the glorious endeavor of translating it into the Arabic language. I have translated it into pure and clean language, interlinear, the language of the *Idra* on top, and the Arab language beneath, in fine craftsmanship. Therefore I have sent his honor two copies, so he can see the beauty of my endeavor and pursue its introduction.
>
> Now, when I received volume 18 of the *Havazelet*, and saw that his honor wrote that it (the translation of the *Idra*) is forbidden and must be put in a hidden place etc., I was bewildered. As my work had not yet

[37] *Havazelet* 18 (18), 24 February 1888 (12 Adar 5648), 138–139. Reprinted in Grayevsky, *Zikharon le-Hovevim Rishonim*, vol. 15, 1928; See also Yaari, *The Hebrew Press in the Orient*, 84.

[38] *Havazelet* 18 (20), 11 March 1888 (28 Adar 5648), 156–157. Reprinted in Grayevsky, ibid., 204. Interestingly Grayevsky mentions another attempt to translate the Zohar into Arabic by one Moreno Cohen of Jaffa; the venture was forbidden by the Sephardic chief Rabbi of Palestine (*ha-Rishon le-Zion*). Additional letters against Ezekiel's translation, by Rabbi Solomon Twena of Calcutta, and other anonymous authors, were printed in issues of *The Jewish Gazette Paerah* in 1888. See: Sassoon, *Ohel David*, 430.

[39] Sassoon, ibid. According to Sassoon, in these letters, Ezekiel cited form the works of Hayim Vital in order to defend his venture, gave instances of earlier translations of Kabbalistic works, relied on the translation of the Talmud into French, and threatened one of his correspondents with an action according to the Indian Penal Code.

> reached his honor, and he had not looked at it, how could he pronounce a verdict upon me? Who has ever heard of such a thing, that a verdict should be pronounced not in the presence of the accused? As his honor has not seen the book, not even part of it, nor read in its introduction about the intention of the author, how could he speak, moreover write, to disgrace me in the above mentioned *Havazelet?*[40]

Ezekiel writes that in his opinion, it is not only not forbidden to translate the *Idra*, but rather it is: 'a religious obligation (*mizvah*) to study and teach and write and translate it into Arabic, which is the accustomed language amongst us'. He cites a passage from Hayim Vital's introduction to *Etz Hayim* to the effect that it is a *mizvah* to reveal the kabbalistic secrets of the *Zohar*, as this revelation will bring forth redemption;[41] he adduces several examples of kabbalistic texts written in foreign languages, or translated into them.[42]

Ezekiel writes, defiantly, that Panigel's decree did not achieve its goal, but on the contrary, enhanced the sales of the book, which was now out of stock. He adds that he refused requests to reprint the translation of the *Idra*, because he was busy translating the rest of the *Zohar*! Ezekiel concludes his letter by requesting Panigel to withdraw his decree, and asserting his independence from the rabbinic authorities in Baghdad (whom he blames for inciting Panigel against him):

> Thus I request his highness that if the truth be with me, he should publish in *Havazelet* that it [the translation of the *Idra*] is permitted, and furthermore, that it is a *Mitzvah* to read in it […] And my master and Rabbi should also know that the sages and Rabbis of Baghdad have written to the dignitaries of India concerning this affair, thinking they had authority over me. Praise God, I am a free person, and they don't have power over me. Yet, if my master will teach me the source for his verdict

[40] The letter was printed, from manuscript, by Grayevsky, 'On the translation of the Idrot to Arabic', 15. Parts of the letter were reprinted in Yaari, *Hebrew Press in the Orient*, 84. Ezekiel writes that he published a previous letter to Panigel in *The Jewish Gazette*, issue 43, but did not receive an answer to his complaints.

[41] On this perception, that became widespread in the sixteenth century, see Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky*, 224–226. On this idea in Vital's introduction to *Etz Hayyim*, see ibid., 239–240 (Ezekiel does not bring an exact quote from Vital, but probably refers to his words in the introduction to *Etz Hayyim*, 9–13).

[42] Ezekiel relies on the mention of such books in the seventeenth century Hebrew bibliography, *Siftei Yeshenim* by Shabbtai Bass. He mentions the works of Abraham Herrera that were written originally in Spanish, and *Sefer Keter Shem Tov* of Abraham of Cologne, that was translated into Latin.

> why it is forbidden and why it must be hidden away, I will try to do that, and will obey his will.[43]

During the months of the controversy over the printing of the translation of the *Idra Zuta*, Ezekiel continued his printing venture, including the publication of other kabbalistic texts, translated into Arabic. Yet, he did not print any other zoharic texts (although, as we saw, he mentions that he did continue to translate the Zohar).

In February 1888, Ezekiel printed an *Introduction to the Kabalah*, the only English text he published in his printing press. This book is a reprint of a text entitled 'Introduction to the Cabalah', published in London in 1845–1846, in the Journal *The Voice of Israel*, propagated by 'Jews who believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah', edited by the convert Reverend Ridley Haim Herschell. The 'Introduction to the Cabalah' that was published in the *Voice of Israel*, and reprinted by Ezekiel, was an English translation (probably prepared by Herschell) of excerpts from the book on Jewish sects by the Jewish scholar, Peter Baer (*Geschichte, Lehren und Meinungen aller bestandenen und noch bestehenden religiösen Sekten der Juden und der Geheimlehre oder Kabbala*, published in Brünn in 1822–1823).

Ezekiel, who in this book added the initials F.T.S. to his name, addressed the book to fellow members of the Theosophical Society in India, who were interested in kabbalah:

> Since the formation of the Theosophical society several enquiries have been made as to the teaching of the Kabbalah. With a view therefore to give the general reader some idea of the subject I have thought it fit to reprint without any corrections or additions the 'Introduction to the kabalah' as it appeared in the *Voice of Israel*, leaving it to some future time to write something more on the subject. Should the introduction excite sufficient interest—amongst the readers in this country—to do so.

All the other books that Ezekiel printed that year were in Jewish Arabic, and addressed to the Jewish Baghdadi community. In April 1888 he published *Natural Philosophy,* a text book on physics for schoolchildren.[44] During that year, he also produced translations of *Song of Songs*, and of *The Book of Creation (Sepher Yezirah)*, a fundamental

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[43] Grayevsky, 'On the Translation of the Idrot to Arabic', 16.

[44] *Natural Philosophy, Matter and Motion (catechism) in Arabic (in Hebrew characters). For the use of schools.* The book is dedicated to Moshe Avi Aziz of Calcutta.

work of the kabbalistic tradition,[45] as well as two Arabic tales, *Dewan El Mathee* and *Dewan El Rahban*.[46]

Toward the end of 1888, Ezekiel printed two more kabbalistic texts in translation. In October a Jewish-Arabic translation of the first part of Yosef Ergas' *Shomer Emunim*,[47] an early eighteenth century kabbalistic text (written in the form of a disputation), whose main argument is that kabbalistic imagery, especially, the Lurianic doctrine of the *Zimzum* (i.e., Divine contraction), should be understood metaphorically, rather than literarily.[48]

Ezekiel dedicated this book to the editor of the journal *Paerah*, Elijah Moshe Dweck ha-Cohen, and to other members of 'our group' in India and other places, who stood by him in his struggle to 'overthrow the yoke of the priestcraft', during the controversy over the publication of the *Idra Zuta*.[49] In the introduction, Ezekiel refers again to this controversy, expressing his hope that the publication of *Shomer Emunim* would not encounter the objections of the rabbinic authorities, who 'opposed the publication of the *Idra Zuta,* for no reason'. As mentioned above, in his introduction to *Shomer Emunim*, Ezekiel tells how he became a member of the Theosophical Society, and says that because he saw that much of the knowledge of the theosophists

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[45] *Cabticum Canticorum, or the Song of Solomon, Interlineary Translation from the Herbrew into Arabic (in Hebrew Characters)*, by Abraham David Ezekiel, Poona, 1888; *Sepher Yesirah or The Book of Creation, Interlineary Translation from the Hebrew into Arabic (in Hebrew Characters)*, by Abraham David Ezekiel, Poona, 1888. A reprint of these texts, and a short discussion of them, can be found at Allan D. Coreé's website: http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/jatexts/Text114.html; http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/jatexts/Text118.html; http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/jatexts/Text118.pdf (all accessed 16 September 2008).

[46] *Dewan El Rahban: an Arabic tale in Arabic (in Hebrew Characters)* edited by Abraham David Ezekiel, Poona 1888; *Dewan El Mathee, an Arabic tale in Arabic (in Hebrew Characters)* edited by Abraham David Ezekiel, Poona 1888. I have not seen the last two publications, which are mentioned in Yaari, *Hebrew Press*, 89; Hill, 'Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic and Marathi Jewish Printing in India'.

[47] The English title page reads: 'Shomer Emuneem (First Argument), a Kabbalistic Controversy Translated from Hebrew in Arabic (in Hebrew Characters). For the use of students of Kabala'.

[48] On *Shomer Emunim*, and the Kabbalistic perception of Yosef Ergas see: Goetschel, 'La Justification de la Kabbale dans le Shomer Emunim of Joseph Ergas'; Idem, 'La Notion de Simsum dans le Shomer Emunim de Joseph Ergas'; Hansel, 'La Lettre ou L'allegorie, La Controverse sur l'interpretation du Simsum dans la Cabale Italienne du XVIII siecle'.

[49] Ezekiel writes the words 'Yoke' and 'Priestcraft' in English.

was based on kabbalah, he had begun studying the Lurianic canon *Ez Hayyim*:[50]

> But once I started reading it, I could not understand a word of it. At that time, one of my friends from our community, Rabbi Sassoon Abdullah Somekh, was here. When he saw me struggling to understand this book, he suggested that I consult his father in Baghdad. I wrote a letter to the famous sage Rabbi Abdullah Somekh in Baghdad, and asked him to guide me how to understand this book. The sage directed me to the book *Shomer Emunim,* the first part of which I have now translated.

A month later, in November 1888, Ezekiel printed *The Sermon of True Faith* (*Drush be-Inian ha-Emunah ha-Amitit*).[51] This sermon, first published at the end of Isaac Lupis's *Kur Mezraf ha-Emunot u-Mareh ha-Emet*,[52] in Metz, 1847, is a summary of *Drush Boker le-Avraham,* written by the 17th century Sabbatean theologian Michael Cardozo.[53] In the introduction, Ezekiel writes that he had decided to translate and print this short work because he found that it could be beneficial towards the understanding of the kabbalistic books he had already published, and those he intended to publish in the future. Here too Ezekiel refers to the controversy against him, and asserts that the study of kabbalah is permitted in his time. He says that since he had translated the *Idrot*, many people started studying kabbalah, and many urged him to print more kabbalistic books.

Nonetheless, the translation of *The Sermon of True Faith* was the last kabbalistic text Ezekiel translated and printed. Possibly, he succumbed to the pressure of the rabbinic authorities, or gave up his printing venture for other reasons. After a year of intensive activity, no more books were printed by the A.D. Ezekiel Press in Poona.

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[50] Probably, Ezekiel studied the version of Shmuel Vital, *Shmonah Shearim*. He refers to it as 'Etz Hayyim with Shmonah Shearim'.

[51] The English title page reads: 'A Sermon on true faith, Copied from "Kor Musref" & Translated from Hebrew in Arabic (in Hebrew Characters). For the use of students of Kabbalah'.

[52] On the book, a Jewish Polemic against Christianity, written in Aleppo, Syria, in 1695 see Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 16.

[53] According to Yehuda Liebes, the *Sermon of True Faith* was written by Cardozo himself. See Liebes, *On Sabbateanism and its Kabbalah*, 44–46. Nisim Yosha, suggested that the abbreviation of *Boker Le-Avraham* was prepared by Lupis. See ibid., 46.

4. Theosophy and Kabbalah

Although A.D. Ezekiel had undoubtedly been aware of kabbalah pervious to his joining the Theosophical Society, his interest in it was stimulated by his encounter with Theosophy, and the theosophical perspective shaped his views on kabbalah and his efforts to translate and publish kabbalistic texts.

At the end of the nineteenth century Madame Blavatsky and other members of the Theosophical Society were interested in kabbalah, as they were in other esoteric traditions. Their knowledge was based on the Christian kabbalistic tradition, on its adaptation by nineteenth-century occultists (mostly, by Eliphas Lévi), and on various nineteenth-century scholarly works on kabbalah (especially, Christian Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah*, published in London in 1865).

According to Colonel Olcott's memories, the first resolution of the Theosophical Society, founded in New York, on 8 September, 1875, was 'that a society be formed for the study and elucidation of Occultism, the Cabbala, etc'.[54] Kabbalah played an important role in the writings of Blavatsky, especially, in the *Secret Doctrine.* As Gershom Scholem suggested (following the Jewish Theosophist Leonard Bosman), the mysterious *Book Dzyan*, which her *Secret Doctrine* is allegedly based on, is dependent in title and content, on the zoharic *Siphra Dezniuta.*[55] Yet, her attitude to kabbalah was quite ambivalent, as revealed especially in her article 'The Kabalah and the Kabalists at the Close of the Nineteenth Century', published in *Lucifer* in 1892, in which she wrote:

> In short [that] no Kabalistic work now extant among the Western nations can display any greater mysteries of nature than those which Ezra & Co., and the later co-workers of Moses de Leon, desired to unfold [...] And what they do reveal hardly repays the trouble of passing one's life in studying it.[56]

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[54] Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, vol. 1, 121. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 27.

[55] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 398–399 (note 398).

[56] Blavatsky, *The Kabalah and The Kabalists*, 12–13. According to Don Karr: 'HPB made it clear that she believed that: A. "Kabbalah" was inferior to "our (Eastern) septenary system". B. Kabbalistic writings had "all suffered corruptions in their content by sectarian editors". C. There was "evidence of occult knowledge in the West" even though HPB saw fit to expose "[its] limitations" and point to "the misleading character of Kabbalistic Symbolism".' Karr, 'Christian Kabbalah in English'.

Interest in kabbalah was especially prominent amongst members of the London lodge of the Theosophical Society, who, because of their preference of Western esoteric tradition, branched off into the Hermetic Society and the Order of the Golden Dawn. As mentioned earlier, in 1887 one of future founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn, Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers, published the first English translations from the Zohar, including the *Idra Zuta*. In the same year, William Wynn Westcott, another fellow of the London branch of the Theosophical Society, and a founding member of the Order of the Golden Dawn, issued a translation of *Sepher Yetzirah*.[57]

It was the interest and knowledge of kabbalah amongst the theosophists which prompted Ezekiel to study, and later translate and print kabbalistic texts. In his introduction to *Shomer Emunim*, he relates:

> Ten years ago some people came from America who called themselves the Sufi Society [...] I met them and joined their society five years ago. I have seen from their writings that much of their movement was based on our Kabbalah. I desired to understand the wisdom of Kabbalah, and asked people to direct me to the books of this knowledge.

He continues and says that the fact that non Jews were experts in kabbalah prompted him to teach, translate and print kabbalistic texts, for the benefit of the Jewish community:

> The members of the Sufi Society that came to Bombay were not Jewish. I was very much astonished that foreign people were experts in our wisdom of Kabbalah, while we, the Jews, were barred from it. So, after much effort and sleepless nights, I studied a little of it, and what I have studied, I will reveal to my brethren so that they can enter and study this knowledge, and this translation will help them to do so.

As suggested above, Ezekiel's choice to translate the *Idrot* was influenced by the late nineteenth century interest of theosophists and other Western esoteric circles who were acquainted with it through the Latin translation in Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbalah Denudata*.[58] This is probably true also of Ezekiel's choice to translate *Sepher Yezira*, another work central amongst Christian kabbalists and occultists. As

[57] Westcott, *Sepher Yetzirah*.
[58] See Kilcher, 'Verhüllung und Enthüllung des Geheimnisses'.

mentioned above, both the *Idrot* and *Sepher Yezira* were translated into English by fellows of the Theosophical Society in 1887.[59]

Ezekiel's theosophical perspective on kabbalah was probably the reason for his intriguing choice to reprint the *Sermon of True Faith*. This short text succinctly summarizes the unique Sabbatean kabbalistic theology of Abraham Cardozo (described by Scholem as a 'Gnostic dualism with a reversal of evaluation'),[60] whose main theological argument as formulated in *The Sermon of True Faith* was: 'That the creator is not the First Cause, but rather, a being emanated for him, which is the God of Israel, and it is He who should be worshiped'.[61] Ezekiel's theosophically inclined mind was probably pleased by the assertion of the author of the *Sermon of True Faith* (be it Cardozo or Lupis): 'The true faith which I reveal to you […] was forgotten amongst us, and for a thousand years nobody has known its essence and truth, and we have been, like the gentiles, misled in the knowledge of the Divine'.[62]

Ezekiel's theosophical perception of kabbalah comes to the fore in his article, 'The Kabbalist from Jerusalem'. Sarah, the Jewish 'seeress' who is described in the story as having 'transcendental powers' performs a 'phenomenon of a physical character, to prove the control of the human spirit over the correlations of matter'.[63] The phenomenon, a miraculous transportation of a Jerusalem manuscript to India, is reminiscent of the 'phenomena' performed by Mme. Blavatsky. The kabbalist of *Beth El* is also described as having psychic powers, and he, like the hidden kabbalists of Tunis, is depicted similarly to the adepts and the *mahatmas* of the Theosophical Society. In the conclusion of the story, the Jerusalem kabbalist affirms that kabbalah and Theosophy are identical:

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[59] Other translations of these texts were published at the same period. In 1887, Eliphas Lévi's disciple, Papus, published a French translation of *Sepher Yezirah*. In 1888, Isaac Myer included an English translation of the beginning of the *Idra Rabba* in his *Qabbalah, the Philosophic Writings of Ibn Gebirol*. Eliphas Levi translated the *Idra Raba* into French already in the 1870's, but his translation *Les Livre des Splendeurs* was published only in 1894. In 1895, Henri Château published a translation of all the Zoharic texts that were included in *Kabbalah Denudata*. See Huss, 'Translations of the Zohar', 57–64.

[60] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 399.

[61] For a summary of Cardozo's Theology see: Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 396–400; Halperin, *Abraham Miguel Cardozo*, 60–70.

[62] The author's discussion concerning the beliefs of the Indians and the Chinese may also have been of interest to him.

[63] Ezekiel, 'Kabbalist of Jerusalem', 599.

> 'There is but one God and one truth' said he. 'Whosoever may be the teacher, he can but teach the Universal Doctrine. There are such adepts in the Himalayas, as there are others of the same kind in Egypt and other parts of the world. God has not abandoned any family of his children to their own ignorance and weakness; He would not be a true Father, if that were so. These doctrines promulgated by the Theosophical Society are identical with those taught by the Kabbalists of our race; there is the same rule of life, the same goal to reach. The World has never been without such teachers, nor will ever be. In the darkest night of superstition and ignorance, in the deepest depths of social degradation, there are always living witnesses to the truth'.[64]

5. Concluding Remarks

The story of A.D. Ezekiel and the 'Sufis from America' illustrates the impact of the Theosophical Society and related esoteric movements on the interest of Jews in kabbalah in the modern era. I would like to conclude with a survey of some additional examples of Jews who joined the Theosophical Society and whose interest in and perception of kabbalah were influenced by theosophy.

Many Jews joined the Theosophical Society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[65] and in 1925, at the Jubilee congress of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, the Association of the Hebrew Theosophists (A.H.T.) was founded.[66] In an appeal to the members of the Theosophical Society, Gaston Polack from Brussels, who was elected as the president of the A.H.T., declared that 'the association proposes to bring to light all the hidden spiritual riches of the Jewish religion'.[67] Between the years 1926–1932, the American section of the A.H.T. published a Journal, *The Jewish Theosophist*, edited by Henry C. Samuels.

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[64] Ibid., 601.

[65] Amongst the founders of the Association of Hebrew Theosophists, in 1925, were Jewish Theosophists from Bulgaria, Egypt, Belgium, India, and Iraq. See Bosman, *Plea for Judaism*, 23. Interestingly, Gandhi tells in his Autobiography that he became acquainted with members of the Theosophical Society in South Africa, through his Jewish associate Lewis W. Rich, who was a member of the Society; see Gandhi, *Autobiography*, 138.

[66] On that occasion, the foundation stone for a future synagogue was laid by Annie Besant. See Polack, 'Association of Hebrew Theosophists', 103–104; Besant, 'On the Watch Tower', 553. Bosman, *Plea for Judaism*, 23.

[67] Polack, 'Association of Hebrew Theosophists', 103–104.

At the same period, a branch of the Theosophical Society was founded in Basra, Iraq, by Jews who had previously resided in India.[68] In 1931, following political strife in the community, the Jewish theosophists were banned by the religious authorities of Basra and Baghdad. They separated from the Jewish community, established their own synagogue and cemetery and employed their own ritual slaughterers (*shochet*). The Jewish Theosophical Society in Basra was active at least until 1936, when the ban on them was annulled.[69]

Similar to A.D. Ezekiel, other Jewish theosophists became interested in kabbalah and Jewish mysticism. Leonard Bosman, an English Jewish theosophist, who wrote extensively about kabbalah, published a booklet (in 1913) entitled *The Mysteries of the Qabalah*. Bosman in his book, *The Music of the Spheres, or Cosmic Harmony*, asserted that essentially theosophy and kabbalah were identical, and suggested that Mme. Blavatsky's *Book of Dzyan* was based on the zoharic *Siphra Dezniuta*:

> But verily the Secret Doctrine of the Jews is Theos-Sophia and nothing but Theos-Sophia, and hence it is a matter of perfect simplicity to reconcile the two teachings which emanate from One Source. The inner teaching of Judaism is the same as that offered in the *Secret Doctrine,* the very name of the *Book of Dzyan* from which the *Secret Doctrin*e was taken and the Qabbalistic work called the *Book of Dzyaniouta* being similar in construction and purpose.[70]

In 1928 Alexander Horne, a member of the A.H.T., wrote a discourse called *An Introduction to Esoteric Judaism* in which he describes kabbalah and Hasidism, as Jewish expressions of universal esotericism. His interest in kabbalah is expressed in a number of articles he contributed to *The Theosophis*t and *The Jewish Theosophist*. In his article 'The Life and Form', published in *The Theosophist* in 1929, he calls for

[68] Possibly, the first Jewish Theosophical branch was founded in Basra in 1916, by Dr. Yaakov Salomon, from India. Yet, there is only scant information concerning this group. In 1927, a branch of the Theosophical Society was founded by Kadourie Ani (whose brother was a member of the Bombay branch of the Society). See Cohen, 'Jewish Theosophists in Basra', 402.

[69] Cohen, ibid., 402–407. See also the memoirs of Sasson Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday* (previously published under the title 'Forever 'Amba', *Ha'aretz* [English Edition], 8 March 2002. I am grateful to Prof. Somekh who informed me about the Basra Theosophists.

[70] Bosman, *Music of the Spheres*, 5. See also idem., *Mysteries of the Qabbalah*, 31.

the establishing of a Jewish theosophy, founded on the Jewish mystical tradition:

> Therefore let the Theosophy that is presented to the Jews be a Jewish Theosophy, based on the purest heritage of the Jewish past, founded on Jewish mystic lore, colored by Jewish symbolism, and phrased in Jewish thought. There is enough in the Cabala, in the philosophy of the Gnostics, the Essenes and the Hasidim, to furnish the basis for an inspiring and intellectually acceptable philosophy of life period.[71]

In 1932, Jennie Wilson, another member of the A.H.T. met with the Jerusalem kabbalist Hayim Leib Auerbach (whom she describes as the 'Dean of Cabala University in Jerusalem'), during his visit in New York, in which he gave a lecture at the New York Branch of the AHT.[72] The Hebrew Theosophist sent a description of her impressions from this meeting to the editor of the *World Theosophy Magazine*, called 'The Ancient Wisdom in Palestine':

> The writer was fortunate to come in contact with the famous Rabbi Auerbach, to explain to him the ideals and aims of the Theosophical Society and hope of the Association Hebrew Theosophists. The existence of the Society was new to him, but when some of the teachings were mentioned, especially re-incarnation, his face lighted up in recognition. "You mean Gilgal" he said.[73]

Jews who joined the German section of the Theosophical Society, which in 1912, under the leadership of Rudolf Steiner, branched into the Anthroposophical Society,[74] also became interested in kabbalah. In 1913, A.W. Sellin published a treatise about the spiritual philosophy of the Zohar, based on a lecture he gave at the first general assembly of the Antroposophical Society in Berlin.[75] Ernst Müller, another follower of Steiner's, and a member of the Zionist student union in Prague, prepared translations of Zohar passages into German, as well as several books on kabbalah, including one in English about the history of Jewish mysticism.[76]

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[71] Horne, 'The Life and The Form', 333.

[72] The Jewish Theosophist, 2(1), April–June 1932, 7 (editorial notes).

[73] Wilson, 'Ancient Wisdom in Palestine', 317.

[74] See Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, 367–368; Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 155–158; von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism,* 129–130.

[75] Sellin, *Die geisteswissenschaftliche Bedeutung des Sohar.*

[76] *Vom Judentum*, 281–284; Müller, *Der Sohar und seine Lehre*; idem, *Der Sohar: Das Heilige Buch der Kabbala*; idem, *History of Jewish Mysticism.* See Riemer, 'Wanderer zwischen den Welten'.

The Theosophical Society influenced further Jewish thinkers and scholars, who were interested in kabbalah in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Naphtali Herz Imber, author of the Zionist anthem *ha-Tikvah*, relates that in 1893 he was asked by George Ayers, the president of the Theosophical Society in Boston, to translate the Zohar.[77] Although Imber was critical of the Theosophical Society and of Mme. Blavatsky,[78] he nonetheless used theosophical perceptions in his discussions of Jewish mysticism, referred to Hasidim as 'Jewish Theosophists', and called the Hasidic Rabbis '*Mahatmas*'![79]

Finally, it should be mentioned that Gershom Scholem was impressed by the 'real insights' of Arthur Edward Waite, a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn, who was much influenced by Theosophy.[80] In his 1927 *Bibliographia Kabbalistica*, Scholem wrote that Waite's *The Doctrine and Literature of the Kabalah,* and his *The Secret Doctrine in Israel*, belong to the best books written about kabbalah from a theosophical perspective.[81] Although Scholem dismissed the Theosophical Society as 'pseudo-religion'[82] and blamed Blavatsky for 'misuse and distortion' of kabbalah,[83] in 1944 he wrote in a letter to Joseph Weiss:

> You are certainly too harsh on Madame Blavatsky, it is surely too much to say that the meaning of cabala has been forgotten in the 'Secret Doctrine'. After all, the Lady has made a very thorough study of Knorr von Rosenroth in his English adaption, and of Franck's 'Cabale Juive'. She certainly knew more about cabalism than most of the other people you mention […] I think it might be rather interesting to investigate the cabalistical ideas in their theosophical development. There is, of course,

[77] Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 181. See also ibid., 16.

[78] Ibid., 10–12.

[79] Ibid., 179, 295. Imber says that Blavatsky invented her *Mahatmas* on the basis of her knowledge of Hasidism; ibid., 10–12.

[80] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2; idem, 'Waite, A.E., The Holy Kabbalah', 633–638.

[81] 'Beide Bücher gehören jedenfalls zu den besten von theosophischer Seite über die Kabbalah geschriebenen' (Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalistica*, 158). Elsewhere, Scholem was much more critical of Waite. See Burmistrov, 'Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte', 26.

[82] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 206. In his notes, ibid., 398–399, Scholem discusses Balvatsky's stanzas of the *Book Dzyan* and her reliance on Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbalah Denudata.*

[83] Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem,* 133.

a big lot of humbug and swindle [!], but, at least in Blavatsky's writings, yet something more.[84]

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[84] Scholem, *Briefe*, 294; Burmistrov, 'Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte', 28–30.

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PART III

MODERN KABBALISTIC SCHOOLS

THE IMAGINED DECLINE OF KABBALAH: THE KABBALISTIC YESHIVA *SHAʿAR HA-SHAMAYIM* AND KABBALAH IN JERUSALEM IN THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Jonatan Meir

1. Introduction: Ariel Bension's Account of 'the Last Kabbalist'

In 1925, Ariel Bension (1881–1932) published a small booklet entitled *Hilula*, which was meant to serve as an introduction to a more extensive work he planned to publish under the title *Sefer Rafael*. The larger book was intended to give an account of 'the last kabbalist', or as Bension put it: 'The last mystic hero of Sephardic Hasidism, which is lying on its deathbed at the Beit El Yeshiva in Jerusalem'.[1] Actually, we know that Bension was describing his own father, Rabbi Yehoshua Ben-Zion from Morocco (d. 1897), who was a member of the Beit El yeshiva, the kabbalistic academy that has been renowned since its golden age in the eighteenth century, when it was lead by Rabbi Shalom Shar'abi (the "Rashash"), and famous also for the 'Contract of Unity' drawn up by the kabbalists who studied there.[2] The son of the kabbalist wanted to write an account of the yeshiva from its origins till his own day, though he succeeded in completing only his introduction to the more extensive work. As we can gather from manuscript letters, Gershom Scholem was familiar with the pamphlet, and sought its continuation.[3]

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[1] Bension, *Hilula*. The book was first printed in German, with a Preface by Richard Beer-Hofmann, and did not include the description of the yeshiva's decline. See Bension, *Hochzeit des Todes*. About the author, see Aranov, *Catalogue*, xiii–xv (the book includes a description of the manuscripts collected by him); Sasson Levy, *Un diamante en el camino*; Gaon, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah* II, 318–319.

[2] On Yeshivat Beit El, see Frumkin, *Toldot*, vol. 3, 46–54, 107–121; Gaon, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah*, vol. 1, 138–143; Gaon, 'Beit El'; Gafner, *Midrasho shel Shem*; Moskovitz, *Ha-Rashash*, 90–94; Giller, 'Kabbalistic Prayers'; Giller, 'Leadership and Charisma'; Giller, *Shalom Shar'abi*; Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 156–169.

[3] Scholem, *Devarim b'Go*, 43–44. See the copy of the letter sent by Eida Bension to Scholem in 1932, preserved in Bension's work, *Zohar*, in the Gershom Scholem Library, in the National and University Library, Jerusalem.

In other writings, as well, Bension mentions the Beit El yeshiva, always a place from which the spirit that enlivened it in the past had since departed.[4] Thus, in his book on the Rashash, he fondly depicts the past leaders of the yeshiva, while presenting its present state in much darker colors. At the end of one of his essays he writes:

> The star of Beit El, which rose when Shar'abi came to Jerusalem, began to decline at the end of the last century and a period of internal decay set in. The outer shell of Beit El was consumed over time and mold now covers these walls, which used to be a mighty fortress of holy fire, brought hither from the Galilean mountains. The storms and rains completely destroyed the dome of the roof—the canopy that sheltered those "grooms" in their white garments, while silver lamps without splendor shine their pallid light on bent, decrepit figures. The spirit that hovered in the past over Beit El—the prayers, the yearning for redemption, the mystical meditations, the struggle for rectification, the melodies that created the unity of hearts, the silence in which the holy fire whispered—all this has slipped away and disappeared, like those meteorites, flashing suddenly over the mountains of Jerusalem, the holy city.[5]

1.1. *Critique*

Bension's book on the Rashash found particularly positive reception among his German-speaking audience. As one reviewer wrote: 'This book is the first attempt to depict the life of the Sephardic Hasidim in the style of modern accounts, similar to Martin Buber's writings on their Ashkenazi counterpart'.[6] However, when Moshe David Gaon came to write a review of *Hilula*, he expressed his doubt that the planned continuation of the book would depict an accurate picture of the Jerusalem kabbalists. As he wrote:

> It is not that important who was 'the last hero of Sephardic mysticism coming to its end among the Sephardic Hasidic circles at the Beit El yeshiva in Jerusalem', since it should be stressed, in the interest of historical accuracy, that he was not the last one, as Sephardic Hasidism is not dying out, even if it has clearly declined.[7]

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[4] Bension, *Sharabi*, 13–42, 58–59; Bension, 'Beit El'; Bension, *Zohar*, 242–246.
[5] Bension, 'Beit El', 11.
[6] Yigal, 'Ha-Hasidut Ha-Sephardit'.
[7] Gaon, 'Bikoret Sfarim', 76–77. Gaon hints to the identity of the 'last kabbalist' as Bension's father; he also mentions the reception of the German version of the book in the German press.

Gaon viewed this decline as only temporary, and he concluded on a note of hope that Bension would provide a more accurate description of the world of the Jerusalem kabbalists. However, the long-awaited savior of the kabbalists never appeared. Instead, more and more people began referring to the "moribund" kabbalists of Jerusalem—at times using Gaon's own works, drawn from several studies he devoted to the Beit El yeshiva in which he too spoke of the yeshiva's ruination and collapse after the First World War.[8]

1.2. *The 'Last Kabbalists'*

Bension's account, though interesting, was a romantic portrayal and a nostalgic recreation written by an individual who had already left the world he was describing. Similar depictions of Beit El also appeared in Hebrew and Yiddish literature, as well as in scholarly accounts of the time, until the yeshiva came to symbolize "the fallen kabbalah".[9] Descriptions of contemporary kabbalists or kabbalistic yeshivot were ignored in favor of this gratifying depiction of the vanishing kabbalists of Beit El; an image which therefore necessitated some alternative form of renewal or awakening—usually based upon the writer's predilection. For instance, the 'Contract of Unity' and the idea of a fraternity of kabbalists were often extolled as models for the early twentieth century communes in Palestine.[10]

We find similar statements by Gershom Scholem, about the 'remnants of the kabbalists' or 'last kabbalists' in Jerusalem, which he associates mainly with the Beit El yeshiva.[11] To quote Scholem, 'the

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[8] Gaon, *Yehudei Ha-Mizrach*, vol. 1, 138–143.

[9] For some depictions of the decline of Beit El, frequently accompanied by a romantic depiction of the past, see Frumkin, *Toldot*, vol. 3, 46–54, 107–121; Feurman, *Sefer Zikhron*, 10, 50, 81; Malachi, *Mekubalim*, 20.

[10] Rabinowitz, 'ha-Komuna'; Rabinowitz, *Ketavim*, 141–155; Tsherikover, 'Die Komuna'. One person who noted the error of this analogy was Shaul Hana Kook, who wrote in one of his articles, with much surprise: 'In our own days, before our own eyes, a legend was created of "a commune of the Rashash"'. Kook argued that this was a baseless legend, and differentiated between the idea of commune and the Contract of Unity. He claimed that it had been Rabinowitz who promulgated the "legend" and others bought it from him. See Kook, 'ha-Agadah'. The "contracts" appeared mostly in the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, in different publications. See Kook, 'Agudat Mekubalei Yerushalayim'.

[11] As does Boaz Huss in his paper 'Ask no Questions'. For Scholem, see, among other places, the short descriptions in Scholem, *Devarim b'Go*, 71, 76, 225; Scholem, 'Kabbala at the Hebrew University'; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 328–329, 422 (Here he

authentic mysticism was long gone, and what was left of Kabbalah in Beit El was something akin to yoga'. Still, Scholem was well aware of the difficulty in entering the world of the yeshiva and stated that had he behaved as an orthodox Jew, he would have learned more.[12] Other authors spoke not only of the decline of the Sephardic kabbalists, but the Ashkenazi ones as well.

2. Kabbalistic Yeshivot of Jerusalem

I submit that reality was very different than these descriptions of decline and decay seek to depict. To be sure, the Beit El yeshiva had past the time of its greatness, especially after the earthquake of 1928 destroyed part of its building. In 1929 Eliezer Rivlin wrote:

> In the last few years, the group of kabbalists in Jerusalem has fallen apart, and they split into a few yeshivot. The Beit El synagogue has been almost completely destroyed, the kabbalists abandoned it and its sills were blown away in the wind. The building itself was almost completely ruined by the big earthquake on the 11th of July, 1928.[13]

However, Rivlin failed to mention that the Beit El yeshiva was rebuilt and continued to operate almost continuously until 1945.[14] Between 1903 and 1927, the head of the yeshiva was Rabbi Masud ha-Cohen El-Haddad (1830–1937) and between 1927–1945, Rabbi Shalom Hadaya (1822–1945).[15]

At the same time, many other kabbalistic centers were established in Jerusalem and dozens of individual kabbalists operated outside of the official framework of yeshivot.[16] Among other yeshivot, whose existence produced a kind of kabbalistic renaissance in Jerusalem, we should mention Rehovot ha-Nahar (founded in 1898), led by Rabbi Shaul

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was relying on the publications of Bension and cited one of his books). See also Huss, 'Authorized Guardians'.

[12] Scholem, *Devarim b'Go*, 44.

[13] Gloss of Eliezer Rivlin, in Frumkin, *Toldot*, vol. 3, 122.

[14] For a description of the renovation of the yeshiva, and its activist in 1928, see Barukh, 'Kehal Hasidim'; Gaon, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah*, vol. 1, 142–143; Unger, 'Kat ha-Mekubalim'.

[15] Kahan, 'Ma'aseh Shalom', 3–68; Laniado, *l'Kedoshim*, 37–38; Gaon, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah*, vol. 2, 219; Gafner, *Midrasho shel Shem*, 313–314. His son, R. Ovadiah Hadayah was director of the yeshiva after him.

[16] For an extensive discussion on this, see Meir, 'Naftuli Sod'.

Dwek ha-Cohen (1858–1932),[17] where there were, according to one account, around sixty *mekhavnim*—individuals who prayed according to Lurianic system—not including other guests and students;[18] the Oz ve-Hadar Yeshiva (in Porat Yoseph), which operated from 1923 onwards, where several influential kabbalists studied,[19] and the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim Yeshiva.

Recent years has produced more nuanced scholarship of twentieth-century kabbalah, based on the research of such personalities as R. Yehuda Ashlag and R. Abraham Isaac Kook. However, the fact that attention was given particularly to these personalities, over many others, seems to derive mainly from the rather intense and vociferous activities of their followers; whereas other kabbalists, who did not produce such followers, have not garnered appropriate attention in the academic world.[20] Certainly the description of traditional yeshivot is completely lacking, since these institutions were considered as mere bastions of orthodoxy, lacking interest or innovation. This is particularly surprising in light of what we know about these yeshivot. For instance, in one of the books printed in 1938 by the Jerusalemite, Zvi Meroni, who was commenting on the 'life of the kabbalists' from the outside, he describes a "renaissance" among the kabbalists. The author estimated that around five hundred kabbalists were performing *tiqqun hazot* ('midnight prayers') in town.[21]

While we do not have a complete picture of the daily life of the kabbalists of the period, their names, yeshivot, or the books they studied and printed, there is enough information to demonstrate that the situation was different than many assume. In this article we will describe the annals of one particular kabbalistic yeshiva, its visionary leaders, and their extensive printing projects. We will also illuminate several points in the history of the Hebrew book in Jerusalem, in an effort to reach a fuller description of the early twentieth century and its kabbalists.

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[17] Moskovitch, *ha-Rashash*, 25–28; Laniado, *l'Kedoshim*, 8.

[18] Muzafi, *Olomo shel Zaddik*, 85.

[19] Gaon, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah*, vol. 1, 146–148; Ben-Yaakov, *Yehudi Bavel*, 212, 262, 482–283; Graievsky, 'Porat Yosef'.

[20] See Meir, 'Gilui'. For some forms of kabbalah at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Garb, *The Chosen*; Huss, 'New Age of Kabbalah'; Huss, 'Altruistic Communism'; Meir, 'Naftulei Sod'.

[21] Meroni, *ha-Holmim*, 72–73.

3. The Shaʿar ha-Shamayim Yeshiva

Let us focus on the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva and its operation until the Holocaust. The yeshiva was founded in 1906 by a group of kabbalists who earlier belonged to the Beit El yeshiva (as also happened with the Rehovot ha-Nahar yeshiva). Practically speaking, Shaʿar ha-Shamayim continued in the Jerusalem tradition of studying Lurianic writings and praying with *kavanot* according to the system of the Rashash, who was considered to have been a reincarnation of R. Isaac Luria (the Ari).[22] Yet, as we will see, the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva had its own unique approach that distinguished it from the other kabbalistic academies of the time.

The yeshiva's leaders were R. Shimon Zvi Horowitz and R. Hayim Leib Yehuda Auerbach. These two men embodied different worldviews. Horowitz, originally from Lithuania, was already involved in the dissemination of kabbalah at the beginning of the century, teaching both groups and individuals.[23] Auerbach, the scion of a Polish Hasidic family, dealt mainly with matters of Jewish law.[24] Horowitz arrived in Palestine in 1887 and studied in the Ez Hayim yeshiva and the Beit El Yeshiva. He soon began to study kabbalah in Jerusalem at 'the big study hall in the yard of *moshav zekenim*'. In this setting he printed, in 1899, together with Hayim Kayam Kaddish ha-Levi, the work *Ateret Yosef*, by the Lithuanian kabbalist, R. Yosef Liskavi. The work is a commentary on the first part of *Mishnat Hasidim* by R. Immanuel Hai Riqi, and was viewed by its publishers as a kind of introduction to the Lurianic kabbalah.[25] According to Horowitz, the scholars of Rehovot ha-Nahar encouraged him to print the book, and,

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[22] On this, see the words of Dwek ha-Cohen, in Margoliot, *Yeshev Ruho*, 4a. On the meaning of *kavanot*, practiced by kabbalists after the Rashash, see Giller, 'Kavanot'; Giller, *Shalom Shar'abi*; Kalus, 'The Theurgy of Prayer'.

[23] See about him, Malachi, 'R. Shimon'; Tidhar, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 334. According to Tidhar, he passed away on the second day of Rosh Hashana, in Moza, where he would go to be alone each Rosh Hashana.

[24] About him, see Bat-Yehuda, 'Auerbach'; Tidhar, *Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, 1470. His son was the renowned halakhic decider, R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

[25] *Ateret Yosef*. Kaddish wrote an introduction about the study of kabbalah, and preconditions for learning it (5a–6b). Horowitz proofread the work, and added as tract of explanations and additions, entitled *Shem m'Shimon* (70b–77b).

indeed, their endorsements preface the volume. In this way, Horowitz continued to teach small groups and individuals at his home.[26]

A year after the yeshiva was founded, Horowitz published a book in which he argued that 'the exile was prolonged due to the insufficient study of the wisdom of Kabbalah', bringing dozens of quotations from kabbalists and Hasidic authors to support his view.[27] It seems that his effort brought fruition, for according to one estimation, in 1913 there were 113 pupils in the yeshiva; most of whom studied kabbalah.[28] The yeshiva's *pinkas Shlihut* (a volume of approbations and receipts used by fundraisers) of 1929 states that 'more than one hundred rabbis and great sages contemplate upon both the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of God's Torah, day and night, not including the students preparing themselves for teaching and rabbinic ordination'.[29]

Among those who studied in the yeshiva in those years, for a short or long period, we should particularly mention the kabbalists Yehuda Zvi Brandwein, Yaakov Moshe Harlap, Aharon Shlomo Maharil, Aharon Avraham Slotky and Menahem Menchin Halperin. Students received support primarily from America, where Auerbach visited for fundraising purposes in the years 1931–1932 and 1952; and from special emissaries who went in service of the yeshiva to both eastern and western Europe, to the surrounding Arab countries and also to America, encouraging donations and raising funds.[30] The fundraising was not always easy and criticism was at times levelled against the great number of fundraisers who were representing new, and previously

[26] It is said that he taught kabbalah to a number of important rabbinic figures of the time, such as R. Isser Zalman Melzer, R. Herzog, and R. Zvi Pesah Frank, who also learned Talmud at the Sha'ar ha-Shamayim Yeshiva.

[27] Horowitz, *Or ha-Meir*. Here, he does not yet appear as the head of the yeshiva, but rather as 'one of the students of Ez Hayim Yeshiva'. Some time later, he printed an abridged form of this work, containing the main points, seeing that the first version was no longer available, and that he felt the contents very important. Horowitz, *Sanigoria*, 37–43.

[28] Feurman, *Sefer Zikhron*, 51.

[29] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Pinkas Shlihut* (1929).

[30] Two *pinkasei Shlihut* are preserved in the National and University Library, Jerusalem. See Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Pinkas Shlihut* (1910); Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Pinkas Shlihut* (1919). The last volume that was given to the fundraiser Swisa Levi, contained the approbation of the Chief Rabbi, R. Yaakov Meir, and a letter from R.A.I. Kook. It includes a list of the many places he visited, including Middle Eastern and European lands.

unknown, yeshivot.[31] However, the yeshiva did receive wide support from kabbalists and rabbis of various streams, who added their signatures to the yeshiva's publications and to special proclamations calling for financial support that were issued over the years. The reason for this lies in the unique curriculum of the yeshiva and its regulations.

3.1. *The Yeshiva Curriculum*

The curriculum of the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva was exceptional, even as it changed over the course of the years for reasons both ideological and financial. The first curriculum was formulated in 1912.[32] According to this, the aim of the yeshiva was the study and propagation of esoteric teachings among torah scholars. Only those who had first mastered exoteric doctrines were admitted to the yeshiva, with each pupil receiving a stipend based upon his stature and financial situation. One of the greatest innovations was the mode of studying. While the curriculum did not proscribe the proper order of study, a division between beginners and advanced students clearly existed. This was exceptional among the kabbalistic yeshivot of Jerusalem, who for the most part, did not initiate scholars into the study of kabbalah, but merely admitted and supported previously accomplished kabbalists.[33]

The goals of the yeshiva were formulated in a few succinct paragraphs: (1) to facilitate the day-long study of kabbalah, including the beginners' classes; (2) to create a special group of people who would study kabbalah day and night and pray according to the system of *kavvanot*; (3) to create a system of 'night watchmen' who would 'stand guard' in prayer all through the night, and recite the *tiqqun hazot*; (4) to print prayers according to the *kavvanot* for purpose distribution in synagogues; (5) to publish kabbalistic books and distribute them among the public free of charge, and (6) to encourage the study of kabbalah among the wider strata of the society. A special place in the yeshiva was taken by those proficient in the *kavanot* of the Rashash.[34] In 1940, the leaders of the yeshiva proudly announced that they had already ordained a few hundred kabbalists, some of whom had reached

[31] See, for instance, the complaint levelled by R. Shalom, the son of Shimon Madhokh to the Chief, R. Yaakov Meir, about the Sha'ar ha-Shamayim yeshiva and other places. Ben-Yaakov, *Ha-Shaliah ha-Noded*, vol. 1, 140–142.

[32] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Hotem Tokhnit* (1912), printed in Hebrew and Yiddish.

[33] Lunz, *Netivot*, 165; Ben-Aryeh, *Ir*, 346–347, 413.

[34] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Pinkas ha-Shlihut*, 4. Dated around 1910.

the rank of *mekhaven* (loosely, 'meditator').[35] The yeshiva's curriculum printed in 1923 (in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English) emphasized the double aspect of the curriculum: the esoteric alongside the exoteric, Jewish law together with kabbalah.[36] Eventually, the exoteric studies were gradually abandoned, and in 1928 a special talmudic school of Shaʿar ha-Shamayim was founded.[37]

3.2. *The New Beit El*

The rabbis of Shaʿar ha-Shamayim viewed their yeshiva as the new Beit El. In the center of the curriculum stood the study of the Lurianic writings and those of the Rashash and prayers with *kavanot*. Like the Beit El yeshiva, here too students and kabbalists signed a Contract of Unity.[38] In 1938, Moshe David Gaon wrote (with an undertone of critique): 'In the last few years, the Beit El yeshiva has come to be synonymous with another kabbalistic yeshiva that was founded in Jerusalem, Shaʿar ha-Shamayim'.[39] This was not only the attitude of the leaders of Shaʿar ha-Shamayim, they often acted as if they were the only such institution. It should be mentioned that the kabbalists of Rehovot ha-Nahar, who also viewed themselves as heirs of Beit El or as the new Beit El, acted similarly: they too wrote a Contract of Unity, and modeled their yeshiva's rules and regulations on those of the Beit El from which they had split.

One of Shaʿar ha-Shamayim's publications opened with a laudation of its unique place in the study and transmission of kabbalah. The leaders of the Rehovot ha-Nahar took exception with this statement, which led the rabbis of Shaʿar ha-Shamayim to add a page explaining that their yeshiva was unique only among *Askenazim*, while among the Sepharadim, there existed other yeshivot that continued in the tradition of the Rashash, as exemplified by Rehovot ha-Nahar.[40]

On the other hand, only a few years later, we find similar claims of uniqueness in the announcements of Rehovot ha-Nahar, such as: 'famous among all residents and visitors to our town, who saw and who heard about it in Israel and abroad, that nowhere else is there a

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[35] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Mazkeret Berakha*.
[36] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Hotem Tokhnit* (1925).
[37] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Mazkeret Berakha*.
[38] An abridged version of the Contract of Unity appears in an advertisement for the yeshiva, Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Hotem Tokhnit* (1925), 19–20.
[39] Gaon, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah*, vol. 1, 141.
[40] Omission from the *Hayim v'Shalom* prayerbook.

yeshiva as great in quantity and in quality, studying day and night, and praying *kavanot*'.[41] Such discourse, however, may be rhetorical, as it was mainly directed to an audience beyond the walls of the yeshivah. Be that as it may, it is obvious that Shaʿar ha-Shamayim indeed had an exceptional outlook when it comes to the study of kabbalah.

Another aspect of its unique character was the ongoing contact between the Askenazi and the Sephardi kabbalists. It seems that the division between the two groups was not always absolute. Although the majority of the students in Shaʿar ha-Shamayim were Ashkenazim, we find among the supporters of the yeshiva, Rabbi Nissim Nahum, one of the founders of the Sephardi yeshivot in Jerusalem.[42]

Some, like Moshe David Gaon, questioned the validity of this support, pointing out that Shaʿar ha-Shamayim was a competitor of the Beit El yeshiva.[43] On the other hand, some of the kabbalists of Shaʿar ha-Shamayim, as well as several Hasidic leaders signed proclamations affirming their support of Rehovot ha-Nahar.[44] Similarly, in its promotional material, the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva described itself in language similar to that used by Rehovot ha-Nahar. It seems that rather than speaking of the "Ashkenazi" Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva in competition with the "Sephardi" Beit El or Rehovot ha-Nahar, we should speak of several circles of kabbalists, who studied within a cooperative and affinitive atmosphere.

This joint study found expression in the fact that some of the kabbalists belonged to both Shaʿar ha-Shamayim and Rehovot ha-Nahar, and it seems that some of the prayers were also common to both yeshivot. As one of the members of Beit El stated in 1928: 'The greatness of Rabbi Shalom [Sharabi], the master of this house, is attested to by the fact that *shalom* (peace) can be found here, as both Sephardim and Ashkenazim pray together; all according to the same rite, from the prayer book containing the *kavvanot* of the Rashash'.[45] In the yeshiva's *pinkas Shlihut* of 1919, we find the statement:

> More than one hundred rabbis and great sages from among all of our brothers, the children of Israel, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim*, contemplate upon both the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of God's Torah, day and

[41] Rehovot ha-Nahar, *Eshet Hayil*.
[42] Nahum, *Atah Hashem*.
[43] Gaon, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah*, vol. 1, 141.
[44] Rehovot ha-Nahar, *Keriyah l'Ezra*.
[45] Barukh, 'Kehal Hasidim', 300.

> night. Rabbis, elders, men of action, all pray from the prayerbook of Rabbi Shalom Sha'arabi, according to the *kavvanot* of our Rabbi, the Ari, and awaken the Gates of Compassion upon the exile of the Divine Presence, the destruction of the Temple and the dispersal of God's people in the Diaspora.[46]

Furthermore, not only were Sephardim and the Ashkenazim united there, but also sub-groups among Askenazim, such as the Hasidim and the *Mithnagdim*. Thus, there is no basis for the commonly accepted statement that only Lithuanian *Mithnagdim* studied kabbalah at Shaʿar ha-Shamayim, in the spirit of the Gaon of Vilna. In the writings of yeshiva head, R. Shimon Zvi Horowitz, we find statements of the Gaon and his students side-by-side with quotations from Hasidic texts; and his co-director, Yehuda Auerbach, emphasized, in many places, his relation to R. Yaʿaqov Yosef of Polnoye, the leading disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. In one yeshiva publication, we find statements praising both the Baal Shem Tov and the Gaon, for their achievements in encouraging the public study of kabbalah. And it further states that by unifying their respective approaches to kabbalah, the final redemption is hastened.[47]

The union between the two worlds expresses itself also in matters of printing. In the printed prayers, we find *kavvanot* of the Rashash together with quotations from Rabbi Yosef Hayim of Baghdad (the *Ben Ish Hai*), and Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav.[48] Similarly, both Sephardic and Askenazic kabbalists penned approbations to the kabbalistic books that were being published. It seems that the eclectic attitude among some contemporary Israeli kabbalists, who combine the *kavvanot* of the Rashash with the tradition of the Vilna Gaon and the Hasidic movement, originated back then.[49]

4. Shaʿar ha-Shamayim and the Land of Israel

The leaders of the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim viewed the dissemination and study of the Kabbalah as a part of the revelation of the mysteries that

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[46] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Pinkas Shlihut* (1929).
[47] Horowitz & Auerbach, *Aheinu she'b'Golah.*
[48] See, for instance, Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Za'akat Bnei Yisrael.*
[49] See for example the kabbalistic works of R. Yitzhak Meir Morgenstern, titled *Yam Hahochma*. Morgenstern is the head of 'Yeshivat Torat Hakham for the study of the Revealed and hidden torah' in Jerusalem.

preceded the coming of the messiah. Furthermore, they saw themselves as adding the necessary spiritual dimension to the ongoing Zionist activity in the land of Israel. About this, they wrote:

> The Kabbalah is the soul of the Torah […] The new movement, born in our present generation, that awoke among our people and strives to return to Zion, lacks the power of life and the holy fire, and can not attract the leading Torah scholars through its own power, for it was founded on a completely profane basis and was not an expression of the source of holiness. It does not contain in it the soul of the Torah and of Israel, in the mystery of oneness, which is accessible through in the wisdom of Kabbalah. This was seen by the founders of the holy yeshiva Shaʿar ha-Shamayim, who understood that there is no better place than the Land of Israel—where 'the life of souls is the air of its land' and which was the motherland of Kabbalah in all generations—to found a large and central yeshiva for the wisdom of Kabbalah in its full scope. To this end, they founded the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim Yeshiva and its branches.[50]

It should not be surprising, then, that the heads of the yeshiva supported Rabbi Kook in his quest of the rabbinate of Jerusalem in the 1920s.[51] Rabbi Kook himself wrote splendid praise of the yeshiva and his approbations appear in all of its publications.[52] Auerbach described how during his first years in Jerusalem, Rav Kook secretly participated in the *tiqqun hazot* at the Western Wall for some two hours, together with the Bratslav Hassidim and the kabbalists from the Sephardic yeshivot.[53]

4.1. *The Lost Tribes*

Another expression of the redemptive vision of the yeshiva heads can be found in Horowitz's search for the Ten Lost Tribes, which he considered a continuation of the tradition of the Gaon of Vilna. Actually, such traditions should more accurately be attributed to the students of the Vilna Gaon and their students. Be that as it may, the path Horowitz took reflects the ripe stage of these "traditions" held by several figures in Jerusalem who came from Lithuania. These ideas coincided perfectly with the 'revival of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel'

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[50] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Hotem Tokhnit* (1925), 3–4.

[51] *Iggrot la-Raayah*, 162 (letter 103), 165–168 (letter 107), 477–478 (letter 338), 344 (letter 233).

[52] Kook, *Kol Mikodesh.*

[53] Kook, *l'Shlosha*, vol. 1, §71, 31.

and offered an "authentic" alternative to the secular Zionistic movement of the time.[54]

In 1898, Horowitz printed, in cooperation with Moshe Yehoshua ha-Kimchi and Shlomo Wexler, a four page booklet containing a detailed travel itinerary to hunt for the Ten Lost Tribes.[55] Ha-Kimchi had been previously active in similar matters, and it seems that his plan was close to being implemented.[56] Wexler was a kabbalist from Germany who, on his move to Israel, joined the Bratslaver Hasidim, and messianic longing could be found among several members of his family.[57] Horowitz joined these two figures in their fierce desire to find the tribes, though their partnership was practical, as opposed to any shared, kabbalistic vision.

Although the pamphlet received the support of a handful of rabbis, it was largely ridiculed by the public, both in Israel and without, as we will shortly see.[58] It was not long before the plan took shape and special announcements were printed to raise financial backing for the travelers. Among those who encouraged the trip, at various stages, were some of the most important rabbis and kabbalists in Jerusalem.[59]

Around 1900, Horowitz set out on his quest, getting as far as India and Tibet. He was accompanied by a Yemenite Jew, a dreamer named Zadoq Friedman (his last name was adopted), who claimed to have far-reaching visions on the tribes and their whereabouts.

Horowitz described his adventures in a fascinating book, which also includes extensive scholarship (in Hebrew, English, and German) on the fate of the Ten Tribes.[60] His quest was suspended due to financial difficulties. Nevertheless, until the end of his days, he hoped to raise funds for another journey. His book contains fantastic accounts, such as his encounter with a member of one the lost tribes who came to the land of Israel in 1913, and a special meeting that was held by

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[54] For a critique of these and similar texts, see Bartal, *Galut ba'Aretz*, 237–295.

[55] *Derishat Kavod.*

[56] For a number of pamphlets and proclamations made around 1890, see Halevi, *Sifrei Yerushalayim*, §665, 703–705.

[57] Scholem, *Die Letzten Kabbalisten*; Strauss, *Rosenbaums of Zell*, 43–50.

[58] See, for example, the farcical description of the founding of the "association" of travellers in *Mikhtavim m'Yerushalayim*.

[59] See the proclamation of 1899, *Et l'Vakesh.* The proclamations requesting financial support for the travellers was eventually reprinted by Horowitz, *Kol Mevaser*, 72–77.

[60] Horowitz, *Kol Mevaser*. Details of the first voyage appears throughout the book. See, especially 72–77. Amazingly, the names of the participants are not mentioned at all.

the yeshiva kabbalists in his honor.[61] Another account relates how, in Tibet, he saw a group of bearded people dressed in long black robes whom he believed to be the lost Jews. He ran toward them with great joy, only to realize on speaking to them that they could not understand a word he said.[62]

The book's stated purpose was to encourage the general public to set up local associations, under the title 'The Association of the Tribes of Yeshurun', which would research and search for the Ten Lost Tribes. Each group would elect 'travelling tourists, qualified and decent men, Sabbath and Torah observant'. In this way, the tribes would be found at last. The Shaʿar ha-Shamayim Yeshiva itself is presented as a kind of collection center for information.[63] Although his dream remained in the form of proposals and was never realized, it expresses the spirit of the yeshiva's founder, which was intertwined with the spirit of Jewish national reawakening in the land of Israel.

5. Publishing

Many of the yeshiva's esoteric views found their way into print. Horowitz's vision was great. He intended to publish a voluminous collection of the writings of Luria and the Rashash, arranged according to entries and with commentaries, to serve as a kind of kabbalistic encyclopedia. He also intended to establish a periodical entitled *Pardes* ("Orchard"), devoted to kabbalistic and legal issues. He further intended to publish numerous kabbalistic manuscripts from the library of the yeshiva.[64] However, the lack of funding foiled the execution of these plans. Two large, successful projects should be mentioned, as they capture the yeshiva's intention to spread Kabbalah beyond the confines of the study hall—the first edition of the prayer book of the Rashash, copied from the original manuscript, and a new edition of the entire Lurianic corpus.[65]

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[61] Ibid., 78–84.

[62] Ibid., 100.

[63] Ibid., 'Author's Introduction', 10. He stresses that the travelers 'had to have beards, which is absolutely necessary, as I know well; for those who shave will not have permission to speak with them' (ibid., 52).

[64] On the yeshiva's partial success in establishing a library, despite the lack of funds to print the manuscripts, see Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Hotem Tokhnit*, 10–11.

[65] In addition, the yeshiva published numerous pamphlets containing prayers, calendars listing the yeshiva's events, advertisements, and calls for financial support.

5.1. *The Rashash Prayer Book*

In the world of kabbalah, the publication by Shaʿar ha-Shamayim of the Rashash's prayer book caused a revolution of sorts. First printed in 1911,[66] the publisher's declared goal was to answer the needs of those who required the prayer book for daily worship, but could not attain the manuscript. The printing was announced in a daily newspaper in Palestine.[67] Even so, this was not a complete version, and subsequently, members of Rehovot ha-Nahar also published a part of the prayer book, stating in the introduction that they were motivated by the lack of a complete text in the Askenazi version.[68] Apparently, however, the first, Ashkenazi publication was also executed in cooperation with the Sephardim—if only several individuals. Hundreds of copies of the prayer book were printed, which provoked angry reactions from some traditional Jews, who feared that the sacred text would end up in unsuitable places, such as secular universities or in the hands of unworthy professors.[69] In the introductions to the prayer book, and other yeshiva publications, we find discussions of the unique dynamic between revelation and concealment; between the need to disseminate kabbalah widely, and the traditional restrictions placed upon allowing access to it. Nevertheless, permission to publish these prayer books paved the way to the publishing of many similar works even today.

5.2. *The Lurianic Corpus*

The second aspect of the publishing revolution lay in the yeshiva's printing of the complete corpus of Luria writings, edited according to manuscript editions by Rabbi Menahem Mendel Halperin (1834–1924).[70] This ambitious project was meant to serve students of kabbalah in the yeshiva and without. It followed an earlier wave of printing parts of these texts by the sages of the Beit El yeshiva, between the years 1863–1873. The earlier printing, however, was intended mainly for kabbalah students affiliated with this yeshiva, even if the books were also distributed outside of the land of Israel.

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[66] Shaʿar ha-Shamayim, *Siddur Tefilah*.
[67] Haas, 'Ohr Hadash'.
[68] Rehovot ha-Nahar, *Sefer Hayim v'Shalom*.
[69] Moskovitch, *ha-Rashash*; Hillel, *Ahavat Shalom*, 239.
[70] Ben-Menahem, 'Vital', 278–279.

We should also mention an early wave of printing in eastern Europe (Krakow and Permishlan) between the years 1875–1885, by the Hasidic master, Yehezqel Shraga Halberstam of Shinova, and individuals close to him. However the previous eastern European and Palestinian editions were now out of print, and need was felt for new editions to accommodate the growing study of kabbalah throughout Israel. In any event, it is clear that not only were the Lurianic writings printed intensively during the second half of the nineteenth century, the books also quickly sold out, so that by the early twentieth century a pressing need for new printings was felt.

Other individuals in Jerusalem, beside Halperin, were also involved in the editing and printing of the works of R. Isaac Luria and R. Hayim Vital, at times cooperatively, and at times on their own. These cultural agents did not write original works, or develop a kabbalistic theology; but from their extensive activity we may learn much—not merely about these particular figures themselves, but also about the dissemination of kabbalah in Jerusalem in the early twentieth century, the importance the kabbalists gave to the act of printing, and centrality of this corpus of writings within the yeshiva's curriculum. (The publication of zoharic literature and commentaries during this same period is a different matter. In general, this literature was more readily available, and it was relatively easy to find copies that had been printed outside of Israel).

Halperin acted from within the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva and printed the books mainly for his students. His activities, however, received much wider acclaim and he maintained connections with dozens of Jerusalem kabbalists in the course of printing—as is clear from the prefaces and approbations. Practically speaking, the printing of the Rashash prayerbook, as well as the writings of R. Hayim Vital, should be viewed as projects intended for all the kabbalists of Jerusalem, rather than the sages of a single yeshiva, since eventually, these editions were used and referred to by all.

6. Shaʿar Ha-Shamayim and the Broader Public

It is difficult to precisely define the theological platform of the yeshiva. On the surface, it seemed nothing but more than a continuation of Beit El. However, its special character becomes revealed in its publishing activities and in the propagation of the yeshiva's curriculum. The

leaders of the yeshiva called upon the entire traditionally observant public to study kabbalah for at least one hour each day, there was never an attempt to reveal to them the depth of kabbalistic secrets. At times, the yeshiva's aim by this was to muster public support for scholars who devoted all their time to the study of kabbalah and prayer with *kavvanot*. For the wider public, *tiqqunim* ('spiritual rectification ceremonies') and special public prayers were held. The yeshiva also promised to pray daily, and on special occasions at sacred sites, for people who supported it financially.[71] An important turn to the general public occurred during the Holocaust, when Horowitz, together with other kabbalists, cast a public curse upon all the German generals (accompanied by *shofar* blasts), which was believed to have led to Hitler's downfall.[72]

6.1. *Symbol of Corruption, Critique and Decline*

The secular residents of the land of Israel were not ignorant of the yeshiva's existence and its predecessor. Whereas, Beit El symbolized to them the decline of kabbalah study, Shaʿar ha-Shamayim was a symbol of corruption. In a satirical newspaper article, all of Shaʿar ha-Shamayim's activities were presented as an attempt to extort money from naïve laymen. The article ends: '[They] hope that a new generation of *Mekubalim* ("kabbalists") will grow into a future generation of *mekablim* ("beggars")'.[73]

A similar description also appears in one of the stories of S.Y. Abramovitsh (Mendele Mokher-Seforim), who depicted Horowitz's search for the Lost Tribes as an alibi for raising money.[74] In a literary parody from 1903,[75] which serves as a sort of introduction to the continuation of *The Travels of Benjamin the Third* (first edition in Yiddish, Odessa 1878),[76] Abramovitsh explicitly mentions the names of the kabbalists involved in the excursion, basing himself on one of the pamphlets

[71] Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, *Hotem Tokhnit* (1912), 9–14.
[72] Leibovitz, *Kol Yehuda*, 178–179.
[73] Ben Avi and Shirzili, 'm'Mahaneh ha-Mekubalim'.
[74] Abramovitsh, 'Agadot ha-Admonim'. Likewise, at the end of the second (and last) Hebrew edition of *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, 1911.
[75] Abramovitsh, 'Agadot ha-Admonim'.
[76] There is an English translation of the Yiddish Version: Abramovitsh, *Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler*. On Abramovitsh and his Book, see Miron, *A Traveler Disguised*; Frieden, *Classic Yiddish Fiction*, 9–94.

issued prior to their departure.[77] In this piece, Benjamin the Third, having returned from his own search for the Ten Tribes (as related in the first version), sets out again, this time in the fraternity of the kabbalists. Although legends of the Ten Tribes were presented in a utopian-romantic spirit by several authors of the time—in that 'age of national renewal'—Abramovitsh's satires mocked the kabbalists and all others of similar leanings. Abramovitsh did not suffice with this short work. In his second and last Hebrew version of *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, printed in 1911, he added a page entitled 'To Make Known and Reveal', in which the date 1898 appears. While this may be alluding to the first Zionist Congress, held in 1897, which he sought to ridicule,[78] Abramovitsh certainly wished to mock the travels of 'the Jerusalem kabbalists', as well (the famous pamphlet being printed in 1898). Similar to *Agadot ha-Admonim* of 1903, Abramovitsh adds another section: Benjamin the Third's renewed travels in search of the lost tribes, together with his new friends, the kabbalists:

> All the time that I was busy printing the stories of the adventures of Benjamin the Third, which I have thus far, with God's help, issued the first volume, the newspapers have spread the rumor that our Benjamin has set out once more, with a group of explorers to foreign lands and distant islands beyond the Mountains of Darkness. But this is what happened. Word reached Benjamin about a new book in the camp of Israel: 'The Search for the Honor of the Sages of the Torah', written by the busybodies, the pure-minded of the holy city of Jerusalem, in 1898 […] He hurried to take Dame Sendrel, his prayer-shawl, his phylacteries, his walking stick and his knapsack, and joined those honorable 'pure-minded explorers'. At this moment, he is leading them through the fearful desert […].[79]

Abramovitsh's satiric attack against those searching for the Lost Tribes, first written about twenty years earlier in the original *The Travels of Benjamin the Third*, received fresh ammunition from the recent voyage of the kabbalists of Jerusalem, whom he mocks as 'detached' from

[77] Abramovitsh, 'Agadot ha-Admonim'. His words are based upon the pamphlet *Derishat Kavod*. About this parody and its relationship to the pamphlet of the travelling kabbalists, see Malachi, 'R. Shimon', 331; Werses, 'Midrashei Parodia', 145–164.

[78] Perry, 'Analogy', 86 note. 80; Miron & Norich, 'The Politics of Benjamin III'; Mer, 'Teyvat Mendele', 277–278.

[79] Abramovitsh, *'Masa'ot Benyamin ha-Shelishi'*, 87. This piece does not appear in the 1896–1897 version of the book, as some people have written.

reality, or, alternatively, as *shnorrers*, whose whole intention is merely to collect money.

At the same time a secular Jerusalem author signed his name as '*Megalleh Temirin*' ('Revealer of Secrets', the title of Joseph Perl's satire on the Hasidic movement) in a critique he wrote of the yeshiva: from his perspective there was no difference between the contemporary Jerusalem kabbalists and the nineteenth century Hasidim described in Perl's earlier satire.[80]

Despite the description of the kabbalists as beggars, loafers, or, at best, dreamers and visionaries, the critiques were never made by more than a few individuals. One example was Ephraim Deinard, who sought to hold a symbolic burial of the kabbalah. In his quixotic war, he sought to excise all expressions of mysticism in Jewish literature, going as far as suggesting Meron, in northern Israel, as a symbolic burial place of kabbalah. His book, *Alata*, concludes with a recitation of Kaddish over the deceased kabbalah.[81]

Yet, simultaneously, another attack was mounting against the kabbalists from a different front; that is, a critique of kabbalah by the renowned Yemenite scholar, R. Yehiyah Kapah, in several incisive and influential works. His main work, *Sefer Milhemet Hashem* was printed in Jerusalem in 1931, and was immediately banned in both Jerusalem and Yemen. After Kapah's death in 1932, several Yemenite Torah scholars wrote a rebuttal of his works, under the title *Sefer 'Emunat Hashem*, published in Jerusalem, 1938. For while the kabbalists had been able to ignore the scorn poured upon them personally by the secular press in Israel, they were unable to remain silent when the attack was against the torah itself, coming from among the ranks of the faithful.[82]

More than anything else, the approbations to *'Emunat Hashem* reveal a great deal about the attitude to Kabbalah in Jerusalem in those days. Dozens of kabbalists and talmudic scholars wrote approbations, both short and long, discrediting Kapah and praising the importance and study of kabbalah—both in their own lives, and for the fate of Israel. Among them is the letter of R. Shimon Zvi Horowitz, who concluded

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[80] Megalleh Temirin, 'Kabbalah Masiyot'. On Perl and his book, see Taylor, *Joseph Perl's Revealer of Secrets*; Dauber, *Antonio's Devils*.

[81] Deinard, *Alata*. On Deinard and his polemics, see Schapiro, 'Ephraim Deinard'; Berkowitz. 'Ephraim Deinard'; Meir, 'Mikhael Levi Rodkinson'.

[82] See Meir, 'Naftuli Sod', 615–619; Wagner, 'Jewish Mysticism on Trial'.

his sharp words against the critics of kabbalah as follows: 'It is appropriate to fight against them, and to subdue and cast them down... until they completely repent and regret their evil deeds and fallacious beliefs, and all their fictitious books, filled with heresy, should be sentenced to burning [...] so that innocent people not stumble on their account'. Horowitz signed the letter: 'Head of the Shaʿar ha-Shamayim Yeshiva, and head of all the kabbalists of the city of Jerusalem'.

Kapah's case was largely unique. The loud voices of outright critics of Kabbalah eventually became muffled, and their repercussions were scant. However, a different sort of critique remained, in academic scholarship and popular literature, which preferred descriptions of decline and fall to that of direct criticism, as we described above.

7. Conclusion

The conventional image of kabbalah in the twentieth century is in need of correction. It is no longer reasonable to claim that the Jerusalem kabbalists of the time lacked innovation. Based upon their belief that we are entering a new age of revelation—in the national, revivalist spirit—and using the limited tools they had at their disposal, they tried to spread kabbalah within the yeshiva and among the traditional public beyond its walls.

The Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva reflected this great transformation of attitude toward the spread of kabbalah and played a central part in the flourishing of the kabbalah among the traditional public. A large number Shaʿar ha-Shamayim's kabbalistic publications can today be found in the Gershom Scholem Library of the National University Library in Jerusalem, some of them containing notes and additions in Scholem's own handwriting. Scholem himself wrote in several places (mainly on the margins of his books and in notes in his estate) about meetings he had with Jerusalem kabbalists, though he failed to mention these encounters in his own books.

The Shaʿar ha-Shamayim yeshiva still exists today in Jerusalem's Bukharim neighborhood and one can still find there several outstanding kabbalists, such as the prolific R. Raphael Moshe Luria, or R. Yitzhak Moshe Erlanger, author of the Hasidic, contemplative work *Sheva Einayim*. Likewise, the late R. Daniel Perish, who brought the recent dissemination of the Zohar in Israel to an unprecedented level,

came precisely from this environment.[83] A correct image of the fate of kabbalah in Israel and eastern Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century contributes not only to a better understanding of the past but also to the understanding of processes playing themselves out as we are writing these words.

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[83] Meir, 'Gilui', 228–231; Huss, 'Tirgumei Zohar', 86.

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THE STATUS OF THE (NON)JEWISH OTHER IN THE APOCALYPTIC MESSIANISM OF MENAHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON

Elliot R. Wolfson

> By God, you gotta have a swine to show you where the truffles are.
>
> Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?*

1. In God We Trust: America as the Spiritual Superpower

There is no question that the environment of America had a profound impact on the Habad-Lubavitch hasidism under the leadership of the seventh, and presumably last, Rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneerson. One of the areas where this effect is most conspicuous is with regard to the attitude toward the Gentile nations. The sixth Rebbe had already expressed gratitude for the freedom to practice Judaism in this country in contrast to the persecutions and hardships suffered in Russia,[1] but he has also expressed doubt regarding the viability of America as a place where traditional Judaism could thrive. Thus, in the beginning of the pamphlet *Qol Qore*, which appeared for the first time on 26 May 1941, Yosef Yitzhaq remarked that in the 'old country' the fires were burning to consume the body of the Jewish people, whereas in the 'new country,' the Jewish soul was threatened with extinction.[2] A similar sentiment was expressed in a talk he gave on the second day of Pentecost, 10 June 1943: the situation in America was deemed to be worse than under Tsar Nicholas in Russia, for, in the latter, the wish was to murder Jews physically, and in the former to uproot them entirely from the faith.[3] The matter is also depicted in terms of a well-known rabbinic recasting of a biblical typology: the destiny of Jacob is linked to the world to come, the fate of Esau to this world. Inasmuch as the people of Israel are involved in mundane matters solely for the

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[1] Y.Y. Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Sihot 5702*, 110.
[2] Y.Y. Schneersohn, *Arba'a Qol ha-Qore*, 3 (Hebrew text on p. 28).
[3] Y.Y. Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Sihot 5703*, 132.

sake of Torah, their material needs are fulfilled on the basis of unwarranted divine grace (*hesed hinnam*); American Jews, however, are not at ease with this sense of munificence, and thus they are in "partnership" with non-Jews in pursuit of physical desires and pleasures.[4] In the following month, on 12 Tammuz (15 July), the festival of redemption (*hag ha-ge'ullah*) celebrating the discharge of the sixth Rebbe from Soviet prison on that date in 1927, the spiritual depravity was repeated in a brief but poignant way: 'Here in America, it is not only that new melodies are not created, but the old ones, too, are forgotten'.[5] One would readily agree that these are rather dismal assessments about American Jewry. Although there are occasional asides in which Yosef Yitzhaq extols the Jews of America,[6] on the whole he is rather grim regarding their religious fortitude. The seventh Rebbe emphasized that his predecessor was far more optimistic about America, noting, for instance, that he rejected the more conventional view of European rabbis that this was not a place where orthodox Jewry could flourish;[7] his comportment, however, is fundamentally different. From the beginning of his leadership until the last years of his life, he maintained his father-in-law's deep conviction regarding the imminent coming of the Messiah, which logically implies a continued sense of physical dislocation and temporary belonging, but he also felt great possibilities in the American landscape to promote the cause of Judaism and to spread the teachings of Hasidism worldwide. When the Messiah comes, he declared already on 6 December 1951, we will be able to say with 'justified pride' that the Jewish youth of America were the soldiers in the army responsible for carrying out the mission of bringing the redemption.[8] Moreover, the freedom of worship secured by the American constitution would eventually serve as a lynchpin in his overall post-Holocaust messianic battle.

In the course of time, we find pronouncements that indicate that he applauded actions and words on the part of the US government and even the president that were in accord with his spiritual vision, for example, the ruling to allow the lighting of the Hanukah menorah

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[4] Ibid., 134.
[5] Ibid., 142.
[6] Ibid., 140, where the quality of innocence (*temimut*) is associated with the American experience.
[7] M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 22 # 8593, 410.
[8] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5712*, vol. 1, 155.

in public places.[9] The mystical import of this activity is to maximize the diffusion of the divine light to Jews but especially to non-Jews, an idea that is linked to the rabbinic injunction to light the candles of Hanukah 'in the entry to one's house from the outside' (*al petah beito mi-ba-hutz*),[10] that is, the essence of this gesture is to illumine spiritually those who are positioned on the exterior.[11] Moreover, the Rebbe appealed to and upheld the rabbinic maxim, *dina de-malkhuta dina*,[12] which accords legitimacy and authority to the rule of the land where one lives in matters that do not conflict with the regulations of the Torah, but beyond this principle of pragmatic expediency, he viewed America in a special way, and thus believed that there was an inherent affinity between American and Jewish law. In the talk given on 12 Tammuz 5743 (23 June 1983), Schneerson took the opportunity to express gratitude to the current American president, Ronald Reagan, and he noted that the superpower status of America is related directly to the fact that it is distinguished amongst all modern nations in placing 'exceptional emphasis' on faith (*emunah*) and conviction (*bittahon*) in God, a propensity exemplified in the slogan 'in God we trust', which is linked especially to the nation's currency. The content of these words relates to 'faith in the Creator of the world, and not faith [*emunah*] alone, but "trust"—faith of conviction [*emunah shel bittahon*], that is, they place absolute trust [*immun muhlat*] in the Creator of the world, and they have faith in him'.[13]

Schneerson shows here, as he was wont to do, a finely attuned sensitivity to mundane matters. He astutely discerns the underlying importance of religious conviction in the American landscape—one must still wonder if a person who did not explicitly avow belief in God by

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[9] From a discourse on 19 Kislev 5747 (21 December 1986), in M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5747*, vol. 2, 54–55.

[10] Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 21b.

[11] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5750*, vol. 2, 66–67.

[12] Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 10b.

[13] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5744*, vol. 2, 895. On the spiritual import of the slogan 'In God we trust', see also idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5744*, vol. 3, 1435; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5746*, vol. 2, 203; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5750*, vol. 2, 67; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5751*, vol. 4, 49. It is of interest to note that the website www.otzar770.com, which includes a picture of the Rebbe with the messianic slogan *yehi adonenu morenu we-rabbenu melekh ha-moshiah leʿolam waʿed* ('May our lord, our teacher, our master, the king Messiah, live forever') features a replication of an American coin with the words 'Liberty In God We Trust' and the date 1986.

invoking the divine in political jargon, let alone someone who openly denied or expressed doubt regarding the existence of God, could stand a chance of running for the presidency. The view of America proffered by Schneerson, and the presidential comments to which he refers, bolstered his messianic vision. All of Israel will be united, but beyond Israel, the 'matter of peace' will spread through the civilized world. The agency that shall bring this about is observance of the seven Noahide laws, the rabbinic category to denote the universal laws that are binding on any human society.[14] From Schneerson's perspective, adherence to these laws on the part of non-Jews purifies their somatic and mental state of being. Salvation (*hatzalah*), therefore, is not exclusively for the Jews but for the world in its entirety.[15] Here, too, Schneerson cites Maimonides as his authority: 'He who fulfills one commandment tips himself and the whole world to the scale of merit, and he brings about for himself and for them redemption and salvation'.[16] As he made clear in a talk he delivered on 19 Kislev 5747 (21 December 1986), 'In God we trust' bespeaks the utopian ideal of all nations worshipping together so that the attribute of kingship will be properly ascribed to God.[17]

2. Seven Noahide Laws: Including the Excluded

Perhaps nothing expresses more clearly the zeal, and to some extent, audacity of Schneerson's messianic aspiration than the drive on the part of the Lubavitch movement under his supervision to spread the knowledge of and gain commitment to the seven Noahide laws amongst Gentiles. This undertaking should not be construed as missionary activity, as there is no interest in conversion. The target audience for the missionizing tendencies on the part of Habad is secular Jews. Still, the aspiration to spread the seven Noahide laws comes closest to a proselytizing program, insofar as it reflects an aspect of their religious vision that entails shaping the beliefs and practices of non-Jews for the sake of redeeming the world.

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[14] Ravitzky, *Messianism*, 188–193; Ehrlich, *Messiah of Brooklyn*, 107–108; Kraus, 'Living with the Times', 280–290; idem, *The Seventh*, 80–83, 224–249.

[15] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5744*, vol. 1, 893; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5745*, vol. 3, 1839–1840; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 35, 97–98.

[16] Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 8:10.

[17] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5747*, vol. 2, 57.

As is the case with so many crucial ideas, this, too, was seen as an integral part of the sixth Rebbe's messianic calling. Specifically, the release of Yosef Yitzhaq from Soviet prison on 12 Tammuz 5687 (12 July 1927) was interpreted as a reaffirmation of his mission "to unify all of the people of Israel by means of the dissemination of the Torah and Judaism, which includes the spreading of the fulfillment of the commandments of the sons of Noah in all of the world in its entirety."[18] The universalist objective is part of the vocational particularity. The significance of the seven Noahide laws in Schneerson's teachings has been noted by a number of scholars, but the topic has been treated in isolation from the larger and more complex issue concerning his philosophical stance on the question of alterity and the status of the non-Jew. Many have claimed, apologetically in my view, that the campaign of the seven Noahide Laws illustrates not only a more conciliatory attitude toward the Gentiles but a weakening of the traditional ethnocentrism. While I do not deny that there is an interesting shift in Schneerson's rhetoric, I submit that a careful scrutiny of the various articulations of this idea leads to the conclusion that the boundary separating Jew and non-Jew is not completely obliterated or even substantially blurred; on the contrary, the narrowing of the abyss only widens it further.

One passage, in particular, is worthy of citing, as the matter of the Jew's responsibility to proliferate the knowledge and observance of the seven Noahide laws on the part of non-Jews is framed in gender terms. The relevant comment is from a discourse delivered on 21 Kislev 5745 (15 December 1984):

> It is known and it has been explained in a number of places that the blessed holy One created the world in a manner that every created being is both a donor [*mashpiʿa*] and a recipient [*meqabbel*], for it is not possible for a discriminate entity to be exclusively in the aspect of donor or in the aspect of recipient. As it pertains to our matter, since the task of the Jew is to influence and to cause the non-Jew to receive the commandments given to the sons of Noah, it follows that the Jew is the donor and the non-Jew the recipient. But since it is not possible for a discriminate entity to be exclusively in the aspect of recipient—the blessed holy One caused the non-Jew to bestow on the Jew in matters of a livelihood.[19]

[18] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5743*, vol. 2, 1733.
[19] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5745*, vol. 2, 900.

Utilizing the standard binary of the donor and the recipient, which is engendered as male and female, the hierarchical supremacy of Israel is expressed by the fact that even the more active role assigned to the non-Jew is tied to benefiting Jews in material matters. Another text, in which the incongruity is made even more sharply, is taken from a talk given on 26 Av 5745 (13 August 1985). In a conventional manner, Schneerson insists that the Jews must not be swayed by the nations in which they are embedded. The reason for the diasporic existence is to accentuate the chosenness of the Jewish people and the fact that they serve as a living example for the nations of the world, especially to endorse the seven Noahide laws. Schneerson makes a point of singling out America as a place where Gentiles respect the Jews and help them establish their own social and educational institutions.[20]

An honest assessment of this passage, as well as others that could have been cited, leads inevitably to the conclusion that the other nations are treated as a means to benefit the Jews,[21] an idea supported exegetically by the verse 'Kings shall tend your children, their queens shall serve you as nurses' (Isa. 49:23).[22] Even the demand that they fulfill the seven commandments of Noah is merely an aspect of this instrumentality. This is not to deny the fact that Schneerson, following Maimonides,[23] whom he cites quite frequently, did impart soteriological significance to the observance of the non-Jews. More specifically, the goal of transposing the world into a habitation for the divine is realized when the Jews fulfill the Torah and the Gentiles the seven Noahide commandments.[24] Nevertheless, the hierarchy is not effaced, a crucial point that has not always been appreciated by scholars who have written about this subject. Those who wish to speak of a partnership between Jews and Gentiles in the business of redemption must acknowledge the terms of that collaboration without defensiveness or dishonesty. The seventh Rebbe's effort to promote the observance of the seven commandments on the part of the non-Jews was certainly laudable, but a careful analysis of his remarks on this topic indicates that they only reinforced the prejudicial alterity implied in his portrayal of the non-Jew as the other to the other who is the Jew.

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[20] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5745*, vol. 5, 2797.
[21] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5743*, vol. 1, 924.
[22] Ibid., 933.
[23] Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 8:10.
[24] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5751*, vol. 3, 269.

By including the excluded in the claim to exclusivity, the exclusivity is rendered even more inclusive.

3. Israel's Humanity: Jewish Particularity as Idiomatic of Self-Nullification

Foundational to Habad's philosophic orientation is the presumed ontological difference in the constitution of the Jew and the non-Jew, both psychically and somatically. While hardly unique to this body of literature, each of the seven masters in the Lubavitch dynasty has accepted such a view, apologetic denials on the part of some scholars and practitioners notwithstanding. The textual evidence to support this assertion is overwhelming and it would be impractical to offer even a small percentage of the sources that validate the point. A striking way that this dogma has been expressed is the claim that non-Jews possess an animal soul that derives from the demonic, whereas Jews possess a divine soul that endows them with the capacity to uplift their animal soul and to transform it into a vessel for holiness. Jews alone are said to be endowed with the aspect of soul known as *yehidah*, in virtue of which the individual can be reincorporated into the incomposite unity of the nondifferentiated One (*yahid*).[25] A distinctive position is accorded the Jews, as it is presumed that only they have the facet of the divine that is enrooted in the essence of the Infinite (*atzmut ein sof*), the 'inner point of the heart' (*nequddat ha-lev penimit*)—they are not just of a similar substance, they are of the same substance (a doctrinal principle attested in the dicta *yisra'el we-qudsha berikh hu had* and *yisra'el we-qudsha berikh hu kolla had*)[26]—and therefore they are the

[25] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5711*, vol., 125, 266.

[26] M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 2, p. 604; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 181; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 30, 153; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 31, 51; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 35, 51; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 36, 122, 186; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 37, 105; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 39, 332, 359, 361, 363, 370, 371, 426; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 6, # 1635, 115; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5712*, vol. 1, 305; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5715*, vol. 1, 278; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 44, 147; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5717*, vol. 2, 57; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5719*, vol. 3, 68; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat al Seder Hodshei ha-Shanah*, vol. 1, 120; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat al Seder Hodshei ha-Shanah*, vol. 2, 150, 415; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat al Seder Hodshei ha-Shanah*, vol. 3, 20, 95, 125, 253, 276. The more typical formulation, based on Zohar 3:73a, affirms the unity of God, Torah, and Israel, though the precise language, *yisra'el*

only ones capable of being bound to and absorbed in the transcendent light beyond the delimitation of the concatenation of worlds.[27] Even the pious Gentiles, who acknowledge that God creates the world *ex nihilo*, can comprehend only the existence (*metzi'ut*) of the divine and nothing of its substance (*mahut*), and since the light of the Infinite is completely concealed from them, they do not have the capacity to cultivate the ultimate experience of ecstasy through the 'realization of the nullification of their existence' (*hitpaʿalut ha-bittul mi-metzi'utam*).[28] The Jews singularly have the capacity to suffer such an experience, to be affixed to the supernal knowledge (*daʿat elyon*) that is above reason,[29] to attain the metanoetic state labeled as the 'conjunction' (*devequt*), 'bonding' (*hitqashsherut*), or the 'unification' (*yihud*) of the 'essence with the essence' (*etzem ba-etzem*),[30] and it is thus through them that 'the

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oraita we-qudsha berikh hu kola had, is closer to the expression *qudsha berikh hu oraita we-yisra'el kolla had*. Regarding this saying, see Tishby, *Messianic Mysticism*, 454–485. This is repeated on numerous occasions in the Rebbe's discourses and letters. See, for instance, M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 4, # 799, p. 39, # 1009, p. 282, # 1095, pp. 376, 378, # 1215, p. 500; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 5, # 1319, p. 111; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 7, # 2157, p. 302, # 2211, p. 351; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 12, # 4173, p. 358; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 14, # 5151, p. 387; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 19, # 7384, p. 386; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 22, # 8331, p. 127; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 28, # 10,655, p. 95; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5711*, vol. 1, 55; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5711*, vol. 2, 330; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5712*, vol. 1, 200; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5712*, vol. 3, 182; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5713*, vol. 1, 259; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5714*, vol. 1, 19, 210; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, 147; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 307, 316, 318; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5717*, vol. 1, 121; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5717*, vol. 2, 167; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5718*, vol. 1, 145; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5718*, vol. 3, 33, 260; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5719*, vol. 3, 196; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 201; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 221, 414; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 3, 60, 64, 99, 137, 289; idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 39, 365.

[27] Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el 5626*, 242; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 216.

[28] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Seder Tefillot*, 287b–c.

[29] M.M. Schneersohn, *Derekh Mitzwotekha*, 27b.

[30] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5713*, vol. 3, 9; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5714*, vol. 2, 15; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, 222, 228; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5717*, vol. 1, 77, 118, 119; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5718*, vol. 3, 200, 260; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5719*, vol. 2, 95. The experience is also referred to as the 'discernment of the essence by the essence' (*hakkarat etzem ba-etzem*); see idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5719*, vol. 2, 96, 97, 172.

darkness is also transformed into light, and it is revealed to them as it will verily be in the world to come'.[31]

On this score, it is relevant to recall that the term to designate the Jew, *yehudi*, is related by Shneur Zalman of Liadi to the utterance of Rachel *ha-paʿam odeh et yhwh*, 'The time I will praise the Lord' (Gen. 29:25), the scriptural explanation of the name of Judah (*yehudah*). The essence of what it is to be a Jew is connected to the gesture of expressing gratitude to God (*hoda'ah*), which, conceived mystically, is the 'aspect of nullification in the light of the Infinite' (*behinat ha-bittul le-or ein sof*).[32] That the unique power of the Jew is linked to the liturgical utterance is an idea affirmed in classical rabbinic sources, but its deeper meaning, according to Habad philosophy, concerns the annihilation of self. This, too, is the meaning elicited from the scriptural term for 'Hebrew', *ivri*, which is linked to the verse 'In ancient times, your forefathers lived beyond the river', *be-ever ha-nahar yashvu avoteikhem me-olam* (Josh. 24:2): the root of the Jewish soul is from beyond the river, that is, from the essence, the concealed thought and the infinite will that transcend the order of the concatenation of the worlds (*seder hishtalshelut ha-olamot*).[33] The biblical depictions of the people of Israel as the children of God (Deut 14:1) or as the first-born (Ex. 4:22) are related similarly to the 'essential connection to the divine' (*hitqashsherut atzmit le-elohut*) alleged on the part of the Jews, an indigenous bond that facilitates their incorporation within the essence.[34] Summarizing the point, Schneerson remarked that the soul of each and every Jew is a

> portion of the divine from above in actuality [*heleq elohah mi-maʿal mammash*], a portion of the essence by means of which they grasp the essence, and when the worship is from the side of the essence of the soul,

[31] D.B. Schneersohn, *Torat Hayyim: Bere'shit*, 161d.

[32] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 99a. See M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5747*, vol. 3, 258.

[33] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 25a (in that context, the source beyond the river is identified as *Keter*), 75d, 76c; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Behuqotai, 46d-47a, Masʿei, 93d; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Shir ha-Shirim, 37c; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5565*, vol. 1, 290; D.B. Schneersohn, *Torat Hayyim: Shemot*, 279a, 281b; M.M. Schneerson, *Derekh Mitzwotekha*, 82b; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5720*, vol. 2, 3–4, 8–9; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat,* vol. 1, p. 253.

[34] Y.Y. Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5689*, 112.

> which is the matter of nullification and acceptance of the yolk, then all the matters of worship are equaniminous.[35]

In an important letter to David Ben Gurion, written on 8 Adar I 5719 (9 February 1959), the seventh Rebbe categorically rejected the idea of a 'secular Jew', since Jewish identity is intricately linked to the pneumatic connection of the Jew, regardless of his or her allegiance, to the divine essence. He acknowledges that there are righteous individuals amongst the nations of the world, but, as the nomenclature indicates, they are from the nations of the world and hence they cannot be on the same footing as Jews.[36]

One should be struck straight away by a blatant contradiction: on the one hand, the intrinsic nature of the Jew, in contrast to the non-Jew, is tagged as the ability to be integrated in the essence, but, on the other hand, in that essence, opposites are no longer distinguishable, whence it should follow that the division between Jew and non-Jew should itself be subject to subversion. I shall return to this matter below, but suffice it here to note that even if it is acknowledged that the overcoming of difference is the purpose of the path, the path to get beyond the path is tendered as the unique responsibility of the people of Israel, since only they are thought to be conterminous with the divine, and hence only they are fully entrusted with the task of transmuting the animal craving for the pleasures of this world into the all-consuming hankering for and delight in God. The ideal of self-abnegation is customarily presented, therefore, as the mystical exegesis of the verse *ner yhwh nishmat adam*, 'the human soul is the lamp of the Lord' (Prov. 20:27), which is applied specifically to Israel based on the older rabbinic idea that the word *adam*, in its most exacting sense, refers to the Jews and not to the nations of the world.[37] Just as it is the nature of the flame to illumine and to rise upward, so the desire of the soul of every Jew (even if a particular individual is unaware) is to ascend and to be conjoined to its source but also to augment the light in the world. Moreover, the term *adam* is related linguistically to the expression *eddammeh le-elyon* (Isa. 14:14), which denotes the correspondence between the human below and divine anthropos above.

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[35] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 298. See idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 22, 163.

[36] M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 18, # 6714, p. 211.

[37] Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 42–57, 73–124.

That this is restricted to the Jews is well attested in Habad sources.[38] To approach the seventh Rebbe's worldview unapologetically, this is the place where one must begin: of all ethnicities, the Jews alone are isomorphic with the essence, and thus they alone are capable of apprehending the imaginal body of God from their own embodied mindfulness.[39]

Early on, Schneerson offered a strident expression of this belief: 'The Jewish man [*ish ha-yisra'eli*] is constituted by two lines [...] the natural qualities, too, are composed of good and evil, which is not the case with respect to the nations of the world, for they have no good at all'.[40] One might propose that such a rash formulation was reflective of youthful intemperance, but it must be remembered that the view expressed by the young man was not uniquely his own, Indeed, in the opening chapter of the first part of *Tanya*, we find the infamous distinction between the animal soul of the Jews and the animal soul of the idolatrous nations: the former derives from the shell of the radiance (*nogah*), which is from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, whereas the latter derives from the remaining three impure shells 'in which there is no good at all.'[41] It is not only that the Jews alone possess a divine soul, but even their animal soul is unique and superior to other ethnic identities. To some extent, this view is modified by the Habad-Lubavitch masters in accord with the Hasidic teaching, which is, in some measure, anticipated in medieval kabbalistic lore, that there is no evil without an admixture of good, and hence the redemptive task is to ignite the spark of light encased in the shell of darkness in order to restore the darkness to the light. This task is portrayed by Schneerson with special reference to Esau or Edom, which, following a longstanding exegetical tradition, is a figurative trope for Christianity:

> This is also the content of the work of Israel in this last exile, the exile of Edom, to purify also this evil of Esau (the father of Edom) until the time

[38] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 69b, 76b; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Wayyiqra, 2c, 8b; Bemidbar, 81c; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Devarim, 4b; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen—5566*, vol. 1, 201; D.B. Schneersohn, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 61d, 62b, 68b, 68d, 111d; M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 20, # 7450, p. 6; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 24, # 9170, p. 171; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5714*, vol. 3, 174.

[39] M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 4, #876, p. 134; idem, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 22, # 8626, p. 448.

[40] M.M. Schneerson, *Reshimot*, vol. 4, sec. 132, p. 193.

[41] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 1, ch. 1, 6a.

> of the end when the good hidden in him will be revealed [...] And by means of this Edom, too, is transformed into good—as the sages, blessed be their memory, said, 'In the future, the pig will become pure'[42] (which alludes to Edom, 'the pig is Edom'),[43] to fulfill the promise 'For the liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esau, and dominion shall belong to the Lord' (Obad 1:21), quickly in our days in actuality.[44]

I shall return below to the image of the kosher pig, as it were, and the apocalyptic theme of the othering of the non-Jew, the Jewish other, that it implies, but the crucial point to underscore here is that Schneerson, following the teaching of his predecessors, which can be traced to much older sources, accorded ontic singularity to the Jewish people. The rich tradition that informed his thinking notwithstanding, the specific exigencies of his moment cannot be denied. In the wake of the mass destruction of European Jews, and the relocation of many refugees to the liberal, democratic society of America, where the powerful forces of secularism and assimilation obviously posed a challenge to those who sought to protect and promulgate orthodoxy, the necessity to emphasize even more stridently the irreducible character of the Jew is surely understandable.[45] Claims to the superiority of the Jew in a post-Holocaust world might seem counter-historical, but their power derives precisely from this fact.

Schneerson never wavered from the conviction that the 'soul of each and every one from Israel is a portion of the Creator and it is bound to him, and by means of this it possesses superior spiritual powers'.[46] The pietistic ideal of self-annihilation (*bittul atzmi*) rests on the consubstantiality of the Jewish soul and the essence.[47] The Jew, as it were, has what it takes to be nothing. The Torah, which in its full incarnation is given uniquely to Israel, is the intermediary bond through which the opposites, God and human, nature and what is beyond nature,

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[42] For analysis and reference to some of the relevant sources, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 239–240, 265. See also M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 12, 175–176; Kimelman, *Mystical Meaning*, 100, 123, 176.

[43] *Midrash Wayyiqra Rabbah* 13:5, p. 293. On the depiction of Esau as the pig, see Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el 5639*, vol. 1, 338; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 243, 250.

[44] M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 35, 118.

[45] M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 9, # 2871, p. 247.

[46] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5720*, vol. 1, 397.

[47] M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 4, 1147.

coalesce in the sameness of their difference.[48] In Habad, accordingly, we have a mystical discipline predicated on a non-egocentricist philosophy that is at the same time culturally ethnocentric. One might have expected the two to have been coupled, such that the breeding of egocentricity on the psychological plane is the efficient cause that engenders the propagation of ethnocentricity on the anthropological. But it is also possible, as the example of Habad illustrates, to decouple the two.

The belief that every Jew bears this distinction is precisely what fueled Schneerson's ambition to spread orthodoxy to secular and estranged Jews. I see no evidence that the seventh Rebbe challenged the view of his predecessors, which restricted mystical gnosis to the Jews. It is true that Schneerson accepted the Maimonidean view that the future redemption entails the diffusion of the knowledge of God for Jews and non-Jews. But this does not efface the disparity. Indeed, an unbiased examination of the material indicates that precisely in contexts where Schneerson affirmed the eschatology of Maimonides, he was careful to emphasize as well the kabbalistic theme of Israel's meontological identity with God.[49] Even when Schneerson accepts Maimonides's view that the scriptural notion that Adam was created in God's image refers to the faculty of reason, which presumably should not be ethnically exclusive, he qualifies this (in a manner reminiscent of Judah Loewe of Prague, the Maharal)[50] by demarcating a difference between the rational soul of the Jews and the rational soul of the non-Jews: the former possess a divine soul and therefore their intellect is imbued with the possibility of becoming assimilated or incorporated into the divine though self-annihilation.[51] What Jew and non-Jew share in common highlights the gap that separates them. Apologetic presentations of Schneerson's ideas notwithstanding, a critical assessment must begin from acknowledging the basic precept of Habad

[48] M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 4, # 1039, p. 316; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5711*, vol. 1, 290–291; idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 3, 59–60.

[49] M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 178–181.

[50] For discussion of the Maharal's view regarding the divine image, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 116–120, and reference to other scholars cited on p. 117 note 423. For a sustained discussion of the influence of this figure on East-European pietism, see Safran, 'Maharal and Early Hasidism', and reference to other scholars cited on p. 91 notes 1–4.

[51] M.M. Schneerson, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5737*, 273–274, and the Yiddish version in idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 15, 60–61.

religious philosophy regarding the unassimilable singularity of the Jews vis-à-vis other ethnicities.

4. Messianic Anthropos: Beyond Theopoetic Metaphoricization

One might contend that the seeds to undermine this perspective are found in Habad teaching as well, since the supernal consciousness is knowledge of the essence, which is characterized as the nondifferentiated light of the Infinite, the supernal light in which there is no longer any basis to distinguish light and darkness, Jacob and Esau, Jew and non-Jew. This state of indifference, however, is itself caught in the snare of ethnocentricity, and hence we would be more precise in rendering the Habad approach as thinking of the non-Jew, the other to the Jew, as still a Jewish other, the other that is other to the other, which is precisely what makes any semblance of identity possible. I make no effort to defend or rationalize this conception of alterity, but I would suggest that there is a principle at work here that may have a wider resonance and relevance.

Shneur Zalman ascribed this characteristic of the *coincidentia oppositorum* to the adamic nature that is linked distinctively to the Jews. Speaking about the forms of the chariot envisioned by Ezekiel, he noted that the face of the lion was to the right and the face of the ox to the left (Ezek. 1:10),

> but in the aspect of the human there is no right or left, for it is their inner aspect that comprises them together, and therefore it is called *adam*, 'I will be likened to the most high' [*eddammeh le-elyon*], that is, to the aspect of the supernal Adam that is upon the throne, which is called the 'human of emanation' [*adam de-atzilut*].[52]

The divine anthropos is identified specifically as the supernal prototype of the Jew, but the face of the human is said to be beyond duality—positioned neither to the right nor to the left because it comprises both left and right—and therefore the distinction between Jew and non-Jew must be surpassed in the discernment that the (non)Jew is the same to the other that is the same other.

[52] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5566*, vol. 2, 464.

As Shneur Zalman put it in another context,

> It is written 'upon the semblance of the throne, there was the semblance of the appearance of a human' (Ezek. 1:26), 'the appearance of a human' [*ke-mar'eh adam*], through the register of the imagination [*be-kaf ha-dimyon*], for the way and order of the concatenation from world to world [...] is in the aspect of a human in three lines, the right and left hands, and the middle is the body [...] And by bearing the throne, the beasts bear the appearance of a human that is 'upon it from above' (Ezek. 1:26), to the aspect of 'for he is not human' [*ki lo adam hu*] (1 Sam. 15:29), above the aspect and category of the concatenation, to drawn down from there a new light to the aspect of the human that is upon the throne.[53]

The enthroned anthropos envisioned by the prophet figuratively symbolizes the manifestation of the infinite light of the structure of the worlds, but the light itself is beyond that form, indeed, it is the meta/figure, the figure without figure, the 'supernal anthropos' (*adam ha-elyon*), the not-human (*lo adam*), which is 'above the aspect of the anthropos' (*lema'alah mi-behinat adam*).[54] The boundless light is connected as well with the zoharic depiction of *Attiqa Qaddisha*, the highest dimension of the Godhead, as lacking any left side,[55] that is, 'there is no division of gradations at all and therefore there are no changes there at all. And this is what Samuel said to Saul, "The eternality of Israel does not deceive or have remorse" (1 Sam. 15:29)'.[56] It is important to heed the scriptural context: Samuel informs Saul that he cannot reclaim the monarchy from David, since the kingship of David, the promise of the messianic reign, derives from the aspect of the divine that is the 'eternality of Israel' (*netzah yisra'el*). With this

[53] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 71b.

[54] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5569*, 173. See also M.M. Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 1, 49; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 2, 954.

[55] Shneur Zohar 3:129a (*Idra Rabba*). On occasion, the zoharic image of the one eye (ibid., 129b), is also used to convey the same idea of transcending binaries. See, for example, Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Re'eh, 24c; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 407. For discussion of these themes, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, 218–224.

[56] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 72c. Compare idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Bemidbar, 9c; idem, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5569*, 173. A critical passage that informed the Habad speculation on the supernal anthropos that is above anthropomorphic representation is Zohar 3:136b (*Idra Rabba*). In that context, 1 Sam. 9:29 is interpreted in the following way: the highest aspect of the Godhead, the 'eternality of Israel', is portrayed as a forehead without a full face, and hence the term *adam* is not ascribed to it. See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Shir ha-Shirim, 23c.

we come to what might certainly appear to be a grave inconsistency in Habad thought. On the one hand, the light of the Infinite, which is called the 'not-human' (*lo adam*), is above the bifurcation of right and left[57]—a point exemplified as well by the claim that there is no distinction between the masculine donor and the feminine recipient (*she-ein sham behinat hithallequt mashpiʿa u-meqabbel kelal*), a concurrence that is acclaimed to exceed rational comprehension[58]—but, on the other hand, it is only through the revelation of the Torah that there can be a disclosure of this light in the shape of the anthropos (*tziyyur adam*) that is unique to Israel, and, consequently, the attainment of the higher level in which the anthropomorphic depiction of the divine is surmounted is spearheaded solely by the Jewish people.[59]

That this is the implication of the messianic awakening is proffered in a remarkable way in a comment of Dov Baer:

> It is known that [the nature of] human [*adam*] [is linked to] 'I will be likened to the most high' [*eddammeh le-elyon*] (Isa. 14:14), and the very opposite of this will be in the Messiah, concerning whom it is written 'My servant will be enlightened' [*yaskil avdi*] (Isa. 52:13), and his root is in the essence of the light of the Infinite, the essential attributes above the aspect of the human, as its says 'very' [*me'od*] (Gen. 1:31). Nonetheless, it will be precisely in the aspect of the human, for presently the aspect of the human comes in the aspect of the delimited consciousness [*hagbalah de-mohin*] of *Abba* and *Imma* in *Zeʿeir Anpin*, in a diminished state [*be-qatnut*], and *Arikh Anpin* is also in the aspect of constriction [*tzimtzum*] vis-à-vis the essence, but in the future-to-come, all the lights of the ten *sefirot*, which are verily in the essence, will appear in the aspect of the human that is without boundary at all, as it is written about him, '[You are] My son, I have fathered you this day' (Ps. 2:7), just as he is in the substance and the essence in actuality [*kemo she-hu be-mahut we-atzmut mammash*].[60]

In the pre-messianic epoch, the divine light assumes the shape of an anthropos, buttressed by the alleged etymological derivation of *adam* from *eddammeh le-elyon*, a double-edge sword that cuts two ways—anthropomorphically, the quality of being human is to be assimilated within the essence beyond, though theomorphically, what is beyond

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[57] Cf. M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 3, # 449.

[58] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 71d.

[59] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, 71d, 72c, 77a; idem, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Tazriʿa, 21b, Bemidbar, 9c, Megillat Esther, 122a; D.B. Schneersohn, *Shaʿarei Teshuvah*, 92b; idem, *Imrei Binah*, pt. 1, 83a; idem, *Shaʿarei Orah*, 95b.

[60] D.B. Schneersohn, *Ner Mitzwah we-Torah Or*, 106b.

essence is imagined in human terms. The imaginal bodies, in and through which the light is incarnate, are the configurations (*partzufim*) specified in some passages of the zoharic corpus and developed further in Lurianic kabbalah, the states of consciousness delineated as *Arikh Anpin, Abba, Imma, Ze'eir Anpin*, to which we should add *Nuqba*, the feminine counterpart, which for some reason is not specified here independently. In the diminished state—figuratively rendered as the exile of God, the exile of world, and the exile of human—the sefirotic light is fashioned in the imagination as an anthropos, in mythopoeic language that conjures the portrait of a divine family; in the messianic future, however, the light will appear in the 'aspect of the human that is without boundary at all' (*behinat adam she-hu beli gevul kelal*).

How are we to confabulate the form of a human without boundary? As expansive as one's imagination might be, this can be imagined only as unimaginable, the figure of the metafigure, the infinite essence that is the non-human (*lo adam*).[61] The excess of this lack is encoded in the word *me'od*, in the refrain at the conclusion of the sixth day of creation, 'and it was very good,' *we-hinneh tov me'od* (Gen. 1:31). From the fact that the word *me'od* has the same consonants as *adam*, we can deduce the principle of the double bind of the imagination: the possibility of expanding beyond the image of the human is communicated by the word that denotes the human image. Furthermore, we are told that the anthropos without dimensions, and, consequently, the representation that is incapable of representation, is linked to the Messiah, whose root is in the 'essence of the light of the Infinite', which comprises the 'essential attributes above the aspect of the human' (*middot ha-atzmiyyim she-lema'lah mi-behinat adam*).[62] Schneerson extended this insight by noting that the rabbinic insistence that the Jews alone are called *adam* implies that they 'are like one human that is above division [*lema'alah mi-hithallequt*] […] Therefore, their amalgamation [*hitkallelut*] is in a manner such that you do not find in them a beginning and an end'.[63] There is a complete homology,

[61] D.B. Schneersohn, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 42a; idem, *Ner Mitzwah we-Torah Or*, 122b.
[62] D.B. Schneersohn, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, 104d.
[63] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 212–213. For an alternative transcription, see idem *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 30, 218–219. See also idem, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 4, 1140–1143. The description of the unity of the body politic of Israel as having no head or end, and this comparable to a circle, is found in earlier Habad sources. For example, see Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Netzavim, 44a.

then, between the essence, the Messiah, and the Jewish polity: just as the essence is devoid of essence, so the messianic constellation of Israel is above visual and verbal anthropomorphization. In the distended consciousness, we journey beyond the desire to imagine the divine as human, since the human is thought to be divine, at the margin of what it is to be human, the figure of the savior, and hence the need to specularize that human through the culturally-specific prism of Israel is called into question, even though we must candidly admit that the masters of Habad-Lubavitch have consistently maintained that only the soul-root of the Jew is in this facet of the divine that is the not-human.[64] As Schneerson put it, commenting on the eighteenth chapter of Yosef Yitzhaq's *Ba'ti le-Ganni* in a talk delivered on 11 Shevat 5748 (30 January 1988),[65] the aspect that is called *Attiq* is separate from the image of an anthropos—indeed the term itself denotes removal—but it is still linked to the aspect of the anthropos.[66] On the ladder of the contemplative ascent, it is necessary to ascend from *Malkhut* to *Ze'eir Anpin*, and from *Ze'eir Anpin* to *Keter*, and from *Keter* to *Attiq*, and from *Attiq* to the facet of the Godhead that completely transcends the emanation, 'since in the aspect of "for he is not human" as well there is the matter of form' (*ki gam bi-vehinat ki lo adam hi yeshno inyan shel tziyyur*).[67] The eschaton is marked by the disclosure of the concealment that is beyond figurative symbolization, the essence of the Infinite, the utter transcendence that is so entirely removed that it is removed from the very notion of removal, insofar as removal itself implies something from which to be removed, but the way to this anthropomorphic and theomorphic disfiguration—the human that is not-human and therefore the God that is not-God—is through the configuration of the divine anthropos that is limited to Israel. It is in this sense that the Torah is considered the intermediary that connects the emanation and that which is above the emanation (*memutz'a bein lema'alah me-atzilut we-atzilut*).[68]

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[64] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 317–318, 410.The Rebbe's remarks are part of his commentary on the eighteenth chapter of the Friederker Rebbe's *Ba'ti le-Ganni* discourse (see following note) delivered in 1968 and 1988. See also M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5715*, vol. 2, 98, 148, 172.

[65] Y.Y. Schneersohn, *Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5710–5711*, pt. 1, pp. 153–154.

[66] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 2, 407.

[67] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5713*, vol. 2, 203.

[68] Ibid. See idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyyot 5715*, vol. 2, 173–174.

According to Shalom Dovber, the future vision is a 'seeing of the substance itself', which is distinguished from ordinary prophetic vision, insofar as the latter is mediated through the anthropomorphic image.[69] Emulating Moses, the enlightened mind beholds the substance as it is in its insubstantiality; in this beholding, one attains the aim of knowledge, which is to know that one does not know. In the end, as many mystic visionaries have ascertained, to see the light is to see the darkness, to comprehend that in the supernal light (*or elyon*) the two are indistinguishable,[70] a vision that cannot be seen but in the seeing of its (un)seeing. As Shneur Zalman put it,

> That which is revealed is called 'light' and that which is above disclosure is called 'darkness'. Accordingly, whatever is in the higher level is referred to in relation to us as darkness, but from above to below, it is the opposite, for regarding what is more revealed, the comprehension is more in the category of darkness vis-à-vis the light of the Infinite, blessed be he, in his essence and his glory, as it is written in the *Zohar* with regard to the supernal crown (*keter elyon*),[71] 'Even though it is the resplendent light and the radiant light, it is black vis-à-vis the Cause of Causes', and everything is darkened before him.[72]

Referring to same zoharic passage, the seventh Rebbe commented, 'So it is with respect to the higher gradations, the closer that one approaches the aspect of the infinite essence [*atzmut ein sof*], the more it is itself in the aspect of the nullification of existence [*behinat*

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[69] Sh. D. Schneersohn, *Yom Tov shel Rosh ha-Shanah 5666*, 98–99. It is also of interest here to note the contrast made between the revelation at Sinai and that of Purim in Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el 5639*, vol. 1, 338: in the case of the former, the epiphany was (in language derived from Ezek 1:26) from the perspective of the 'human appearance' (*ke-mar'eh adam*), whereas in the case of the latter, the increase in the degree of self-denial occasioned an emanation above the anthropomorphic mold, which is the metaphorical depiction of the divine in the image of the gazelle (based on Song of Songs 2:9). The intent of this observation can be elicited from the concluding statement in which the talmudic dictum 'Be swift as the gazelle, and be courageous as a lion, to fulfill the will of your father in heaven' (Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 112a) is cited, that is, the imaginary representation of the divine as a gazelle is proportionate to the one who acts like a gazelle in being swift to carry out God's will.

[70] M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 4, 1143; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5714*, vol. 1, 152; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5711*, vol. 1, 24.

[71] *Tiqqunei Zohar*, ed. Margaliot, sec. 70, 135b. I have translated the text as it appears in the work of Shneur Zalman (see following note), even though some words from the original were left out.

[72] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Shir ha-Shirim, 4c–d.

bittul ha-metzi'ut] and in the aspect of darkness [*behinat hoshekh*]'.[73] To attain this apophasis, the mind must venture past all that is implied in the motto repeatedly invoked by the seven Habad masters, *adam eddammeh le-elyon*, that is, one must traverse the threshold of theism itself. The biblical phrase, accordingly, assumes a different meaning: for the archetypal 'human' (*adam*) to become like the 'supernal one' (*elyon*), it is necessary that one become not-human (*lo adam*) through the eradication of one's will.[74] The quietistic divestiture of self by which the human becomes divine corresponds to ridding the imagination of images that configure the divine as human. This is the intent of the ideal vision of the essence without any garment: to see with no veil is to see that there is no seeing without a veil, but in this seeing, the mind lets go of the fanciful urge to posit a face beyond the veil.

Redemption is characterized, accordingly, as the collapse of antinomies, conveyed in the Habad lexicon as *zeh leʿumat zeh*, 'this corresponding to this'. Needless to say, the collapse of binaries would include the blurring of the discord between Israel and the nations. When thought of geopolitically, the ramifications of the coming of the Messiah would have to extend to all nations, a point that is regularly supported by reference to the verse 'Strangers shall stand and pasture your flocks, aliens shall be your plowmen and vine-trimmers' (Isa. 61:5). Since this boundary will be blurred, the Jews will be able to discourse openly about the wisdom of Torah, fulfilling the prophecy 'For the land shall be filled with devotion to the Lord, as the water covers the sea' (Isa. 11:9).[75] Schneerson's view, as he explicitly notes, is based on the opinion of Maimonides that the sages and prophets have not desired the days of Messiah for any material or political power, but only so that 'they would be free [to study] Torah and its wisdom', and on account of which 'they would merit the life of the world to come'.[76] Schneerson also follows the surmise of Maimonides that at that time there will be peace amongst the nations and 'the occupation of the whole world will be solely to know the Lord, and, therefore, Israel

[73] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5718*, vol. 1, 163. See idem, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 191.

[74] Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmu'el 5632*, vol. 2, 395, 402; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5715*, vol. 2, 176–177.

[75] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5720*, vol. 1, 195.

[76] Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 12:4.

[will consist of] great sages, who know the concealed matters and who comprehend the knowledge of their Creator in accordance with human potential'.[77] Moreover, in line with the apophatic approach of Maimonides, the Habad interpretation of this wisdom, as we have seen, implies that the objective of Jewish monotheism is to divest the mind of the theopoetic temptation to portray God anthropomorphically and anthropopathically.[78] However, at play as well is the kabbalistic depiction of the Infinite as the coincidence of opposites, an idea that goes considerably beyond the perspective of the medieval sage, especially in the challenge it presents to the axiological dualism, which justifies and sustains the socio-political reality of the Jews as an autonomous community. Indeed, Maimonides is on record as affirming that in the messianic age nothing of the natural order will be obliterated.[79] It is reasonable to presume that this applies to the law of non-contradiction, for the very concept of nature accepted by Maimonides would not be intelligible unless we presume this principle. I see no reason to suppose that Maimonides thought this law would be abrogated in the future.

In Habad eschatology, this law is surpassed in the identification of opposites, to the point that we can no longer differentiate between good and evil. The ideal is encapsulated in the rabbinic designation of the future as a 'world that is entirely good' (*olam she-kullo tov*)[80]—'goodness' is no longer a correlative term, as it has incorporated evil within itself. The view of the previous Habad masters regarding the dissemination of the secrets of Torah in messianic times is thus paired by Schneerson with the Maimonidean opinion that knowledge of God

[77] Ibid., 12:5. See M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 174–175. The language of Maimonides was cited on a number of occasions in Schneerson's writings and discourses. See, for instance, M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 17, # 6211, p. 66; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5711*, vol. 1, 341.

[78] Wolfson, '*Via Negativa* in Maimonides', 371–373.

[79] Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim, 12:1. See also idem, *Guide of the Perplexed*, II.28, p. 335, 29, p. 345. Note as well I.32, p. 70, where Maimonides (citing Isa. 5:20) considers the confusion of opposites to be a 'deficiency and defective' in the Law. Such a confusion is precisely what the Habad masters envision as indicative of the final redemption. See also ibid., I.52, p. 114, where Maimonides writes of the imagination's faulty desire to establish a means to connect contraries, which should remain separate. On the delineation of the nature of governance as the division of light and darkness, see ibid., II.6, p. 261.

[80] Palestinian Talmud, Hagigah 2:1, 77b; Babylonian Talmud, Qiddushin 39b, Hullin 142a.

will fill the land, yielding the claim that Jews will be able to discuss the mysteries publicly, presumably even before non-Jews. Not only is the broadcasting of the esoteric seen as a propadeutic to accelerate the redemption, but the latter is depicted as the wholesale dispersion of the mysteries of the Torah, a breaking of the seal of esotericism. But, it is precisely with respect to the explicit claims regarding the disclosure of secrets that the scholar must be wary of being swayed by a literalist approach that would take the Rebbe at his word. There is no suggestion of willful deceit on the part of Schneerson, of an intention to falsify, but there is an appeal to the wisdom of the tradition regarding the duplicity of secrecy: the secret will no longer be secret if and when the secret will be exposed to have been nothing more than the secret that there is a secret. To discover the secret that there is no secret is the ultimate secret that one can neither divulge nor withhold.

5. Blessed Mordecai and Cursed Haman: Mystical Transvaluation of Tradition

As it happens, that possibility looms most conspicuously at the precipice to which the pietistic path leads, the ideal of equanimity wherein the dissonance between good and evil is defused. The collusion of opposites patently presents a theoretical challenge, since the overcoming of binaries in the Infinite would belie the rigid dualism separating Jew and non-Jew that is presupposed by the halakhic worldview. An interesting passage that indicates the sensitivity to this issue is found in Dov Baer's *Shaʿarei Orah*:

> The joy of Purim is above the concatenation and this is the matter of 'until one does not know'[81] […] the intention is not that there is equanimity [*hishtawwut*], God forbid, for Haman is forever cursed and Mordecai the Jew blessed, but the principle of the matter in the gradation that is above the concatenation is in the pattern of the gradation that is above wherein the darkness is like the light.[82]

The festival of Purim is distinguished from other holidays, insofar as the joy commensurate to it relates symbolically to that which is beyond all differentiation and particularity, a level of attainment that is

[81] Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 7b.
[82] D.B. Schneerson, *Shaʿarei Orah*, 144b.

captured in the talmudic dictum that one must drink enough wine on Purim to the point that it is no longer possible to distinguish between 'cursed Haman' and 'blessed Mordecai', expressions that are numerically equivalent. Dov Baer recoils, however, at the categorical effacing of boundaries implied by this tradition and thus he emphasizes that equanimity, the indifference that is the defeat of all difference, is not the intention of the ritual practice ordained by the rabbinic authorities. As he emphasizes elsewhere,[83] the root of the Jew is 'from the perspective of the essence of the Infinite in actuality', but the root of the idolatrous nations is 'from the first contraction [*ha-tzimtzum ha-ri'shon*], which is after the withdrawal of the light, and it is comprised in the luminosity that is called the vacant place [*maqom panuy*], as this is the source for the root of the aspect of separation and division'. The possibility of messianic rectification for the non-Jews in the end is secured by the fact that a trace (*reshimu*) of the light remained concealed in that space in the beginning. In the future, souls of the non-Jews will be restored to the vacant place, which is the void (*tohu*) and the emptiness (*efes*). This is the esoteric meaning of the verse 'All of the nations are as naught [*ke-ayin*] in relation to him, he considers them as if they were from the void and the nothing [*me-efes wa-tohu*]' (Isa. 40:17). Here philological attunement is critical: the very same words used to designate the essence that is prior to the withdrawal are used to designate the vacuum that arises as a consequence of the withdrawal. Dov Baer, however, is careful to distinguish the two: the former is the 'true divine nothing' (*ayin ha-elohi ha-amitti*), which is the 'source of everything' (*meqora de-khola*), the 'true being' (*yesh ha-amitti*), whereas the latter is the 'actual nothing' (*ayin mammash*), which appears 'as if it were not in existence at all' (*ke-illu eino bi-metzi'ut kelal*). While this distinction may seem pedantic, it is the basis for upholding the rabbinic claim that the term *adam* applies exceptionally to Israel, a philological point that, as we have seen, exerted a profound influence on kabbalistic anthropology. The non-Jew, even when purified, can only reach the level of incorporation into the externality of the human form (*hitkallelut de-adam be-hitzoniyyut*), which is associated with Elohim, the attribute of judgment, but not the interior aspect (*behinah penimit*), signified by YHWH, the attribute of mercy, since they were separated

[83] D.B. Schneerson, *Torat Hayyim: Bere'shit*, 76b–c.

from the 'essential unity' at the time of the first contraction and they derive from the void that is 'considered as if it were not in actuality' (*she-ke-lo mammash hashiv*), the negative that dissimulates as the negative, which is to be distinguished from the prerogative of the Jew to affirm the negative in its fecund positivity. This is the kabbalistic intent of the rabbinic teaching that the term *adam* applies most properly to the Jews and not to the idolatrous nations.

Something of the initial break—the inaugural division within the indivisible, which engenders the beginning that conceals the origin—cannot be rectified. And hence, even though the future is described as a time when all of the holy sparks will be liberated from the demonic shells and evil will be annihilated from the world, an element of contrariness will endure: Haman, who is from the seed of Amaleq, will always be cursed and Mordecai the Jew will always be blessed. What, then, does the numerical equivalence of the two expressions convey? In the essence above the concatenation of worlds, and this includes the first act of contraction, opposites are truly identical—darkness is indistinguishable from the light that is luminous to the extent that it is dark, which is to say, the light that is neither luminous nor dark. However, in the mind of the Mitteler Rebbe, and this should not be viewed as idiosyncratic, the possibility of attaining this gradation is assigned uniquely to the Jewish people. As conceptually difficult and spiritually limiting as this may sound, we must accept that the mystical logic advanced by Habad allows us to speak of a *universal singularity* only if we are willing to admit that the universal, which entails the effacing of boundaries, is the specific dispensation of one ethnic faction.

The messianic task of the Jew, then, would be to sponsor the truth that Jew and non-Jew are identical in virtue of being different. In a manner that is resonant with Levinas, ethnocentricism is the condition that secures the viability of a genuine alterity, since the notion of an 'absolutely universal', the principle that grounds the sense of respect for and responsibility toward the irreducible other, 'can be served only through the particularity of each people'.[84] Simply put, otherness is what makes the other the same; what I share with the other is that we are different. An obvious point of divergence between the approach of Habad and that of Levinas would turn on the question of ontology. Although Levinas was conversant with at least some kabbalistic

[84] Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 136.

sources that demonstrate affinity with the hasidic orientation, including, ironically enough, the *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* of the Lithuanian opponent to East-European Hasidism, Hayyim of Volozhyn,[85] he squarely rejected the ontologizing of Israel's election, which renders the distinctiveness of the Jews a matter of inborn nature.[86] On Levinasian grounds, chosenness is a function of acting, not a condition of being; for the Habad masters, by contrast, Israel's election is a feature of the inherent disposition of what is, and thus ethics cannot be severed from ontology. We can propose a coincidence of opposites in the absence of opposites to coincide, but this only reinforces the othering of the other. When there is no other, the other persists as not (an)other, and therefore it is not sufficient to envision a unity in which there is neither one nor the other.

The point is illustrated convincingly from another passage from Dov Baer. In discussing the nature of the future, he observes that many of the critical verses that speak of the eschatological vision (Isa. 2:2, 11:9, 40:5; Zeph. 3:9) imply that the nations of the world are included. The seventy nations, or more specifically, the seventy archons attached to them, correspond to the seventy powers on the side of holiness, which are connected as well to the number of persons that were Jacob's issue (Ex. 1:5). As a consequence of the obliteration of evil, the seventy forces will be elevated to their source, the seven supernal attributes from *Hesed* to *Malkhut*, and the corresponding seven kings of the world of chaos (or the seven primordial kings of Edom) that fell in the breaking of the vessels will be rectified, an idea that is linked

[85] From a conceptual standpoint, there are many affinities between the Habad teaching initiated by Shneur Zalman of Liadi and the speculative kabbalah that can be traced to Elijah ben Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna. Obviously, I cannot engage this topic here, but consider, for example, the discussion of the passage in Hayyim of Volozhyn's *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* in Wolfson, 'Secrecy, Modesty, and the Feminine', 213–216. A careful glance at that discussion leads us to conclude that the characteristic doctrine of Habad, which I have termed apophatic embodiment, is affirmed by Hayyim of Volozhyn. I hope to dedicate a separate study of this phenomenon in the kabbalistic ruminations attributed to the Vilna Gaon and his school. An interesting later repercussion of this intellectual crisscrossing is the reference to Shneur Zalman's notion of infinity and the contraction of the divine in the essay *Halakhic Man* by Joseph B. Soloveitchik, a descendant of Hayyim of Volozhyn. See Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha*, 168, 178–183. It should also be noted that Soloveitchik studied as a child with the Habad teacher Baruch Rizberg. See ibid., 182 note 89. On the controversial question of Soloveitchik's relationship to Schneerson in Berlin and later in New York, see Deutsch, *Larger Than Life*, 71–73, 113–119, 279, 282, 289.

[86] Wolfson, 'Secrecy, Modesty, and the Feminine', 198–200.

orthographically to the suspended *ayin* in the last word of the expression *yekharsemennah hazir mi-yaʿar*, 'the pig of the wild will gnaw at it' (Ps. 80:14),[87] the letter, incidentally, that marks the middle of this biblical book.[88] In some contexts, Dov Baer seems to posit a view similar to his father, the Alter Rebbe, and thus he characterizes the future as the unconditional destruction of every source of unholiness and the uncompromising purification of evil. The total transformation of darkness into light is the condition that fosters the indiscriminate manifestation of the divine presence to all flesh, Jews and non-Jews alike.[89] Occasionally, however, he insists otherwise. In one passage, for instance, he declares that

> there will still be a great variance between Israel and the nations of the world, for with regard to Israel it is said 'you, O Lord, will be seen in plain sight' (Num. 14:14) [...] for the Jews will see with their eyes [*ayin be-ayin*] the essence of the light of the Infinite, blessed be he, in actuality, without any garment of concealment at all, but rather as it is above in actuality, it will come to them in the disclosure below. Therefore, the worship of Israel then will be in the aspect of the enlarged consciousness [*mohin de-gadlut*], insofar as they will be sustained from the splendor of the essence of the light of the Infinite in actuality, as their contemplation will be of the essence in actuality, which is above the concatenation of transcendence and immanence.[90]

What is given with one hand is taken away with the other, or, to be even more precise, the hand that gives is the hand that takes away: the Jew alone is capable of contemplating the essence within which the dissimilarity between Jew and non-Jew is transcended. The identity of difference is apperceived through the speculum of the difference of identity. Incongruous as it may seem, the ultimate vision casts a spotlight on the blindspot in the system. By the dint of its own paradoxical logic, the attempts to avoid saying that the disproportion between the

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[87] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 2, Devarim, 30b–31a; D.B. Schneerson, *Shaʿarei Teshuvah*, 74a; idem, *Imrei Binah*, pt. 1, 17c; idem, *Torat Hayyim: Bereʾshit*, 196a; idem, *Perush ha-Millot*, 95b; M.M. Schneersohn, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 1, 20; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Bemidbar*, vol. 2, p. 393; Sh. Schneersohn, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmuʾel 5632*, vol. 1, 263; idem, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmuʾel* 5632, vol. 2, 545; idem, *Liqqutei Torah: Torat Shmuʾel 5639*, vol. 1, 259, 307, 310; Sh. D. Schneersohn, *Be-Shaʿah she-Hiqdimu 5672*, 1:376; M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyyot 5716*, vol. 2, 243, 250.

[88] Babylonian Talmud, Qiddushin 30a.

[89] D.B. Schneerson, *Shaʿarei Teshuvah*, 74a.

[90] Ibid., 142d.

other nations and Israel is completely redressed are not viable. It is true that the messianic politics are such that the ideal anthropos, the messianic figure, is a third term between the Jew and the non-Jew, both and thus neither Jew nor non-Jew, but with regard to the relationship of Jew and non-Jew, we must continue to say that the one, as the other, is not other in virtue of being other.

6. Beyond the River: Transcendence and the Singular Universal

Much evidence can be adduced from the writings and discourses of the seventh Rebbe that indicates his commitment to this conception of alterity. Like his predecessors, he ascribed to the Jews a unique role in the messianic mission to redeem the world, often expressed in the traditional liturgical idiom, 'to rectify the world in the kingdom of the Almighty' (*letaqqen olam be-malkhut shaddai*),[91] and thus he, too, imagined an endtime in which the chasm separating Jew and non-Jew would be appreciably narrowed.[92] It is particularly the proliferation of the study of the interiority of the Torah on the part of the Jews—to the point that there will not remain even one Jew who is not conversant with the teaching of Hasidism—that facilitates the eschatological change in the status of the non-Jew.[93] The cosmological underpinning of the apocalyptic sensibility is clear enough: the world is a 'unified reality', since it was created by a 'singular and united' God, and therefore 'all human beings and all the things in the world are bound to each other'.[94] Schneerson was, no doubt, influenced by (and on occasion even directly cites)[95] the words of Maimonides from the uncensored version in the section on the laws of kingship toward the end of his halakhic code. According to this text, Jesus and Muhammad are described as being entrusted with the task of 'paving the way for the messianic king, to prepare the world in its entirety to worship the Lord

[91] The line appears in the second stanza of the traditional *Aleinu* prayer; see *Seder Avodat Yisra'el*, 132.

[92] M.M. Schneerson, *Iggeret Qodesh*, vol. 14, # 5093, p. 323; idem, *Iggeret Qodesh*, vol. 23, 175; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5717*, vol. 1, 51, 251–252.

[93] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5715*, vol. 1, 136; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5716*, vol. 3, 105.

[94] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5712*, vol. 1, 163.

[95] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5711*, vol. 1, 155.

together, as it says, "For then I will make the nations pure of speech" (Zeph. 3:9)'.[96] This biblical verse is invoked by Schneerson to mark the disruption of the partition that separates the Jew and non-Jew; in the future, all the nations, even the sparks that are presently submerged in the depths of darkness, shall be restored to the light of holiness. I do not think that Schneerson's perspective accords with the more radical interpretation of Zeph. 3:9, attributed to R. Joseph (explicating the position of R. Eliezer) in the Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 24a, to the effect that all the nations will become proselytes in the future to come. On balance, the position of Schneerson, following Maimonides, accords with the view of Abbaye that the verse only implies that the nations will turn away from idolatry.[97] Departing from Maimonides, however, the Habad approach privileges Judaism as the agent to purify the other two Abrahamic faiths, the attribute of judgment associated with Edom (Christianity) and the attribute of mercy associated with Ishmael (Islam).[98] Be that as it may, if we take seriously Schneerson's insistence that the one that is truly pious (*hasid amitti*) has no concern for boundaries,[99] it follows that the spiritual ideal would necessarily entail venturing beyond the discordant demarcations of the law. As he put it in a talk from 12 Tammuz 5713 (25 June 1953),

> Since the root of the disclosure of the Messiah is from the aspect that is above boundary, it follows that the emanation below in the world will also be in the manner of unity and the lack of division—and thus the action of the Messiah will be in the manner of rectifying the world completely to worship the Lord together, as it says 'For then I will make the nations pure of speech, so that they all invoke the Lord by name and serve him with one accord' (Zeph. 3:9), and as it says 'And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name' (Zech. 14:9).[100]

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[96] The text of Maimonides is from the uncensored version of the *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim, 11:4.

[97] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5712*, vol. 1, 170, 208; idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5714*, vol. 1, 148. See, however, the reference to R. Nissim of Gerona's interpretation added to Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 23, 179 n. 76, and the explication in Ginsburgh, *Kabbalah and Meditation*, pp. 86–87, 95–96 note 80. I thank Jody Myers for reminding me of the reference in Ginsburgh.

[98] D.B. Schneersohn, *Derushei Hatunah*, vol. 2, 547.

[99] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5751*, vol. 3, 405.

[100] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5713*, vol. 3, 56. The Rebbe's comments are an explication of a distinction made by the RaShaB (*Sefer ha-Ma'amarim 5669*, 39) between Moses and the Messiah: in the case of the former, the encompassing light (*or maqqif*) shines within the internal light (*or penimi*) by constricting its

I spoke a moment ago of disruption of the partition and not its dismantling, for, as I have already made clear, Schneerson did not abandon entirely the ethnocentrism of his predecessors. It would be intellectually misleading to say that his teachings are exempt from the prejudicial ontology of the kabbalistic tradition or that he was unaware of the potentially subversive repercussions of the messianic characterization of the infinite essence. I noted above that the special connection of the Jew to that essence is linked etymologically to the title *ivri*, which denotes the one who dwells on the other shore, the shore beyond the river. But if that shore is a metaphor for the division beyond divisions—the shore, that is, that is without a shoreline—then it must be the source of both Jewish and non-Jewish souls. The point was made by Schneerson, commenting on Josh. 24:2 (or, more accurately, on the section of the traditional Passover Haggadah in which this verse is cited) from a talk delivered the second night of Passover, 16 Nisan 5720 (12 April 1960):

> The matter of the river is what is written 'And the river goes forth from Eden to water the garden' (Gen. 2:10), for Eden is the aspect of *Hokhmah*, and the river is the aspect of *Binah*, and this is the matter of *Mahashavah*, for just as the waters of the river never cease, so thought does not stop and it flows perpetually. However, the root of the souls are above the aspect of *Mahashavah*, and this is what is written 'your forefathers lived beyond the river', that is, above the aspect of the river. And this is also the explanation of the saying that 'Israel arose in thought',[101] 'arose' precisely, for they are in the highest aspect of thought. This is also what is written in the *Zohar* on the verse 'On the day of the first fruits' (Num. 28:26), for of all the nations of the world, Israel were the most ancient and the first fruits of the blessed holy One,[102] and the meaning of 'ancient' [*qadmonim*] is that their source is in the primeval thought of the Primordial Anthropos [*mahashavah ha-qedumah de-adam qadmon*]. Indeed, the dictum of the Maggid[103] that the primeval thought of the

essence, whereas in the case of the latter, there is a conjunction (*hithabberut*) of the two lights to the point that they are completely identical, and thus the encompassing light is revealed in the internal light in its essence without any constriction (*tzimtzum*) or attire (*hitlabbeshut*).

[101] *Midrash Bere'shit Rabba*, 1:4, p. 6. Compare Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Amarim: Tanya*, pt. 1, ch. 2, 6a: 'The souls of Israel arose in thought, as it is written "My firstborn son is Israel" (Ex. 4:22), "You are children unto the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1), that is, just as the child derives from the brain of the father, so, as it were, does the soul of each and every Jew derive from his thought and his wisdom, may he be blessed'.

[102] Zohar 3:253a (*Raʿaya Meheimna*).

[103] See M.M. Schneersohn, *Derekh Mitzwotekha*, 58b; idem, *Or ha-Torah: Ma'amerei Razal we-Inyanim*, 84.

> Primordial Anthropos is the aspect of the universal light (the universal crown) that comprises all of the concatenation equanimously [*or kelali* (*keter kelali*) *ha-kolelet kol ha-hishtalshelut be-hashwwa'ah ahat*] is well known. It follows that there is also the place for the nations of the world,[104] and hence it says that [the Jews] were in the aspect of first fruits, for in the Primordial Anthropos, they were in the highest aspect, in the aspect of the interiority of the Primordial Anthropos. And even higher, the source of the souls is in the aspect of the letters that are in the essence of the light of the Infinite before the withdrawal, according to the saying[105] 'he engraved engravings in the supernal luster'.[106]

Contextually, the biblical description of the forefathers of Israel having resided 'beyond the river' refers to the Euphrates, but it is interpreted mystically as an allusion to the innermost essence, the alterity of alterity, one might say, the other par excellence, the other above any and every specification and therefore other vis-à-vis its own otherness. Since this essence is, according to the locution transmitted in the name of the Maggid of Mezeritch, the 'universal light' that contains the multiplicity of differentiated beings in a nondifferentiated manner, it must be the source of both Jew and non-Jew. The paradoxical truth may be elicited from the fact that, on the one hand, it is Terah, Abraham's non-Hebrew father, who occupied the position beyond the river, and yet, on the other hand, being so positioned is proffered as the distinctive quality of the Hebrew. The non-Jew inhabits the place reserved for the Jew.[107] Dialogically, the other to the other secures the irreducibility of the other. The essence, therefore, is demarcated as the 'impossibility of impossibilities' (*nimna ha-nimnaʿot*), since it bears opposites (*nose hafakhim*) in a manner that defies the logic of non-contradiction.[108] Schneerson stays faithful to the teaching of the prior masters, however, going back to the Alter Rebbe, by insisting that even in this indis-

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[104] See, however, M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5711*, vol. 1, 231–233, where the aspect of transcendence, the shore beyond the river, is described as the source of the types of the Jewish souls, the souls of the world of emanation and the souls of the worlds of creation, formation, and doing. On the basis of Jer 31:26, the former are called the 'seed of the human' (*zera adam*) and the latter, the 'seed of the beast' (*zera behemah*). Moses, who is in the aspect of the supernal knowledge (*daʿat elyon*), is entrusted with the task of imparting knowledge to the latter so that they may be transformed into the former. Compare idem, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5714*, vol. 2, 82.

[105] Zohar 1:15a.

[106] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5720*, vol. 2, 3–4.

[107] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Sefer ha-Ma'amarim Meluqat*, vol. 1, 253.

[108] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5720*, vol. 2, 9.

criminate essence a discrimination can and must be made between Jew and non-Jew: the ontological root for the soul of Israel is located in the highest aspect of the essence, which is designated as the 'primeval thought of the Primordial Anthropos' and as the 'letters that are in the essence of the light of the Infinite'.

As contradictory and inscrutable as this may seem, the path of Habad leads us notionally to posit that in the place of indifference, where opposites collide, a difference can still be made, a difference within the indifference, the paradox conveyed by the arresting image of letters in the infinite essence.[109] Israel is distinguished to the extent that it is rooted in the primeval thought, indeed, identical with the primordial Torah, which is the light of the Infinite. The Jew, in other words, is the sign of difference within indifference, the consummate mark of the other, the other to the other, the singular universal. The 'spiritual vocation' of the Jew is not in principle open to all, as it has been recently argued, and even the phenomenon of conversion, which ostensibly challenges this assumption, or at the very least mitigates against a simplistic biological explanation for the inequity of Jew and non-Jew,[110] is possible because of the ontological difference. Conversion is an important trope to articulate a critical aspect of the ecstatic experience. I do not think, however, that it alleviates the inequity between the somatic and pneumatic conditions of the Jew and non-Jew. Such a claim would fail to take into account either the mechanics

[109] Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqqutei Torah*, vol. 1, Hosafot, 53d.

[110] Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 263 note 31. The author asserts that the claim of Dov Baer, and other 'mystics within the Jewish tradition', that the 'divine soul is specific to Israel […] cannot be rooted in a biological or vitalistic orientation since one can convert to Judaism […] Rather, it concerns a spiritual vocation (which in principle must be open to all), one in which the Jewish person takes on the given, awe-filled responsibility, expressed by the covenant, for the return of all God's people to him and establishing God's exiled presence in human history'. The claim that the spiritual vocation assigned to Israel is open to all is an apologetic statement that is contradicted by countless texts, and the appeal to conversion to substantiate the point reflects a failure to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon according to the kabbalistic interpretation adopted by the Mitteler Rebbe and other Lubavitch masters. I will cite one passage from *Quntres ha-Hitpaʿalut*, in *Maʾamerei Admor ha-Emtzaʿi: Quntresim*, 139–140, which demonstrates that the inaccuracy of Steinbock's surmise: 'However, there is something akin to an actual nature in everyone from Israel also in his [task to fulfill] "Shun evil and do good" (Ps. 34:15) in actuality, precisely from the perspective of the root of his divine soul, which is the natural and essential aspect, and not from the perspective of his choice or his worship at all'. From this we may conclude that the distinctiveness of the Jew's calling is determined primarily on the basis of ontology and not on behavior or functionality.

of conversion or the understanding of embodiment as they are understood generally in kabbalistic sources and particularly in the thought of the Mitteler Rebbe and the other Habad masters. As I have discussed at great length elsewhere,[111] the conception of body affirmed in Lubavitch thought is semiotic and not anatomic. If we understand embodiment in this hyperlinguistic sense, then it is accurate to inscribe the distinction between Jew and non-Jew physiologically. Concerning the former, it can be said briefly that conversion does not involve undergoing a transubstantiation to become part of the other in relation to which it is the same, but rather a process of return, the restoration of the other to the same in relation to which it is the other.

In the talk delivered on 11 Shevat 5718 (1 February 1958), Schneerson refers to Hayyim Joseph David Azulai's observation that the talmudic expression[112] is the 'convert who converts' (*ger she-nitgayyer*) rather than the 'non-Jew who converts' (*goy she-nitgayyer*) to indicate that the soul of the convert was present at Mount Sinai, even though it may be many years before the actual conversion takes place.[113] Going considerably beyond this explanation, which builds on the rabbinic idea that the souls of all converts to be were present together with all future generations of native-born Israelites at the revelation on Mount Sinai,[114] Schneerson insists that, technically speaking,

> it is never the non-Jew who converts, for the one who converts does so because there is a holy spark within him, but for some reason it fell into a place to which it does not belong, and when he converts—after several reasons and attempts—then the holy spark is liberated and it joins the 'torch' and the 'light,' that is, the Torah, the commandments, and the blessed holy One.[115]

The ostensible redundancy communicates that conversion is akin to a gnostic drama of emancipation of the spirit: the convert to Judaism is already a Jew—one is to become what one already is—and thus conversion is a reversion, a release of the spark of holiness from its imprisonment in a foreign body.[116] To convert, therefore, is not to

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[111] See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, ch. 3.

[112] Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 48b, 62a, 97b; Bekhorot 47a.

[113] Azulai, *Midbar Qedemot*, 3:3, 10b.

[114] Tosefta, Sotah 7:5; Babylonian Talmud, Shevuʿot 39a; see Porton, *Stranger Within Your Gates*, 32, 42, 120, 177, 217, 242 note 71, 311 note 250, 354 note 22.

[115] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5718*, vol. 2, 61–62.

[116] On the status of the convert's soul and the body, see M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 9, # 2666, p. 53.

affirm a genuine sense of difference, to cross a boundary, but rather to reclaim part of the self that has been lost, to go back to one's origin.

Elaborating on this theme in the talk from 15 Shevat 5743 (29 January 1983), Schneerson noted that the adage 'the convert who converts is compared to a newborn infant' (*ger she-nitgayyer ke-qatan she-nolad damei*) indicates that the convert is not an 'entirely new reality' (*metzi'ut hadashah legamrei*) but rather s/he is like a baby that existed prenatally before entering the world.[117] To state the matter in more technical terms, the souls of converts to Judaism are identified as the holy sparks that were scattered as a consequence of the breaking of the vessels in the seventy nations and displaced to the shell of *nogah*, the innermost of the four shells, the one in closest proximity to the core, the shell that consists of the duality of good and evil.[118] Using this criterion, converts are treated as lower than those who are thought to be Jewish indigenously—the root of the Jews is 'in the aspect of truth', the central pillar or the attribute of compassion (*rahamim*), and thus the destiny of Israel is to 'receive the aspect of the truth of the light of the Infinite', whereas the root of the converts is 'beneath the wings of the *Shekhinah*',[119] the proselytes from Ishmael (Islam) derive from the right wing of mercy (*hesed*) and the ones from Edom (Christianity) from the left wing of judgment (*din*), and thus they receive the light

[117] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5743*, vol. 2, 925. Also relevant to this understanding of temporality implied by the phenomenon of conversion is the rabbinic belief that the souls of converts were present at Sinai (see above, note 114). This presence suggests that when the conversion takes place, it is a reversion to an original condition. See M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwaʿaduyot 5714*, vol. 1, 248.

[118] D.B. Schneersohn, *Shaʿarei Teshuvah*, 142d; idem, *Imrei Binah*, pt. 1, 86d–87a; idem, *Torat Hayyim: Bere'shit*, 121b–c, 124c, 125a–b. The source for the souls of the righteous Gentiles is similarly identified as the shell of *nogah*, which is also the source of the natural soul in the Jew, whereas the soul of all other Gentiles is from the three shells of impurity. See Hillel ben Meir of Paritch, *Liqqutei Be'urim* on Dov Baer Schneersohn, *Quntres ha-Hitpaʿalut*, p. 144; M.M. Schneerson, *Iggerot Qodesh*, vol. 9, # 2666, 53.These passages are mentioned by Loewenthal, *Communicating*, 297 note 128. While the positive remark concerning the righteous of the Gentiles is emphasized, no mention is made about the corresponding negative remark regarding the rest of the Gentiles. It is said of them that whatever good they do is motivated by egocentric desires, and not for the sake of fulfilling the will of God or out of a sense of compassion for fellow human beings.

[119] The expression is rabbinic in origin, but the key text that influenced the Habad material is Zohar 1:13a–b.

only by way of the lateral lines.[120] In spite of this discrepancy, they are nevertheless implanted in the same divine substance.[121]

The phenomenon of conversion only reinforces the paradoxical attribution of difference within the indifference. As the seventh Rebbe put it in a talk on the second day of Pentecost, 7 Sivan 5720 (2 June 1960), the Jews have the ability to ascend 'to the root and source of the soul in the aspect that is above the chaos and the rectification, and hence, even though "Esau was a brother to Jacob" (Mal. 1:2), to the point that he does not know which of them he desires, "he loved Jacob" in particular'.[122] In a treatise prepared for 18 Elul 5727 (23 September 1967), the day that commemorates the return of the sixth Rebbe to America, Schneerson elaborated the point:

> The matter of 'for [the Lord your God] loves you' (Deut. 23:6) is the essential love of the blessed holy One, for Israel, for even though in the gradation above the concatenation, it says 'and Esau was a brother to Jacob', nevertheless 'he loved Jacob' particularly. And this is 'the Lord your God', even though in YHWH, which is above (the light of the Infinite that is above the concatenation), everything is identical, still by means of a disclosure of the essential love of the blessed holy One, for Israel, YHWH, which is above, is 'your God' precisely.[123]

The Jewish soul, which is rooted in the essence, has the capacity through ritual observance to transform curse into blessing and the power through repentance to turn iniquities into virtues. Previously, I cited a passage in which this exploit is portrayed with special reference to Esau or Edom, depicted metaphorically as the pig, the animal that symbolizes the force of impurity paradigmatically.[124] The salvific work of Israel in the 'last exile', which is the 'exile of Edom', is to purify the evil of Esau, so that the good hidden in him will be revealed, the 'lights of chaos' (*orot de-tohu*), which is the source of his soul,[125] and, consequently, the pig will be restored to holiness. And yet, in the light of the Infinite, which is above binary opposition, God nevertheless harbors a special love for Israel, which distinguishes them from all other nations.

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[120] D.B. Schneersohn, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Emtza'i: Hanahot*, 10. See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Ma'amerei Admor ha-Zaqen 5565*, vol. 1, 372–373.
[121] D.B. Schneersohn, *Ner Mitzwah we-Torah Or*, 141a.
[122] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5720*, vol. 2, 107–108.
[123] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5750*, vol. 4, 242.
[124] See above, note 44.
[125] M.M. Schneerson, *Torat Menahem: Hitwwa'aduyot 5717*, vol. 3, 242.

The possibility of messianic rectification is predicated on the paradoxical positioning of the non-Jew in the light of the essence, but in such a way as to safeguard the inequality with the Jew. In the final analysis, this tension in Schneerson was never fully resolved. In a letter from 14 Av 5719 (18 August 1959),[126] he discussed the uniqueness of the Sinaitic revelation for the Jewish people, contrasting it explicitly with Christianity and Islam. Addressing the more general question of the difference between Jews and non-Jews, he begins by referring to the ruling of Maimonides that the righteous of the nations have a portion in the world to come,[127] but he then goes on to acknowledge that Jews have more possibilities than the other nations. In response to the question why this is so, he confesses that it is not rationally comprehensible. Having conceded this basic point, he does go on to compare the different nations to the various parts of a body, and just as the latter have discrete functions, so the former. The special role accorded Israel is justified by the comparison of Israel to the heart,[128] a position famously articulated by Judah Halevi in the twelfth century and one that greatly informed the kabbalistic sensibility through the ages.[129] The attempt to synchronize Maimonidean universalism and mystical individualism may be considered typical of the hybridity that shaped the seventh Rebbe's orientation. The coalescence of these disparate intellectual currents produced a curious, and not altogether coherent, apocalyptic disbanding of the dyadic clash between Jew and non-Jew, but in such a way that the one remains other to the other, and thereby indifferently the same.

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[126] M.M. Schneerson, *Liqqutei Sihot*, vol. 6, 317–318.
[127] Moses ben Maimon, *Mishneh Torah*, Melakhim 8:11.
[128] Zohar 3:221b.
[129] Judah Halevi, *Sefer ha-Kuzari*, 2:36, 44.

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MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE KABBALAH CENTRE

Jody Myers

1. Introduction

The Kabbalah Centre is a new religious movement that seeks to disseminate the teachings of kabbalah to a universal audience. Founded in 1970 in the United States, it exhibits many of the characteristics associated with postmodern religious sensibility.[1] Symbols from disparate frameworks of meaning—including New Age ideas, psychology, physics, and capitalistic consumer culture—are utilized to interpret and communicate concepts and values rooted in twentieth century and pre-modern Jewish kabbalah. Promising that the teachings of kabbalah will bring personal fulfillment and contentment, and addressing themselves primarily to spiritual seekers 18–45 years of age, Kabbalah Centre teachers recommend ways of finding a loving life partner, creating a fulfilling marriage, and sustaining an exciting and emotionally satisfying sexual relationship. They suggest behaviors that conform to Jewish religious law and modern orthodox Judaism—with a notable exception on the matter of homosexuality, about which they are quite tolerant. However, they assiduously avoid explicit identification with Judaism. Their recommendations and explanations are based on scientific reasoning, pragmatic individualism, and kabbalistic concepts shorn of their particularistic ethnic associations.

Kabbalah Centre teachings are an elaboration and interpretation of the kabbalistic writings of Yehuda Ashlag (1885–1954).[2] Born in Warsaw, Yehuda Ashlag received a rabbinical education and was attentive to, though not formally educated in, modern thought. He moved to Palestine in 1921 in order to devote himself more intensively to the study of kabbalah, and except for a few years spent in England, he lived in Jerusalem until his death in 1954. Ashlag constructed a

[1] Beckford, 'Religion, Modernity and Post-Modernity'; Huss, 'All You Need is LAV'; idem, 'The New Age of Kabbalah'.

[2] On Ashlag, see Meir, 'Wrestling with the Esoteric'; Huss, 'Altruistic Communism'.

distinctive and innovative version of kabbalah. He raised only a few disciples, and few studied his teachings until decades after his death. During the 1960s, an American orthodox rabbi named Philip Berg studied kabbalah with two of Ashlag's disciples.[3] They died in the late 1960s, and Berg asserted himself as the leading transmitter of Ashlagian kabbalah. He began to develop his unique interpretation of these teachings.

The establishment in 1970 of Berg's school and publishing house, the Research Centre of Kabbalah, signals a new era in the popularization of kabbalah. Berg was one of a handful of men of the younger generation who regarded kabbalah as the vehicle for restoring religiously alienated or secular American and Israeli Jewish men and women to their Jewish roots.[4] These teachers' undiscriminating policy toward students violated the dominant stance of Jewish religious authorities, who generally regarded kabbalistic knowledge as esoteric and best limited to men schooled in sophisticated rabbinic literature and behaving in strict compliance with Jewish ritual and ceremonial laws. Berg, in partnership with his wife Karen, initially sought to attract a following in Israel. In 1970 they moved to Israel and made overtures to highly secularized young Israelis who, like their American peers, were seeking spiritual insight in Eastern religions. The Bergs remained in Israel until the early 1980s, when they returned to the US with a core group of Israeli disciples. They did not achieve noticeable success until the early 1990s. At that point, growing appreciation for Berg's teachings by non-Jews as well as Jews enabled the Bergs to establish centers of study and worship called Kabbalah Learning Centres in the major cities of Canada, the United States, western Europe, and Israel. Sons Yehuda and Michael Berg joined the leadership of the movement and began adding to its published literature. The teachings on marriage and sexual behavior described in this chapter are drawn from the published writings of Philip, Karen, Yehuda and Michael Berg, and from the curriculum and public lectures and sermons of Kabbalah Centre instructors and prayer leaders.

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[3] On the efforts of Levi Krakovsky and Yehuda Brandwein, two members of the first generation of Ashlag's disciples, see Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 23–39.

[4] In this group I would include Aryeh Kaplan, Zalman Schachter, and Shlomo Carlebach along with Berg.

2. Basic Elements of the Kabbalah of Ashlag and the Kabbalah Centre

Kabbalah Centre teachings are based on the creation myth common to kabbalistic theosophical speculation. The cosmogonic narrative begins prior to the creation of the physical universe, when all was God: endless, infinite divinity, entirely self-sufficient and lacking nothing. The divine light emanated vessels to receive its light; these vessels are the ten *sefirot*, that is, manifestations of divinity in decreasing intensity. Below the first three emanated *sefirot* are six *sefirot* which contain the one, unified soul. The soul is the designated primary recipient of divine light. Distinctive to Ashlagian kabbalah is the principle that two impulses, the Desire to Share and the Desire to Receive, constitute the basis of all existence. Ashlag defines God as the impulse called Desire to Share, comparing God to light inexhaustibly and effortlessly filling infinite space with its positive energy. He points out that each vessel, filled with divine light, contains the energy of Desire to Share, but their receptive capacities are an expression of the Desire to Receive as well.[5]

The next episode in the narrative is *tsimtsum*, the restriction or cessation of the emanation of divine light.[6] Various explanations for this event appear in Ashlag's and other kabbalistic writings. One explanation ties it to the soul's experience of shame. Receiving light without earning it causes the soul shame, so it empties itself of its light and refuses to accept more. Another explanation emphasizes the soul's desire to emulate God. Filled with the light of sharing, the vessels of the soul wish to satisfy others' Desire to Share, and so they must empty themselves of divine light in order to receive. A third explanation for the cessation of light, which I will elaborate below at greater length, is due to the rupture of vessels that occurs when the soul's Desire to

[5] This is a simplification of the narrative that appears in Ashlag, *Sefer Talmud Eser Ha-Sefirot*. Philip Berg's version of it appears in P. Berg, *Kabbalah for the Layman*, 70–77. Y. Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 25, 85–91, places the one soul in the fourth through ninth *sefirot*, whereas his father does not specify.

[6] Whereas in Lurianic kabbalah *tsimtsum* refers to the initial contraction of the *Ein sof* in order to create the vessels, for Ashlag *tsimtsum* is the restriction that occurs later. See Hansel, 'The Origin in the Thought of Rabbi Yehuda Halevy Ashlag', 37–46, who describes *tsimtsum* as occurring to the vessels in *Malchut*. Yehuda Berg, in *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 118–121, describes restriction as a process that occurs in the six *sefirot* above *Malchut*.

Receive goes beyond bounds. In whatever way the cessation of divine light is explained, the restriction provokes a catastrophic fracturing of the one soul into many souls, male and female, and the creation of the 'lower', physical universe of our own experience. The lower world is a mirror of the upper world; because of the catastrophe, both are flawed and in need of repair, and events in the lower world stimulate a reaction in the upper world.

According to Ashlag, in the lower, physical universe, all creatures and living things are marked by a strong Desire to Receive. This drive is essential, because the Desire to Receive impels animals and humans to seek food, rest, shelter, knowledge, sexual pleasure, power, wealth, and so on. However, when the Desire to Receive is unrestrained, it is exceedingly selfish and aggressive, and it is called the Desire to Receive for the Self Alone. Immature and undisciplined human beings are driven by the Desire to Receive for the Self Alone, and thus human society is often cruel and unjust, and history is a series of violent conflicts and imperialism. Divine light is present, but human beings are usually not aware of it; their self-centeredness is blocking it out. Ashlag explains that the resolution of this difficult situation occurs on an individual level and on a societal level. Through conscious and rigorous discipline motivated by love for God, an individual may elevate his/her self-centered Desire to Receive to higher and higher levels of holiness until it is transformed into a Desire to Receive for the Sake of Sharing. Knowledge of kabbalah is essential for this process. Through kabbalah one learns about the dynamic within God and the universe, the effect of *tsimtsum*—restriction—upon the divine realm and the creation of the lower world. One learns that restriction of a different sort, the restriction of one's egotistic Desire to Receive, is necessary for the repair of the situation. Also essential are the *mitzvot*, the commandments of the Torah, which God gave to the Jews as a means of showing love to God. When the soul reaches the highest level, it achieves *devekut*, adhering to God and becoming like God. This is *tikkun* (repair) at the individual level.

For Ashlag, *tikkun* at the societal level is paramount. He stresses that a person who has ascended in holiness would necessarily dedicate him or herself to fulfilling the commandment 'love thy neighbor as thyself' and ensuring that other people have been given what they need. A person cannot truly love God unless he loves God's creations. Ashlag believes that Jews have a pivotal role to play in the elevation of

human souls: when they are motivated by a pure desire to connect to God and show love toward God's creations, their study of Torah and performance of rituals will purify them and guide the rest of humanity toward God as well. A Jewish society governed by the Desire to Share impulse—according to Ashlag, a socialist system is ideal for this—would be a model of economic justice and political responsibility. It would give rise to other societies following the same principles, and they in turn would influence the rest of humankind to reform. Ultimately, all of humanity would be elevated and adhere to God. The spread of knowledge of kabbalah, according to Ashlag, is an indicator that the last stage of human history (the messianic era) has begun. He regarded his own clear explication of kabbalah as a sign that this stage was at hand.[7]

The Bergs accept these teachings, but in contrast to Ashlag, they focus most of their attention on individual *tikkun*. Typical of other new religious movements originating in late 20th century America, the emphasis is on personal fulfillment and only secondarily on the larger societal mission.[8] While a central principle in Kabbalah Centre teachings is that the highest ideal is to 'love thy neighbor as thyself' and achieve that through personal restriction, the primary message given to draw people to the movement is the assurance that living according to kabbalah is the key to greater and long-lasting individual happiness. Another contrast is the Kabbalah Centre's emphasis on reincarnation. Belief in reincarnation has been a feature of kabbalah for centuries, and Ashlag recognized that reincarnation enables the individual soul to improve over multiple lifetimes. However, in Kabbalah Centre doctrines reincarnation assumes major importance and plays a decisive role in theodicy and, as will be shown below, in explaining one's sexual impulses.

Another difference between Ashlag and the interpretation of his teachings promoted by the Kabbalah Centre is the permissiveness that prevails on a social level. Following Ashlag, Philip Berg argues that God offered the *mitzvot* as gifts, much like tools that enable a person to elevate his/her soul from its base, self-centered immature level to a refined level in which it acts from the Desire to Share impulse.

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[7] Ashlag, *Gift of the Bible*, 50. Ashlag's universalism is examined in Huss, 'Altruistic Communism', 115–116.

[8] Westeley, 'Cult of Man', 135–145.

One should only perform rituals and observe halakhah when one has a deep desire and certainty that they will be personally meaningful and will connect oneself to God; the absence of this certainty indicates that one's soul is not ready for the task. Performance of rituals is valueless in and of themselves, and they are regarded as a means for being able to act lovingly. All of these points can be found in Ashlag's writings, but in Berg's they are strongly emphasized as a means of countering the authoritarian images of God that so alienate his target audience. Kabbalah *insists* that a meaningful and purposeful life cannot include any element of coercion, duty, habit, or guilt, Berg teaches. It is a central principle of the Kabbalah Centre movement that no shame or guilt should be cast upon those who do not follow halakha, whether it involves ritual or moral violations; such judgment is contrary to the ideal of 'love thy neighbor' and indicates a lack of understanding that each soul has its individual path to *tikkun*. This tolerant stance, so characteristic of postmodern religiosity, will play an important role in the acceptance of homosexuals within the Kabbalah Centre community.

This tolerance and inclusiveness expresses itself in the most obvious departure from Ashlag: Berg's decision to spread kabbalistic teachings to women and to non-Jews. While Ashlag imagined that at the end of time all humanity would understand kabbalah, and it would be the Jews' task to raise them to that level, Berg determined that it was time to fulfill that mission.[9] All those who are interested may learn at the Kabbalah Centre. Recommended behaviors, including virtually all *mitzvot* that have historically been limited to Jews, are taught to non-Jews who evince the understanding and desire to perform them as an act of connecting to God.

3. Kabbalistic Concepts and Sexual Behavior

One of the foundational stories for the Kabbalah Centre teachings on sexual ethics is the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. According to Jewish tradition, the Torah may be explicated according to its literal meaning (*peshat*), its implications (*remez*), its homiletical messages (*derash*), and its hidden meaning (*sod*). Kabbalists understand

[9] The position of the Kabbalah Centre on the matter of Jews and non-Jews is dealt with at length in Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 117–126.

their interpretations as the hidden, and the deepest and most essential meaning of the sacred texts. Kabbalah Centre teachers affirm this and insist that the Bible should be regarded as a code that only kabbalah can unscramble. In *The Kabbalah Book of Sex and Other Mysteries of the Universe*, author Yehuda Berg discards the literal understanding of the Garden of Eden story as nonsensical and responsible for perpetuating misogyny and mistreatment of women. Drawing upon various kabbalistic commentaries, he demonstrates that the Garden of Eden story is the coded version of the cosmogonic narrative described above, and it teaches essential truths about sexual pleasures and disappointments. Yehuda Berg's explanation of the story's hidden meaning draws from classical kabbalistic teachings.[10]

According to Berg's explanation, the Tree of Knowledge represents the third of the highest three *sefirot*, also named *Binah*. The phrase *gan eden*, 'Garden of Eden', refers to the next lower six *sefirot* in which the one, unified soul resided in perfect fulfillment. This one soul is the primordial human prior to the fall, and in accordance with ancient Jewish teachings is an androgynous Adam joined seamlessly with Eve. When Adam-Eve is told not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, it is because the primordial human soul was not to partake of the higher intensity of divine light until it has fully emptied itself of its self-centered Desire to Receive impulse. The act of consumption is actually a sexual union, for the giving and receiving of divine light in this stage of existence can be understood as sexual bliss. The soul's intention to empty itself, or exercise restraint, is a praiseworthy act of preparing itself to receive divine light in order to share it with others. However, the serpent interferes with this good intention. The serpent, representing the self-centered manifestation of the Desire to Receive, convinces Adam-Eve to consume the fruit. The act is premature, Yehuda Berg teaches, because it occurred before the Desire to Receive was sufficiently restrained, and the taste of the fruit so excited the soul's Desire to Receive that it bounded out of control and shattered. This caused *tsimtsum* and 'the fall of Adam'. The *sefirot* emanated the physical universe of pain and suffering, and the one soul split into a huge number of separate male and female half-souls who long to find their true soul mates.[11]

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[10] For example, his explication of the Garden of Eden narrative (below) is a modified version of that found in Ashlag's introduction to his commentary on *Ez Hayyim, Panim Me'irot u-Masbirot*, 18–29 (sections 15–22).

[11] Y. Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 97–121.

This interpretation of the Garden of Eden story is utilized to convey important lessons about sex and interpersonal relationships. The primary lesson is that successful sexual union and satisfying personal relationships must include self-control. Sex governed by selfish desires alone may be initially satisfying, the author emphasizes, but in the long-term selfish sex leads to disappointment, boredom, a lack of fulfillment, and even impotence and danger. *The Kabbalah Book of Sex* uses 'before and after' case studies as examples of people for whom selfish sex is a regular feature of their lives: people who engage in sex with multiple partners, sometimes simultaneously, and seem to have no history of or interest in establishing long-lasting, monogamous relationships. Perhaps this is a reflection of the target audience; perhaps it is merely a pedagogical strategy to show that even the most dissipated individuals will find value in kabbalah. Yehuda Berg's examples of selfish sex include a male achieving orgasm before the female partner, prioritizing one's own pleasure before one's partner's, thinking of someone else while making love with one's partner; flirting with someone other than one's partner; having extramarital affairs; masturbating; finding titillation from pornography; and having sex with a menstruating woman.[12] Pre-marital sex, while not explicitly labeled 'selfish sex,' is also considered undesirable and leading inevitably to a boring, stale sex life.[13]

The disparagement of sex with a menstruant must be understood by reference to a different symbol system than the one in the cosmogonic myth, one that uses scientific language. Philip Berg has always described kabbalah as science and used scientific terms to describe spiritual concepts. Identifying kabbalah with science is a venerable theme within kabbalistic literature, and Berg's discourse was borrowed from his teachers.[14] Using scientific language is also a strategy of outreach; Kabbalah Centre leaders seem to realize that contemporary spiritual seekers are not persuaded by grand narratives, and so they add scientific or pragmatic arguments to narrative proofs such as the Garden of Eden story. The Kabbalah Centre is typical of New Age

[12] Ibid., 190.
[13] Ibid., 246.
[14] This is characteristic of New Age spirituality and post-modern spirituality; see Huss, 'New Age of Kabbalah', 116. This was not a mere strategy of outreach, however; Berg learned this principle from his teacher, Ashlag's disciple Levi Isaac Krakovsky, who elaborates this point in his 1939 book, *Omnipotent Light Revealed*.

groups and the modern religious movements that reject biblical literalism and want to avoid the taint of a naive fundamentalism. They tend to conflate science and religion, and to insist that one's faith is not faith at all, but pure science.[15] In his earliest writings, Berg employed the symbolic language of electrical currents and 'columns of energy' to describe the divine realm. Conceptualizing the dynamic of the ten *sefirot* as a 'three-column system' is an old kabbalistic tradition: the left column contains the *sefirot* that are conceptualized as female, the right column contains the male *sefirot*, and the middle column contains the *sefirot* that join the two sides. Berg's innovation, however, was to equate the dynamic of the *sefirot* to electrical circuitry or to the atom, with its positively charged protons, negatively charged electrons, and neutral neutrons. (In this case, positive, negative, and neutral do not have any moral implications, and they are all essential.) The left-column *sefirot* are negative energy and identified as Desire to Receive energy. The right-column *sefirot* are positive energy and identified as Desire to Share energy. When the two opposing energies are unassisted or unmodified, their combination will be unproductive or destructive. The presence of the neutral energy restricts them and makes them productive. The physical realm mirrors the divine world, and so it functions according to the laws of atomic and electrical energy; to be more accurate, from the kabbalistic perspective the laws of physics are a physical version of the original divine pattern. The divine light is positive, giving energy, and so is the proton; the soul is negative receiving energy, and so is the electron; and the act of resistance, like the neutron, is needed to produce a good outcome. In the physical universe that resulted, each successful occurrence follows this equation: positive energy + negative energy + resistance = productive outcome.[16]

Explained according to this scientific system, the cosmic events at the beginning of time sound far more abstract. Individual substances, acts, and categories of life have positive, negative, or neutral resistant value—these attributions seem to originate in kabbalistic teachings, although the source is not always referenced. The soul in the Garden

[15] Lewis, *Legitimating New Religions*.
[16] P. Berg, *Kabbalah for the Layman*, 101. This is also in idem., *Kabbalah Connection*, 99–105; idem, *Wheels of a Soul*, 86.

of Eden was largely negative Desire to Receive energy, and it sought out the Tree of Knowledge which was divine light and positive energy. Because sufficient resistance was not applied, the soul short-circuited and split into two, creating separate male and female half souls. Each of the harmful examples of sexual behavior mentioned above violates the energy equation (positive energy + negative energy + resistance = productive outcome) because one party is not completely giving or receiving or there is not sufficient resistance. For example, a husband engaged in sex with his wife while thinking of another woman is not giving to his wife wholeheartedly, nor is he restricting his thoughts to his wife alone. The outcome will be unproductive in that the sex will be unsatisfying—if not in the short term, then certainly over time—or not as invigorating and emotionally beneficial as it potentially could be.[17] Sex during menstruation is problematic because the male sperm, which represents a positive charge, is connecting directly with the woman's blood, which is a negative charge; this produces a short circuit, or as Yehuda Berg explains, 'a huge power drain [...] a meltdown'. The only way a good outcome can be produced during menstruation is for resistance (to sexual relations) to be exercised. Berg adds an additional argument to his case against sex during menstruation: the blood expelled from the woman conveys a shattered vessel that was once ready to give life, and one does not want to connect with such energy. He suggests that the couple wait an additional week after menstruation has stopped before resuming relations.[18]

Those familiar with Jewish law will recognize that the recommended behavior with regard to the menstruant is congruent with the laws of *niddah*; that is, the prohibition in *halacha* against sexual relations with a menstruant plus the additional seven days of separation. Historically, these laws have been explained as acts demonstrating obedience to God and as acts that preserve a level of ritual purity.[19] While the most devout and intensive practitioners within the Kabbalah Centre community will honor the laws of *niddah*, and Yehuda Berg is recommending these laws to all the readers of *The Kabbalah Book of Sex*, the behavior is explained by reference to a markedly different theology and symbol

[17] Ibid., 58–60, discusses the harmful consequences of such stray thoughts on the soul and body of a child conceived during such sex acts.

[18] Y. Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 238.

[19] In fact, rabbinic authorities understood that the laws of *niddah* have little to do with the status of ritual purity; see Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity*, 20–22.

system than that ascribed to within Jewish society. There is nothing here about showing fealty to an omnipotent deity or about purity. This reinterpretation of the laws of *niddah* is reminiscent of the logic used in modern Orthodox apologetics. During the 1980s, Orthodox women responding to feminist criticism articulated new rationales for their observance of the laws of *niddah.* An important defense of the laws of *niddah* written by theologian Rachel Adler, who at that time was sympathetic to Orthodox Judaism, described menstrual blood anthropologically as symbolic of potential life. Women can contain it in their bodies, but it is too powerful for men to withstand.[20] In a similar manner, the Kabbalah Centre advocates adherence to *halacha* but avoids any reference to ritual pollution or the charge that it is misogynistic. Those who learn kabbalah from the Centre learn that people, activities, and substances possess a specific type of divine energy. The status and intensity of that energy dictates the most efficacious behavior and infuses their world with cosmic significance.

The reflexive relationship of the lower and upper worlds means that restraint, giving, and receiving are simultaneously physical and spiritual events within the earthly and metaphysical realms. Therefore, although the sexual recommendations often focus on restraint, they are designed to enhance pleasure. In order to achieve both short-term as well as lasting fulfillment in sexual relations, one must 'let go of all selfish desires' and focus completely on pleasing one's partner. Exercising restraint heightens sexual pleasure in the short term as well as the long term. Passionate sex is extolled, and extensive foreplay and kissing are advised: 'And it cannot be simple little kisses. The kissing must be hot, passionate and wild'.[21] The Garden of Eden story teaches that sexual bliss is spiritual power, whether or not a person is cognizant of it, and Berg claims that one's sexual pleasure is greater when one keeps this in mind.[22] Sexual pleasure also has a larger, broader societal function, in that good sex brings *tikkun*, repairing the fissure between the upper world of the *sefirot* and lower, physical world. The larger social function of spiritual practices is obviously secondary to its individual benefits, but it is nevertheless mentioned. Yehuda Berg explains that meditating on two specific Hebrew letters during orgasm

[20] Adler, 'Tum'ah and Taharah: Ends and Beginnings', 63–71.
[21] Y. Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 220.
[22] Ibid., 61, 184–185.

'restores the Light that was lost in the Garden of Eden. And it helps repair the original shattered One Soul, bringing our world closer to its ultimate destiny of peace and paradise'.[23]

Another hallmark of post-modern religious movements, it has been said, is their connection to late capitalism in that they have made their spiritual services and products into commodities which are advertised and sold through global communication systems.[24] This certainly describes the activities of the Kabbalah Centre, which masterfully markets its books, courses, and spiritual paraphernalia on the web and appears to cater to celebrities and the affluent. However, the Kabbalah Centre's recommendations for self-restraint and the selfless pursuit of one's partner's pleasure, and the suggestion that couples not engage in sex for about twelve days per month do not comport with the valorization of instant gratification and hedonism that observers associate with the spirituality of late capitalism.[25] At first glance, the Bergs' and Kabbalah Centre teachers' repeated denial that kabbalah has anything to do with morality might be a convincing demonstration of selfish individualism. Here is Yehuda Berg's explicit statement of the issue:

> It's not about moral values […] Rather, it's about: *What's in it for me?* […] Enlightened self-interest is our only motivation. Kabbalah is not about giving something up for some abstract spiritual ideal. Kabbalah is about learning how to have it all. When we resist the desire for immediate but short-term gratification, it's for one reason and one reason only—to attain greater pleasure over the long term![26]

Explaining why it is not advisable to engage in sex with multiple partners or while drugged, Berg writes, 'It's not about morals. It's about getting a better return on your investment'.[27] These statements are meant to attract people who have little respect for notions of morality, God, duty, or altruism. They are pragmatic and self-centered and go through life looking for a good deal.

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[23] Ibid., 253.

[24] Huss, 'New Age of Kabbalah,' 120–121.

[25] Urban, 'Cult of Ecstasy', 292–296.

[26] Y. Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 179. See also ibid., 191: 'Kabbalah is all about energy flow, the physics of spirituality, and methodologies for generating megawatts of sexual power. Toss morality and ethical behavior out the window; flush shame and guilt down the toilet; stuff 'religious' principles into the trash compactor. Kabbalah has nothing to do with these concepts'.

[27] Ibid., *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 37.

Thus, the Kabbalah Centre's adoption of capitalistic ideals is complex. The comments disdainful of morality divert attention from what is essentially a moral core principle in Kabbalah Centre teachings: the most beneficial and cost-effective behavior is sharing with others, demonstrating unconditional love, and aspiring to 'love thy neighbor as thyself'.[28] The Kabbalah Centre's method of outreach is to appeal to people's self-centered urges and desire for prosperity. People who actually learn Kabbalah Centre principles will discover that it is best to suppress one's self-centeredness and material acquisitiveness. They will learn that 'prosperity' does not refer to capital or material assets, but a feeling of connectedness to divine light that can be attained at any economic level. Everybody, no matter how poor or wealthy, is warned that only when they contribute at least 10% of their income to charity will they be somewhat assured of preserving their earnings.[29] Similar to this expressed disdain for conventional morality is the strategy exercised by the Kabbalah Centre since the 1990s when insisting that 'the religious establishment' over the ages has despised kabbalah and persecuted kabbalists, and that religious authorities have kept kabbalah from women, the unlearned, and non-Jews. Consequently, those who learn kabbalah can congratulate themselves on rebelling against oppressive and puritanical power elite.[30]

It appears, then, that what we are seeing here is an appeal to people who are disoriented by and discontent with the hedonism and moral ambiguity of contemporary popular culture, but who have rejected the solutions provided by conventional organized religions. They approach life problems pragmatically and from an individualistic perspective. The Kabbalah Centre speaks with their vocabulary and provides them with rules for achieving a certain measure of order and satisfaction. The origins of these practices in Judaism are not mentioned; when the similarity is noticed, it is explained in a manner that gives primacy to kabbalah and de-legitimizes more conventional forms of Judaism.

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[28] Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 112ff. Y. Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 236.

[29] P. Berg, *Wheels of a Soul*, 89. See Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 156–157. The logic behind this warning is that a person does not receive unless he also shares what he is receiving. The commandment of tithing enables a person to show gratitude to God, the source of all bounty, and to share with others and express the Desire to Receive for the Sake of Sharing.

[30] See Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 61–62, 90; Y. Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 5, 12, 37.

4. Marriage

The moral and conservative underpinnings of Kabbalah Centre teachings are evident also in their explanation of marital dynamics. For this, the doctrine of reincarnation plays an essential role.

Gilgul, 'reincarnation' (sometimes translated as transmigration in reference to its connection to the Hebrew word for wheel), appeared in Jewish writings only sporadically before the sixteenth century, and so it is not widely mentioned in the Zohar, the chief book of kabbalah that is the focus of so much Kabbalah Centre attention. However, soul transmigrations played a major role in the teachings of Isaac Luria and appeared in kabbalistic doctrines thereafter. Although reincarnation fell into disfavor among most modern Western Jews, Philip Berg refused to ignore a subject that was of such intense interest to young people and seemed so essential to kabbalah.[31]

The general purpose for reincarnation in Lurianic kabbalah is that it occurs when a person has violated God's commandments; rather than descend to *Gehinnom* ('hell') for punishment, the soul is punished by being required to live again. A soul that is particularly evil and has not exhausted its chances may be transmigrated into a beast, plant, or stone. The usual type of rebirth, however, is as another person. Berg expanded on this with concepts of personal reform taken from Ashlag. He taught that the trials experienced in one's life are not from God but are a consequence of one's previous deeds, whether from this life or a previous one, designed to provide the opportunity for the soul to respond in a better manner than it did previously. With the correct apprehension of life's trials, a person is brought closer to *tikkun* and to the great joy of uniting with a soul mate and with God. The cosmogonic narrative of the *tsimtsum* teaches this: the vessels of the soul felt shame when they received light without earning it, and so they shut out the light. Thereafter, no person receives what he or she does not earn. While Berg locates the source of this principle of causality in kabbalah, it was also a feature of New Age and Eastern religious teachings that were circulating at the time.[32] In Lurianic kabbalah,

[31] P. Berg, *Wheels of a Soul*, a book devoted to the subject of reincarnation, opens with a preface declaring the universal importance of knowledge of the Jewish view of reincarnation. On page 19 and elsewhere, Berg complains about the incorrect notions of reincarnation he has found in contemporary literature.

[32] Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 277–290.

reincarnation occurs differently for men and women. Women's punishment for sins is lighter than men's in that they merely serve time after death in *Gehinnom* for the sins they committed in their lifetimes. Rarely is *Gehinnom* mentioned at the Kabbalah Centre, but it is widely acknowledged that women do not need to reincarnate as men do. This is because the ancient Israelite women, in contrast to the men, refused to engage in the idolatrous worship of the Golden Calf.[33] Their piety repaired the misdeed of Eve (and all female souls) in the Garden of Eden, and consequently female souls are no longer required to undergo reincarnation. Yet, women return to earth voluntarily for various reasons, according to the Kabbalah Centre. The most frequently explanation is that they return in order to help their male soul mates complete their *tikkun* and thereby hasten their reunification on earth and after death in Paradise.[34]

Thus, reincarnation is closely linked to marriage. Philip Berg extensively developed the logic of this system in his teachings. Marriage is the arena in which the souls play out the drama of the repair of their souls. Intimately engaged with each other, males and females make each other's lives difficult and thus provide each other with opportunities to elevate their souls to a higher level; the goal of life, which is to transform one's Desire to Receive for the Self Alone into a Desire to Receive for the Sake of Sharing, is ideally or best achieved by a man and woman united in marriage. Bringing children into the world is the most sharing act possible. These principles do not take into account the situation of homosexuals or others who may never marry or remain married. Yet, Berg admits that most marriages are difficult because people rarely marry their soul mates; soul mate marriages occur only when the male soul has been transformed to a very high level (the last one prior to completion of a soul's *tikkun*), so there is usually a mismatch between the male and female souls. Without knowledge of kabbalah, such ascension is well-nigh impossible. The marital difficulty should be regarded as an opportunity sent by God to

[33] K. Berg, *God Wears Lipstick*, 80.

[34] In P. Berg, *Wheels of a Soul*, 102, Berg mentions only that according to Vital's *Sha'ar Ha-Gilgulim* most women are on earth 'on a volunteer basis for the benefit of men with whom they may have endured a number of incarnations'. The critical role of women at the time of the Golden Calf has since been developed more in the book by Karen Berg, *God Wears Lipstick*, 79. Neither Philip nor Karen Berg mention that, according to Luria, women's souls must serve time after death in Gehinnom for the sins they committed in their lifetimes.

aid in transformation. For example, a man with a problem controlling his anger will be drawn toward a woman who provokes his weakness, thereby giving him ample opportunity to control himself and elevate his soul. Clearly, he was attracted to her because she would help him repair aspects of his character and rectify problems remaining from his past lives. Knowing this will help him tolerate her criticisms, accept her guidance, and appreciate her. Indeed, the experience of a painful marriage, then, may help the soul become elevated and merit its soul mate. Yet, staying in a marriage is not an absolute good. Divorce may be necessary and a required element of one's process of *tikkun*.[35]

The Kabbalah Centre presents a fairly conservative view of gender roles in general and within marital relationships in particular. Advanced and specialized women-only courses and literature such as Karen Berg's lectures and her book *God Wears Lipstick: Kabbalah for Women* teach that men and women have different and complementary roles. While all human souls are imprinted with the Desire to Receive, men are described as generators of divine light, and as the embodiment of positive Desire to Share energy. Women are described as receivers, as vessels, and as the embodiment of negative Desire to Receive energy. Egalitarian feminism is considered misguided and a bit ridiculous.[36] Male and female differences to some extent fit traditional stereotypes. If the couple acts in accordance with their essential natures and practice restriction, they will live relatively harmoniously and make progress toward their individual *tikkun* (positive + negative + restriction = productive outcome). If they are soul mates, it will be a blissful marriage. Both are taught to give to or serve their spouses without the expectation of receiving in return; if one gives with the expectation of receiving in return, this is not really sharing, and consequently one will not find fulfillment.[37]

Restriction within the marital relationship differs for men and women. According to Kabbalah Centre teachings, men want to master the world and exercise power. Their self-esteem depends on their

[35] P. Berg, *Wheels of a Soul*, 107, 150, 156, 162–164.

[36] While Berg praised the religious rebellion, 'love movements', and anti-war agitation of the early 1970s as signs of a spiritual awakening, he showed little respect for feminism, writing (in *Ten Luminous Emanations*, volume II, xii), 'On the lighter side of the coin, we are now experiencing a movement known to most of us as 'Women's Liberation'. Explicit criticism of feminism is voiced in women-only classes like 'Mind, Body, and Spirit'. Zimmelman, 'Powerfully Subordinate'.

[37] K. Berg, *God Wears Lipstick*, 41–46.

sense of themselves as powerful and capable of doing manly acts such as governing, leading, protecting, building, performing tasks that require physical strength and agility, and so on. Yet, they are incapable of fulfilling their ideals unless they are guided by women. Again, every female soul takes upon herself some of the *tikkun* of her male partner, and it becomes her *tikkun* to help him complete his *tikkun*. Thus, women are 'enablers' for their male partners. Men do not have a reciprocal responsibility toward their female mates.[38] In the Kabbalah Centre's women-only classes, women are taught that a man's primary responsibility is to provide financially for the family, and women's primary task is to create a home for a man and keep it clean, either through her own or hired labor, and guiding the family to live according to kabbalah. The energy that is expended by the wife in keeping a clean home must be positive and loving, because this energy passes through the home into their relationship.

The Kabbalah Centre teaches that women are not less important than men; indeed, their souls are on a higher spiritual level. This outlook allows women and men to reject egalitarian feminism without overtly insulting women's capabilities and diminishing their value. It frees women who so desire from the burden of working outside the home, and it honors the choices of men and women who are drawn to the 'traditional' familial roles. The Kabbalah Centre's symbolic language is unique, but what it advocates is essentially the bourgeois model of female domesticity that posits separate spheres of influence for men and women, and which places women on a spiritual pedestal and gives them the responsibility for ensuring the purity of the home. It is obvious that the Kabbalah Centre's explication of gender roles is drawn from the modern Orthodox world. In their apologetics, the separate spheres argument has been the predominant mode of explaining the laws of *niddah* and the exclusion of women from the most prestigious activities connected to public prayer and Torah study. They remove the stigma of impurity from women by associating impurity with men and the public sphere, insisting that women's

[38] This latter point was suggested to me—and it was taught in the 'Mind, Body, and Spirit' course— in response to my question as to why, if women do not need to reincarnate, the Kabbalah Centre teaches them to concern themselves with the *tikkun* process. I was reminded that each soul is split in two, and because the male side needs fixing, the work of the female is not complete. She comes to this world equipped with a '*tikkun* package'. Interview with Shaul Youdkevitch, 10 May 2006.

higher sanctity requires them to be kept separate and unsullied from normal routines. They highlight women's power as creators of new life and as the ones who determine the onset and cessation of sexual relations with their husbands. This apologetic response enables orthodox men and women to affirm that they give sanctity to life and elevate women far more than do the contemporary notions of unrestrained freedom.[39] The Kabbalah Centre's approach differs from these other Jewish approaches by applying it to all—not only Jewish—couples and including in it principles of reincarnation.

5. Homosexuality

Jewish tradition, and this includes kabbalistic literature prior to the late twentieth century, has regarded sexual relations between males as an *averah*, a sin; sexual relations between females is ignored or regarded as a minor offense.[40] Yet while male-male sex has been frowned upon, the desire of men to engage in sex with other men and with boys is regarded as natural, not uncommon, and existing alongside the desire of men to engage in sex with women. The kabbalist Isaac Luria's 'non-judgmental appraisal' of homosexual sex and his 'implicit acknowledgment of the natural inclination for such sexual practices' made its way into his kabbalistic writings.[41] This is not quite acceptance, however; Luria teaches that the soul of a male who engages in homosexual sex will be reborn in its next lifetime into a female body (this is understood as a negative consequence), and kabbalistic penitential prayers for engaging in male-male coupling were included alongside those for engaging in sex with the menstruant, with a non-Jewish woman, with another man's wife, with animals; for the sin of theft, of slander, dishonoring parents, and so on.[42]

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[39] For the appearance of this ideology in modern Jewish orthodoxy, see Myers & Litman, 'Secret of Jewish Femininity'. There is no research showing that new religious movements are, in regard to gender roles, inclined more toward or against egalitarian feminism than established religions. This subject has been explored Palmer, 'Women's "Cocoon Work" in New Religious Movements', 343–355.

[40] Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, 192–197.

[41] Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 114.

[42] On the reincarnation into a woman, see chapter 9 of *Sha'ar Ha-Gilgulim*. Such a mixed-up female will not be matched with a soul mate and will be infertile; only through great piety may she (he) merit the assistance of another woman's soul 'impregnating' her (his) soul and thereby enabling her (him) to give birth—but only

The Bergs are certainly aware of this literature; in one of Philip Berg's first books, he referred explicitly to the passage recounting the male reborn as a woman.[43] This reference did not reappear in the Centre's publications after the late 1990s, and male-male sex is not identified as problematic or included it in their definitions of selfish sex discussed above. Instead, they focus on the quality of the relationship between the men. Here is how Michael Berg discusses the matter in a correspondence with a gay student:

> While Kabbalah and its cardinal text, the *Zohar*, has little to say about homosexuality, it is a main focus of The Kabbalah Centre and Kabbalah in general to stay away from judging others for any reason, external or internal, physical or metaphysical. Kabbalah also explains that the most sharing act we can achieve on this planet is childbirth, which is unattainable between two members of the same sex alone. However, that is not to say that two same-gendered people cannot have the same or more loving, rewarding, and lasting relationships as heterosexual couples. Kabbalah is all-inclusive rather than exclusive, and I hope you feel comfortable continuing your study.[44]

Michael Berg's claim about 'the Kabbalah and its cardinal text' is certainly disingenuous. At the same time, he does not assert that homosexuality is ideal; indeed, it is apparent that it is not. However, he does not label homosexual behavior a sin or urge homosexuals to overcome their desires. One can find in Yehuda Berg's *The Kabbalah Book of Sex* a more explicit reference to homosexuality and reincarnation. Echoing Lurianic sources, he points out that a male body may have a female soul, and a female may have a male soul, and also that souls have multiple prior souls or components of them. In contrast to his brother Michael, Yehuda affirms the necessity of accepting one's homosexuality: 'So whatever combination of soul and body we may have, we are all exactly who we need to be in order to accomplish this

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female babies are possible. This is just one example of the many teachings that warn against succumbing to homosexual impulses; there are many others which counsel men who have engaged in homosexual sex to enact rites of penitence lest they suffer severe punishment in their current lives and after death. Some of this is paraphrased in P. Berg, *Wheels of a Soul*, 153.

[43] Ibid., 153.

[44] http://www.becominglikegod.com/?p=ask_michael&s=291 (accessed 28 January 2006).

mission [to be more sharing]'.[45] This may change from one lifetime to the next.[46]

It is clear that the social context in which the Kabbalah Centre finds itself and the movement's proselytizing mission have shaped their approach. One teacher explains,

> We have to deal with the subject of homosexuality very subtly [...] but why be cruel to people? Why insult them? It is not politically correct. This is 2006. Should we tell people who are 40 or 50, who've never married and do not have children, that they should have acted differently? Of course not! Not everybody does everything according to all the rules, so should we drive them out? There are people in the Centre who take drugs, who gamble, who steal, who cheat on their spouses—why would we want to drive them out? They are here and we want them to learn what we have to teach. Who knows? After learning from us, after experiencing the Light [God], they may change.[47]

That is, in regard to male-male sex as well as to all sorts of behavior that are not optimal, they focus not on the 'sin' but on making people more receptive to what they regard as the core principles of kabbalah. In the case of homosexuality, they are not critiquing the tradition; rather, they are placing some values above others. The tolerance and welcoming of gay participants at the Kabbalah Centre deviates from the norm in Orthodox Jewish society and is, in effect, a critique of Orthodox Judaism. The question remains, however, why they accept Orthodox values with regard to women's roles but not with regard to homosexuality.

One interesting result of the changed outlook on homosexuality is the new designation of a penitential ritual, found in Lurianic and other kabbalistic sources, designed to cleanse a man of the sin of past sexual relations with another man. The ritual involves rolling naked in the snow. Surely Kabbalah Centre teachers could have simply dropped this obscure practice. Yet immersion in the *mikveh*, the ritual bath, is particularly important to the Kabbalah Centre community: the devout men immerse every morning, and women are encouraged to immerse on many occasions in addition to the prescribed immersion after the

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[45] Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 215.

[46] A gay member of the Kabbalah Centre community informed me that he has been taught by his teachers that gayness is not an indelible part of a person's soul; the soul can be born into a heterosexual in one lifetime, and reincarnate as gay because of the *tikkun* that it needs to make. Private interview with author, 4 May 2006.

[47] Interview with Shaul Youdkevitch, 6 June 2006.

days of *niddah*. They have imbibed from kabbalistic lore the fascination with the stories of mystics who immersed in ice-water or frigid *mikvah* pools filled with melted snow. Perhaps this extreme but essentially harmless practice of rolling in the snow is too awe-inspiring to reject, and is just what is needed to break a person of his or her bad habits. Thus, Yehuda Berg recommends the practice in order to 'purify and remove any and all negative blockages that have been created as a result of [...] Selfish Sex'.[48] Alongside the description of the ritual, *The Kabbalah Book of Sex* includes a testimony by a man who decided to emulate the kabbalists who engaged in such purification rituals 500 years earlier. He writes:

> I got down in the snow and started to roll, meditating to cleanse and purify my body and soul [...] When it was over I was as high as a kite. The feeling was indescribable. That night I had the most amazing dreams. It's hard to describe, but let's just say that the power and truth of this tool became clear to me that night, and even more important, in my sexual relationship.[49]

The details of his sexual relationship are not revealed to the reader, but we are informed that joining him on the trip up to the snowy mountains of California to perform the ritual were three male and two female friends. The message here is that an old ritual may be performed in a quite modern social context; its power does not diminish, and even the hip and liberated will find it valuable.

The Kabbalah Centre movement presents its teachings as the cure for ailing interpersonal relationships, dysfunctional sexual behavior, and unexciting and emotionally dead marriages. Lessons and rituals that were formerly known only by a small, insular Jewish community—and some lessons and rituals that were known only to an elite among the Jews—are being shared indiscriminately with a universal audience. The recommended sexual behaviors are cut off from their roots in organized religion and made to appear exciting and challenging. Moral arguments are not simply avoided, they are emphatically rejected. Nevertheless, the recommended behaviors actually would draw men and women together into stable families and communities and, except in the case of homosexuality, reproduce conservative gender roles. Two themes are paramount: first, kabbalah teaches fundamental scientific

[48] Berg, *Kabbalah Book of Sex*, 249.
[49] Ibid., 251.

principles about the divine energy that courses through all levels of existence, and human sexuality has a dynamic and direct connection to divine energy. Second, following kabbalistic principles is simply the quickest, most effective, and most long-lasting way to achieve maximum satisfaction. Although Kabbalah Centre teachings are a 'pastiche', the parts are nevertheless connected to each other logically and form a mutually-supportive whole. It is common in some academic circles and in much of the organized Jewish community to find fault with the Kabbalah Centre because it has separated itself from the tradition of Jewish learning and the larger Jewish community. Yet, it appears that because the recommended behaviors are disassociated from organized Judaism, and their rational rationales are revised and replaced, they have been brought into the lives of a large, diverse audience as never before.

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MADONNA AND THE SHEKHINAH: THE PLAYFUL TRANSGRESSION OF GENDER ROLES IN POPULAR CULTURE

Kocku von Stuckrad

> I love contradiction. There's always a mystery, always a whole other life going on.
>
> Madonna

1. Introduction

Although the three scriptural religions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam officially put a theological ban on the iconographic depiction of their god, a superficial glance at the history of these religious systems suffices to show that in them an image of the divine prevails that is formed along the Genesis concept of "in the image of the human". On closer investigation, of course, it becomes apparent that the underlying model is not anthropomorphic but ultimately andromorphic ("in the image of the masculine"). Thereby, societal conditions and relations of power are transferred to the image of the divine.

Along with the question of the divine gender comes the question of divine bodiliness. This involves the theological problem that the god cannot be conceptualized anymore as a transcendent god who is beyond the material, created world, but as a god whose bodiliness is immanent to the world. In fact, this alternative underlies the heated discussions about pantheism—or, in a weaker form, panentheism—that since the early modern period have occupied Western theology and philosophy. At the one end of the spectrum we find theological doctrines that insist on God's transcendence and thus on his being bodiless and genderless; at the other end we see "materializations" of the divine in the created world, as in pantheistic models of interpretation.[1]

[1] Such an idealtypical construction of two poles should of course not hide the fact that theological and philosophical discourse has produced a number of concepts that claim to solve exactly this problem. The philosophies of F.W. Schelling and G.W.F. Hegel, for instance, can be read as systematic attempts to unite in one philosophical model the immanence and visibility of the divine on the one hand, and its detachment and transcendence on the other.

As will become clearer in my discussion, these alternatives are themselves part of a discourse of gender; it is not by chance that the bodiliness and sexuality of the divine are particularly stressed in concepts of divine femininity—as in the modern goddess movements—; at the same time, God's transcendence and the independence of his mind are masculine stereotypes that are informed by an androcentric image.

Despite the androcentric orientation of Jewish and Christian images of god there have been several attempts in European history of religion to conceptualize the femininity of the divine, either as a counter-model against the masculine god or as a gender polarity that ultimately aims at transcending the bodiliness of the divine altogether. While in Christianity the figure of Mary could take on divine features,[2] in Judaism discourses on the body and gender of the divine very often crystallized around the concept of the Shekhinah.[3] In a history that lasts more than two-thousand years—even though during the first one thousand years the concept had no pronounced feminine significance—the idea of the Shekhinah has been given a variety of different meanings and has been influential in many different ways. Therefore, this idea is a good yardstick for the construction of femininity, which provided possibilities of identification and role models for women and men in concrete societal contexts.

The following analysis is based on interpretational approaches in gender studies that are informed by theories of discourse and by post-structuralist reflections. These, in turn, are responses to older concepts prominent in gender studies. There can be no doubt that the analytical distinction between the biological "sex" and the socially constructed "gender" in the 1960s and 1970s was an important step toward a better understanding of what can be termed the cultural production of gender and bodiliness. That distinction, however, has itself been critically addressed by subsequent generations of scholars. Joan W. Scott, for instance, demonstrated that although the distinction between "sex" and "gender" intended to overcome binary models of masculinity and femininity, it ultimately perpetuated them.[4] With

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[2] On Marian piety see Delius, *Geschichte der Marienverehrung*; Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*; Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*.

[3] The relevant literature includes Scholem, 'Shekhinah'; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. I, 371–422 ('Shekhinah'); Green, 'Shekhinah'.

[4] As Joan W. Scott puts it, referring to Carol Gilligan's work: 'By insisting on fixed differences […], feminists contribute to the kind of thinking they want to oppose. Although they insist on the revaluation of the category "female" […], they do not

its regarding "sex" as naturally given and "gender" as changeable and culturally constructed, this model directly mirrors discourses of gender that conceptualize "nature" and "culture" as opposite categories (usually associating "nature" with femininity and "culture" with masculinity).[5] An additional problem of the sex/gender-distinction lies in its inherent disregard of the fact that "nature" provides more forms of sexual differentiation than masculine and feminine; hence, "sex" is by no means naturally given but itself dependent on social constructions. That is what "queer studies" aim to analyze. While queer studies are very prominent in English-speaking communities as a response to some problems of gender studies, in academic communities that have a Germanic language background another tendency can be observed, as well. In the wake of discourse analyses the German term *Geschlecht* and its equivalents in other languages (Dutch *geslacht* etc.)—with its ambivalent meaning of both "sex" and "gender"—has gained new currency in recent debates. Building on Joan W. Scott's definition of "gender",[6] Barbara Hey aptly summarizes:

> *Geschlecht* is knowledge of the societal relations between women and men and as such never absolute or persistent, but always dependent on context, controversial, and instrument as well as result of power relations. Knowledge as a way to order the world is inseparable from societal organization. Consequently, *Geschlecht* is the societal organization of gender differences (*Geschlechterdifferenz*). But this does neither mean that it mirrors constant, natural differences nor that it enforces them. Rather, *Geschlecht* provides for these distinctions historically, culturally, and socially different meanings. Viewed from this perspective, the "sex/gender" divide is misplaced.[7]

When in the following I talk of "gender", it is this understanding of *Geschlecht* that I am referring to. Hence, applied to the topic of divine

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examine the binary opposition itself' (Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 40). The chapter 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' is also included in Scott (ed.), *Feminism and History*, 152–180.

[5] See Scott, 'Gender'; Honegger & Arni (eds.), *Gender, die Tücken einer Kategorie*; Armour, *Deconstruction* (Armour deals with Irigaray and Derrida in particular); see also Schröter, *FeMale*; Armour & St. Ville (eds.), *Bodily Citations*.

[6] 'My definition of gender has two parts and several subsets. They are interrelated but must be analytically distinct. The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power' (Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 42; reprinted in Scott, 'Gender', 166).

[7] Hey, 'Die Entwicklung des gender-Konzepts', 19–20 (my translation).

femininity our research question can be reformulated: In what ways does the concept of the Shekhinah mirror various societal forms of organizing what is perceived as gender differences? From this perspective, the divine gender is both 'instrument and result of power relations'; role models, in turn, are options that have to be described in their societal contexts, independently of any natural differences.

In this article, the discussion of gender and role models on the one hand, and the changing functions of the Shekhinah in religious discourse on the other, form the background of my interpretation of the work of Madonna. I will try to demonstrate that Madonna is both a representative of a new kind of organization of gender differences; at the same time she plays with shaky stereotypes that have a long genealogy in Western culture.

2. The Shekhinah through the Ages

The career of the Shekhinah knows many different stages.[8] Derived from the Hebrew root *shakhan* ("to dwell"), already in the Second Temple period the term *shekhinah* referred to God's cultic presence in the Holy of Holiest of the Jerusalem temple. Although the idea of "God's Shekhinah" dwelling in the temple could be linked to monotheistic theologies, the monotheistic orientation of ancient Judaism is everything but clear. The Shekhinah was sometimes associated with a "partner" of JHWH until late antiquity, hence as a goddess who for some Jewish groups gained importance in cult and theology.[9]

It was only in the formation phase of rabbinic Judaism (from the second to the eighth centuries CE) that a nuanced interpretation of the Shekhinah was developed, with issues of salvation history attached to it.[10] Now we learn that after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 the Shekhinah was forced into exile; she will only return when the Jews lead their lives according to the Torah. Referring to developments in the Second Temple period, rabbinic interpretations link the withdrawal of the Shekhinah with misdemeanors of

[8] See the literature mentioned in note 3 above; see also the overview in Lodahl, *Shekhinah/Spirit*.

[9] See Winter, *Frau und Göttin*; Keel & Uehlinger (eds.), *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole*. As an older, controversial contribution cf. also Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*.

[10] Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellungen von der Schekhinah*; Ernst, *Die Schekhîna in rabbinischen Gleichnissen*; Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 79–102.

prominent biblical figures, followed by the deeds of rightful biblical heroes that led to the return of the Shekhinah to the temple.

2.1. *Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Shekhinah*

From this very brief overview we can gather that the soil was well prepared when from the twelfth century onward kabbalistic speculation started to address the Shekhinah. It is certainly not by chance that kabbalah began as a philosophical-mystical theology and practice in Southern France and Spain, because here an intensive exchange took place between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. In philosophical regard, the kabbalists took over Neoplatonic concepts of emanation that had been developed by Muslim scholars.[11] In addition—and with the question of God's gender in mind—it is fair to assume that the flourishing Marian piety in Southern France, particularly within the "heretic" groups of medieval Christianity, did not fail to have its impact on the development of kabbalistic interpretations of the Shekhinah.[12]

In the most important writings of the kabbalah, the *Sefer ha-Bahir* ('Brightly Shining Book', ca. 1180) and the *Sefer ha-Zohar* ('Book of Splendor', ca. 1290), the Shekhinah is ultimately integrated into the model of the tenfold emanation of the divine. The ten *sefirot* symbolize the characteristics and powers of the transcendent godhead that unfolds in the system of the sefirot and thus gets into contact with the material world without losing its transcendence.[13] The tenth sefirah—Malkhut—is located at a point where the world of the sefirot almost meets the revealed world; whenever contact with the divine is sought, Malkhut has to serve as a kind of mediator. Small wonder, then, that the tenth sefirah gained so much attention among kabbalists.[14] As "God's bride", Malkhut was identified with the Shekhinah, but also with the assembly of Israel (*Knesset Yisrael*). In Israel, God meets himself and re-accomplishes the primordial perfection that characterized the situation before the exile of the Shekhinah. Thus, the Shekhinah

[11] See the respective chapters in Frank & Leaman (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*.

[12] See Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 169–172; Green, 'Shekhina'.

[13] This is not the place to engage the many different kabbalistic doctrines of the sefirot; my description of the kabbalah, too, must remain superficial. For a readable introduction to the kabbalah of the Zohar see Green, *Guide to the Zohar*; still very useful are Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*.

[14] See Maier, *Kabbalah*, 86–104; Green, *Guide to the Zohar*, 50–53.

represents the female aspects of the godhead; she is the Sabbath on which God unites with his bride, exactly as he does with Israel on the Sabbath.

Within the zoharic writings, but also in other kabbalistic texts, this relation between God and the Shekhinah is often expressed in sexual metaphors.[15] The reunification of the Shekhinah with God is linked to the process of salvation and redemption (*tikkun*) that became so prominent in the Lurianic kabbalah of the sixteenth century. What interests us here, however, is the fact that kabbalistic texts, when they address the bodiliness and gender of the divine, do not apply the notion of equality of two genders within the godhead; rather, they mirror the androcentric conditions of the time.

> [T]he image of heterosexual pairing is appropriate only in the first stage of the redemptive process in which the exilic condition of separation and fragmentation begins to be overcome. The consequence of the unification, however, is the restoration of the feminine to the masculine. This restoration does not entail, as Scholem would have it, the perpetual union of the Shekhinah and her husband, but the ontic assimilation of the former in the latter [...] this reintegration involves the subjugation of the female to the male.[16]

Kabbalists identified the feminine with the *corona*, the crown, of the phallus, thus referring to the biblical notion, 'a capable wife is a crown for her husband' (Prov. 12:4).[17] That we are dealing here with an identification of female sexuality with male divine gender is further attested by the fact that the moment of ultimate union between Malkhut (Shekhinah) and the sixth sefirah (Tiferet) is happening through the ninth sefirah (Yesod); Yesod is identified in kabbalistic literature as the divine phallus. Wolfson concludes: 'Redemption in its ultimate sense does not signify the perpetual pairing of male and female, but the reconstitution of androgyny in the Godhead in which the gender dimorphism is superseded'.[18]

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[15] On a study of gender in kabbalah see particularly Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*; see also Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*; Mopsik, *Sex of the Soul*.

[16] Wolfson, '*Tiqqun ha-Shekhinah*', 291.

[17] Interestingly enough, the symbolism of the *corona* is also applied to Shabbatai Zvi, the messiah king, and again with reference to Prov. 12:4; see Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, 231–232 note 198.

[18] Ibid., '*Tiqqun ha-Shekhinah*', 290.

Thus, in kabbalistic interpretation the gender of the Shekhinah is multivalent; the Shekhinah is reflective of a male dominance that incorporates the female aspects of the divine. It reveals the power of male definitions, as well as an androcentric discourse of perceived differences.

2.2. *Sarah, the Wife of the Messiah*

Despite the tendency of kabbalistic hermeneutics to appropriate female attributes of the godhead in masculine terms, during the seventeenth century the Shekhinah found its way into other forms of religious discourses, too. For Sabbatianism, a major movement of Jewish culture in those times, the Shekhinah played a significant role with regard to the restitution of the primordial harmony (*tikkun*) and the coming of the messiah. Shabbatai Zvi, announced as messiah by Nathan of Gaza, within a few years gained such an enormous reputation that his person almost led to a schism within European Jewry. The movement culminated in the years 1665 and 1666, before Sabbatianism lost momentum after the conversion of its messiah to Islam (which nevertheless did not mean the end of the movement).[19]

Early on, the legends that formed around the person of Shabbatai Zvi and the Shekhinah had a sexual connotation. Not only that the messiah was married five times (once even with a Torah scroll, which led to Shabbatai's excommunication); the Shekhinah herself is repeatedly depicted in erotic terms. Nathan of Gaza, for instance, made the *Visions of Rabbi Abraham* known to a wider public. In this text it says:

> When he is six the *Shekhinah*, which has revealed herself to us, will appear to him in a dream as a flame, and cause a burn on his private parts. Then dreams shall sorely trouble him, but he shall not tell anybody. And the sons of whoredom will accost him so as to cause him to stumble, and they will smite him but he will not hearken unto them.[20]

The eroticization of the Shekhinah can be tracked in legends surrounding the figure of Sarah, the third wife of the messiah. With her whole family killed in pogroms, kidnapped, and brought to a Christian

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[19] See the classical study by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*; for contemporary documents and responses see Halperin, *Sabbatai Zevi*; see also Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 183–211.

[20] Quoted from Goldish, *Sabbatean Prophets*, 72. See also Shai, *Messiah of Incest*, 106–110, 128–143.

foster family during the Polish uprisings of Chmielnicki (1648–1649), Sarah found her way back to the Jewish community only as an adult. Soon she attracted wide attention due to her remarkable prophecies; one prophecy in particular added to her fame: that she would marry the messiah. Via Amsterdam and western Italy Sarah traveled to Egypt and in 1664 indeed married Shabbatai Zvi, one year before his candidacy for the role of the messiah was announced publicly.

But as interesting as this story may be, what is relevant for us here is the changing perception of the Shekhinah that crystallizes around the figure of Sarah. The lively formation of legends concerning Sarah do not only see her as the wife of the messiah and as a great prophetess, but also as a sexually hedonistic sinner who got involved with every man she could find during her journeys. Jacob Sasportas, an unemployed rabbi in Hamburg and a strong critic of Shabbatai Zvi, has the following to tell:

> I myself had been acquainted with her in the city of Amsterdam (may God preserve it!) when she arrived from the Polish expulsion about fourteen years ago, a heartless [that is, fatuous] young lady who would claim in her madness that she would wed the king messiah. Everyone laughed at her. She went to the city of Livorno, where she behaved promiscuously with everyone, as was reported to me by the sage Rabbi Joseph ha-Levi (long may he live!). And since she would make ridiculous statements [about marrying the messiah], and she was beautiful, it was conveyed to Shabbatai Zvi, who was then in Egypt with Raphael Joseph, the warden over the Alexandria harbor. [Shabbatai] revealed some of his secrets to him, including the fact that he was the king messiah and that this woman in Livorno was his [heavenly ordained] mate. He sent for her and married her, and she was his third wife.[21]

Goldish notes:

> The images of the virgin and the prostitute are two sides of the same coin. They reflect the polarized, archetypical male notions of female sexuality, and their ubiquitousness in literature composed by males says a great deal about how men see the world. In marrying Sarah, Shabbatai Zvi in a sense marries into Christianity—or perhaps even marries the Virgin Mary.[22]

This marks a further important characteristic: Sarah does not only represent the Jewish tradition but due to her Christian education also the

[21] Sasportas, *Sefer tsitsat novel tsevi*, 4–5; translation by Goldish, *Sabbatian Prophets*, 90.
[22] Goldish, *Sabbatian Prophets*, 95–96.

femininity of Mary. A new paradigm becomes fully visible here for the first time: 'Sarah [...] is both prostitute and virgin, Christian and Jew. She is Eve (mother of all people), Sarah/Rebecca (mothers of all Jews), and Mary/Meriam (mother of Christ and Christianity). Her *tikkun* is ordained through her own prophecy and that of Shabbatai: she would be the wife of the messiah'.[23] It is this combination of role models, stemming from different religious arsenals of tradition, that provided Sarah with such a high importance within the Sabbatian movement.

2.3. *The Career of the Shekhinah in the Twentieth Century*

During the second half of the twentieth century the Shekhinah became part of what is usually referred to as goddess spirituality. This in turn goes back to religious developments in Great Britain around 1900 when both in historical interpretation of religion and in practical religiosity the role of the goddess gained influence. Wicca religion is a direct result of these developments.[24] Not only for the modern witches' movement—with Wicca being its largest representative—but for the whole goddess movement it can be noted that with regard to role models the female divinity experienced a change.[25] The idea of the "Great Goddess" encompasses all different aspects of the divine; as a consequence, those attributes that had usually been ascribed to the male god—activity, bellicosity, etc.—were incorporated into divine femininity. Individual goddesses such as Isis, Hekate, Ishtar, Kali, or Shakti could easily be conceptualized as aspects of the Great Goddess, a tendency that is turned explicitly into ritual practice, for instance, in the chants of the Wicca religion.[26] Now it is possible to view the Shekhinah herself as a goddess. Caitlín Matthews imagines her as an aspect of the 'energizing power' of the Great Goddess: 'In esoteric Judaism the Shekhinah appears as energizer who enables Yahweh to plan the creation. From the depth of her power she provides the space with proportion, depth, and breadth. When Yahweh goes over the

[23] Ibid., 96–97.

[24] See Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*; Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*.

[25] For the developments within contemporary Judaism, and particularly within the "Jewish Renewal" movement, see Weissler, 'Meaning of Shekhinah'.

[26] An example is the very popular chant 'Ancient Mother' that addresses the goddess ('She of Many Names') with many different names, including "Shekhinah"; see the clip on You Tube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQHu20_MhDU (accessed 14 August 2008). See also Jones & Matthews (eds.), *Voices from the Circle*; Matthews (ed.), *Voices of the Goddess*.

surface of the water, the mirror image of the Shekhinah appears in its depth'.[27]

This revaluation of the goddess mirrors an increasing differentiation of female role models in the twentieth century; what is more, it can be interpreted as a reversed process compared to early modern kabbalah, namely as an incorporation of the male into the female. At the same time, however, it is remarkable that the relevant ascription of female divine attributes follow a traditional scheme. This is particularly apparent in the fact that goddess spirituality focuses most typically on the *immanence* and *bodiliness* of the goddess, while the transcendent dimensions of the divine, as well as attributes such as rationality and mind, are marginalized. Thus, even this radical new form of active female spirituality is still representing the dominant power relations and the stereotypical assumptions about masculinity and femininity that are present in contemporary Western societies. A woman who chooses these role models may regard herself as an active, life-giving, nature-bound and powerful person—logical thinking, rationality, and distanced reflection, however, are characteristics that even in feminist spirituality are typically regarded as "non-female", as a relapse into "patriarchal conditions".

3. Madonna and the Playful Transgression of Gender Roles

While modern goddess spirituality still carries important characteristics of how societal relations of power "organize" gender differences, recently there have been indications of an increasing erosion of those differentiations. Perhaps the best example—particularly for the topic of this chapter—is the career and the work of the artist Madonna.

Madonna (born 1958) has had enormous influence on modern pop culture during the past twenty years. Through her song 'Like a Virgin' (1984) known to a wide public, she has acted as singer, musician, composer, film actress, producer, journalist, author of children's books, and model—a veritable shape-shifter who presents herself in ever-changing roles. Most interpreters agree that Madonna is the "icon"[28] of

[27] Matthews, *Göttin*, 81 (my translation).

[28] An icon in classical sense is not just a picture or image but a carrier of power and religious energy. It is interesting to note that Madonna herself uses this attribution for herself, thus underlying the fact that she consciously and ironically works with the stereotypes put on her work by others. See the website www.iconmadonna.com

"postmodern" self-fashioning.[29] If we reduce the term "postmodern" to Lyotard's understanding of a conscious deconstruction of traditional stereotypes and narratives,[30] we will certainly subscribe to such a diagnosis, as Madonna, more than most other artists, plays with these roles and explicitly calls them into question.

From the beginning Madonna has presented herself as saint and virgin on the one hand, and as a sinner with inclination to promiscuity on the other. This ambivalent picture is visible in works such as 'Like a Prayer' (1989), 'The Immaculate Collection' (1990), or 'Erotica' (1992). Recently, Madonna caused a sensation with her interest for Jewish religion and the kabbalah; since the late 1990s, she has been a devotee of the Kabbalah Centre, a highly successful and globally operating kabbalistic institute that enables non-Jews and women to actively engage "classical" kabbalah, even if in modern interpretation.[31] Madonna changed her name to 'Esther', which is not without irony, as this Hebrew name means 'star'.[32] She adopted a couple of Jewish customs and more and more involved kabbalistic motives in her work. For instance, she does not perform on Friday nights. Furthermore, she has visited Israel with members of the Kabbalah Centre to celebrate some of the Jewish holidays. Madonna has a private-tutor of her own, Rabbi Eitan Yardeni, whose wife Sarah Yardeni runs one of Madonna's favorite charitable projects, 'Spirituality for Kids', a subsidiary of the Kabbalah Centre. In an interview with CNN's Richard Quest, and with a side-swipe against other celebrities (e.g. Paris Hilton) who according to Madonna use kabbalah merely for making themselves interesting, she notes:

> I wouldn't say studying Kabbalah for eight years goes under the category or falls under the category of being a fad or a trend. Now there might be people who are interested in it because they think it's trendy, but I can assure you that studying Kabbalah is actually a very challenging thing to do. It requires a lot of work, a lot of reading, a lot of time, a lot of commitment and a lot of discipline.[33]

(accessed 27 February 2008; on 14 August 2008, however, the site was no longer active but forwards the visitor to www.madonna.com).

[29] See particularly Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth*. On p. 25 he notes: 'As for Madonna, almost all the academics who examine her call her postmodern at some point, but generally without stating what they mean exactly'.

[30] See Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*.

[31] See Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*.

[32] What is more, the term is etymologically related to the goddess Ishtar; see Huss, 'All You Need is LAV', 619.

[33] Anonymous, 'Kabbalah No Fad'.

For the video of the James Bond movie 'Die Another Day' she worked several kabbalistic doctrines—most notably the 72 names of God—into an allegorical dramaturgy.[34] In this video Madonna plays with Jewish symbols that are not appropriate for female use, such as the laying of the tefillin; what is more, she acts in a bellicose and aggressive fashion and thus exchanges ascriptions of female passivity for the role of the destructive goddess. During her 2006 'Confession Tour' Madonna again picked up Christian and Jewish motives and received controversial—at times even openly aggressive—response by religious authorities. In the performance of 'Live to Tell' the artist uses Christian symbols such as the crown of thorns and even goes as far as herself being crucified on stage. The Vatican and other Christian organizations regarded this as blasphemous, which led to attempts to boycott her show. In a press-release, Madonna noted that her performance is 'neither anti-Christian, sacrilegious or blasphemous'. 'Rather, it is my plea to the audience to encourage mankind to help one another and see the world as a unified whole. I believe in my heart that if Jesus were alive today, he would be doing the same thing'.[35]

Already before the release of 'Confessions on a Dance Floor' (co-written and produced with Stuart Price), another song raised dispute, too, this time among Israeli rabbis. They condemned the song 'Isaac' because they believed the song to be a tribute to Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534–1572), notably one of the most important reference points for the teachings of the Kabbalah Centre. According to these rabbis' interpretation, it is not allowed to use a holy rabbi's name for profit. From the text alone it is not clear whether the song refers (implicitly, if at all) to Isaac Luria or to the biblical patriarch Isaac.

Im nin'alu daltey nedivim
daltey nedivim
daltey marom lo nin'alu
['(Even) if the doors of the generous are locked,
doors of the generous,
the doors of heaven are not']

Staring up into the heavens
In this hell that binds your hands
Will you sacrifice your comfort
Make your way in a foreign land

[34] A very good analysis is provided by Huss, 'All You Need Is LAV'.
[35] See Wyatt, 'NBC Draws Protests from Conservatives'.

Wrestle with your darkness
Angels call your name
Can you hear what they are saying
Will you ever be the same

[Chorus]
Mmmm mmm mmm
Im nin'alu, im nin'alu
Mmmm mmm mmm
Im nin'alu, im nin'alu
['If they are locked']

Remember, remember
Never forget
All of your life has all been a test
You will find the gate that's open
Even though your spirit's broken

Open up my heart
Cause my lips to speak
Bring the heavens and the stars
Down to earth for me

[Chorus]

Wrestle with your darkness
Angels call your name
Can you hear what they are saying
Will you ever be the same

[Chorus]

In interviews, Madonna called this song 'The Binding of Isaac' and denied any link to Isaac Luria. Instead, Madonna claims that 'Isaac' was actually named after the singer Yitzhak Sinwani, an Israeli of Yemenite origins who appears on the track.

> The album isn't even out, so how could Jewish scholars in Israel know what my song is about? I don't know enough about Isaac Luria to write a song, though I've learned a bit in my studies. But I've never heard that it's blasphemous for anyone to mention the names of catalysts. That's just a religious organization claiming ownership of something. 'This is our information; you're not Jewish and you can't know about it,' or, 'You're female and you can't know about it.' That's religious thinking.[36]

[36] Gardner, 'Madonna at a Crossroads'.

Madonna wants to draw a line between spirituality and religion. 'Religious thinking', she says, comes down to 'tribalism. You're not thinking for yourself; you're doing things because that's what somebody else did, or it's how your family taught you to behave and think'.[37] With her own family, she attempts to be more inclusive and less normative. 'Because I study Kaballah [sic!], my children are exposed to it. We go to a Torah reading every Saturday morning. And my daughter goes to spirituality-for-kids classes. But it's non-denominational; there are kids who are Muslims, Jews, Christians, atheists, whatever'.[38]

Summing up, we can say that in her work, Madonna transgresses two borders—the lines between the role models of saint and whore, Eve and Lilith,[39] goddess and demon, as well as the lines between various religious pieces of tradition. In the interview with Elysa Gardner, Madonna refers to the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo as her role model.

> Her work was very confessional, and told you a lot about what was going on in her life. But you never knew exactly what was true and what was false and what she was overdramatizing. She was creating a myth about herself. But she used it as an educational tool for herself and, I think, for other people. That's how I think of my work. I do self-portraits. People put me into all different categories: I'm a material girl, a sex goddess, a mother, spiritual. But I love contradiction. There's always a mystery, always a whole other life going on.[40]

Looking at the history of kabbalah and the changing perceptions of gender roles, another comparison is interesting, as well. Analyzed with the tools of cultural hermeneutics, Madonna's work has a striking similarity with the myths surrounding the life of Sarah; exactly as Sarah did some 350 years ago, Madonna represents both the Jewish mothers and the Christian God's mother. Hence, we should not be surprised to learn that Madonna will marry the messiah, or, rather, will give birth to the messiah herself.

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid. On Madonna's view of "religion" and her opinion about Judaism and conversion, see also Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 121–123.

[39] On a comparison between Lilith and Madonna see Guilbert, *Madonna as Postmodern Myth*, 98.

[40] Gardner, 'Madonna at a Crossroads'.

4. Concluding Remark

The intention of this discussion of various possibilities to place the figure of the Shekhinah in theological and societal discourse was not to present a continuous development or logical history. Quite the contrary: The Shekhinah is a good example of the changeability of religious symbols in different societal contexts. The idea of the Shekhinah does not lend itself for the essentialization of "female" or "male" attributes and characteristics. Therefore, the Shekhinah illustrates the poststructural critique of the categories "sex" and "gender" that underlies my analysis. If we regard "gender", or *Geschlecht*, as the societal organization of what is perceived as differences, and if we take seriously the fact that relations of power are crystallizing in religious interpretations, as well as in concrete role models, we will be able to better understand the contingency of "male" and "female" characteristics than with a model of interpretation that unwillingly essentializes biological difference.

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ERWIN NEUTZSKY-WULFF AND THE NEUROLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE SEFIROT

Sara Møldrup Thejls

Erwin Neutzsky-Wulff (b. 1949) is undoubtedly the most important figure in the landscape of contemporary Danish occultism.[1] However, because he has positioned himself mainly as an underground science-fiction writer, he has hardly been noticed by the academic study of religion. Neutzsky-Wulff places himself on a borderline between literature and (quasi-)science, both topics that have been hardly addressed in the study of religions. Furthermore, his religious theories have a somewhat elitist profile and have been, apart from the religious content of his books, transmitted mainly orally to his closest followers during courses or through his self-published magazines *Elsebeth* and *Bathos*. Thus, to create a coherent picture of the religious teachings and activities of Neutzsky-Wulff one has to be well versed in his extensive literary corpus, as well as in his other activities. As a result, no scholar of religion has realized the importance and depth of the religious aspects of Neutzsky-Wulff's writings and no scholarly literature exists on this subject. Some articles have been written from the point of view of literary criticism but the only writings engaging with his philosophical and religious theories are more or less hagiographic presentations and reproductive writings by his own followers.[2]

The literary career of Neutzsky-Wulff is dispersed. He has written stories for comic strips, porn and horror magazines, computer manuals, voluminous science fiction novels, and last but not least literature regarding magic, occultism, and religion. This last type of publications culminated in a huge volume entitled *Det overnaturlige* ('The Supernatural'), published in 2004.

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[1] In my use of the term occultism I follow Marco Pasi's definition, i.e. as a specific current of Western esotericism. See Pasi, 'Occultism'. Furthermore, when I speak of "occultist kabbalah", this should be understood as the interpretation and use of kabbalah within the context of occultism.

[2] The most noteworthy being Larsen, *Forsvar for verden*.

The novels bear explicit references to the religious ideologies and practices elaborated in the quasi-scholarly writings. For example, many of his books are divided into ten chapters, often arranged according to the ten sefirot. This article will explore the role of kabbalah in the writings of Neutzsky-Wulff and how his perception of kabbalah on the one hand is inscribed in the tradition of occultist kabbalah reaching back to the early modern period and how his system on the other hand is extremely innovative. Consequently, the question of how this type of kabbalah relates to traditional kabbalah and other forms of contemporary kabbalah will also be examined. But before turning to the religious and epistemological contents of Neutzsky-Wulff's writing I will present a brief biographical overview.

1. A Brief Account of a Controversial Career

Erwin Neutzsky-Wulff likes to shroud his person behind myth. Therefore, most accounts of his life should be read with caution, as they are often written by his followers or by himself. Neutzsky-Wulff was born in 1949 in Copenhagen. His father, Aage Neutzsky-Wulff, was also a writer. He was interested in esotericism, primarily anthroposophy, and wrote several treatises on esoteric subjects. Though Neutzsky-Wulff never mentions his father's books, he must have had them at his disposal at home. According to himself he was an extraordinary child that from an early age preferred solitude and books to the company of people. He describes how he could read fluently at the age of three and how he discovered literary classics such as Shakespeare, the Greek tragedies, and the Hebrew Bible, while avoiding any contemporary literature.

He was an undisciplined schoolboy but still got the highest marks in his class. After high school he went on to study philosophy at the University of Copenhagen. However, after a while he dropped out and started focusing on his literary career. His activity as a writer developed quickly, and already in the 1970s he published not less than ten novels and collections of short stories, accompanied by a large number of poems, essays, and other literary works. From the beginning his writings were criticized for being elitist and promoting an aggressive worldview, this accusation being largely due to the author's unconditional rejection of democracy and Christianity, especially as the latter had developed in contemporary Denmark. In this period, he allegedly

met a group of scholars, whom he refers to as "the Satanists", a term which he uses to denote their rejection of or disinterest in Christianity. They introduced him to a universalistic, comparative study of religions which influenced him, but eventually he left the group.[3] He has later described another group of Satanists, mainly in derogatory terms in his fictional work *Indsigtens sted* ('The Place of Insight').[4] Because of this book, Neutzsky-Wulff was publicly labeled as a "Satanist" and an "Occultist", an image which was strengthened further by the subsequent publication of the quasi-scholarly books *Okkultisme* (Occultism) and *Magi* (Magic). Neutzsky-Wulff did not reject his characterization as a Satanist, and even reinforced in numerous interviews and debates in the media. However, he preferred to keep his public image ambiguous, by giving contradictory statements with regard to his supposed Satanism. During the last few years he has more or less avoided the term.[5]

Neutzsky-Wulff has been and still is an extraordinarily active debater; he is not afraid of making controversial and radical statements regarding society, culture, and religion. In many ways he seems to enjoy the image set up by the media of being a brilliant borderline lunatic, and he utilizes this in order to present his cultural criticism in a highly polemical language. Thus he has become renowned as a cultural anarchist, a literary loner, a sadomasochistic Satanist, and an uncompromising political debater. The controversy surrounding the career of Neutzsky-Wulff culminated in the mid-1990s, when the journal *Faklen* ('The Torch') began its publications.[6] The first issue, released in 1996, contained a harsh criticism of the universities and their phlegmatic indolence towards the increasing fascistic tendencies of society, and it presented a radical humanistic manifest. But most controversial were the articles discussing the political and theological agendas involved in the authorized Danish translations of the bible, especially the Old Testament.

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[3] It is doubtful whether this group has actually existed or whether Neutzsky-Wulff has invented it in order to legitimize his controversial teachings.

[4] There seems to be a strong resemblance between the description of the Satanists in *Indsigtens sted* and the actual group into which Neutzsky-Wulff was allegedly initiated. However, Neutzsky-Wulff himself is ambiguous in his attitude about this relation.

[5] See Neutzsky-Wulff's humoristic response to accusations of Satanism raised by one of his strongest opponents, namely the Danish theologian Johannes Aagaard. Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Satanisme'.

[6] *Faklen* now only exists in a digital version, but the content of all the early issues is available on the website: www.faklen.dk (retrieved 11 April 2009).

Under the title 'Bibelforfalskning?' ('Forgery of the Bible?'), the authors Jens-André Pedersen Herbener and Rune Engelbreth Larsen gave an account of the conflict between academic and theological agendas in the translation of the bible, illustrated with numerous examples of how the Danish Bible Society distorted the original Hebrew text.[7] Obviously this led to a heated debate between the editorial board of *Faklen* and the people involved in the bible translation. The editorial board consisted to a large extent of Neutzsky-Wulff's followers, a fact that was quickly noticed by the media and that led to the branding of the magazine as Satanic, occult, and anarchistic, an attitude reinforced, among others, by the Danish theologian and former leader of the anti-cult movement Dialogcentret ('The Dialogue Centre'), Johannes Aagaard.[8]

The relationship between the members of the editorial board of the journal and Neutzsky-Wulff was very close, and between 1997 and 1998 Neutzsky-Wulff was the author and director of a religious role-gaming experiment called 'Mesterspillet' ('The Mastergame'), in which a number of the members participated. It was centered on the religious phenomenology which was later elaborated in *Det overnaturlige*, and involved personal "journeys" within different mythical narratives functioning more or less like mystery initiations.[9] During the course of the game Neutzsky-Wulff engaged in a relationship with one of the participating girls, Lene Wittrup Jensen, even though he was already married to another woman. As a consequence, he brought the game to an abrupt end: 'I had to renounce "The Mastergame" and its by now exceedingly physical implications. Even the most "occult" form of polygamy was not an option'.[10]

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[7] Herbener and Larsen, 'Bibelforfalskning?'. Even though the general attitude of this article is highly polemical, the authors did have an important case. Consequently, this article generated a heated debate regarding the political, scholarly and theological premises of the translation of the Bible. Recently the whole case has been discussed in two publications: Herbener, *Bibeloversættelse* and Halvgaard, *Kilde eller kanon*.

[8] See the discussion of the history of *Faklen* on the journal's website (www.faklen.dk/faklen/historie.php, retrieved 11 April 2009). The discussion presented there, however, is somewhat biased. This is unfortunately a common trait within all sources dealing with *Faklen* and the subsequent controversies between the magazine and Neutzsky-Wulff.

[9] There is hardly any public information available on this project, and since it is not essential to the present study, I have not pursued it further. A brief reference is found on www.faklen.dk/faklen/14.php, and a short description on Neutzsky-Wulff's own website: www.enw.dk/nyheder.html (both retrieved 11 April 2009). In the beginning more than twenty people participated, but it was soon cut down to sixteen: nine women and seven men.

[10] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Rune går til bekendelse'.

Due to extensive internal conflicts following this turn of events, the group surrounding *Faklen* and Neutzsky-Wulff split, and Neutzsky-Wulff left Copenhagen to live with his new girlfriend. He divorced his wife and settled in a former school in Vinstrup, Jutland. There, he got married to Lene Wittrup Jensen, who changed her name to Helena Neutzsky-Wulff. With the help of some of Neutzsky-Wulff's followers the two restored the school and set it up as a cultural center. Since then, Neutzsky-Wulff has given series of lectures and successive seminars there, which at times have attracted up to 50 people. His literary output is continuously growing, and he engages lively in debates in newspapers. In 2007 he divorced Helena, as well, and married her friend Anne Kristine Jakobsen, who now bears the name Chresteria Neutzsky-Wulff.

2. A General Theory of Religion and Reality

One of the most important works by Neutzsky-Wulff is *Det overnaturlige*. Neutzsky-Wulff also refers to it both as 'The Ultimate Grimoire' and 'The Proper History of Religions'. It is divided into ten parts, each subdivided into ten chapters. Focusing largely on comparative mythology, the book presents itself as a sort of new *Golden Bough*, and one of Neutzsky-Wulff's main arguments is that all religions revolve around the same axis and are more or less identical.

He sees the historical evolution of religions as a form of degeneration, and Christianity, as exemplified by the National Lutheran Church in Denmark, as far removed from a living religion as possible. The reason for this, according to Neutzsky-Wulff, is that religion means pragmatic interaction with spiritual realities, and according to him no such thing takes place in Lutheran Christianity. Especially Christianity's traditionally problematic relation to sexuality is important. To Neutzsky-Wulff no separation between religion and sexuality is possible: 'Religion might be the most sophisticated extension of limbic behavior[11] and is in its source inseparable from the reflecting sexuality. Thus a study, in the original sense of the word, of sexuality

[11] The limbic system is a part of the brain responsible for autonomic functions, emotional behavior, learning and memory, and, most importantly in this context, sexual behavior. It is composed mainly by the thalamus, the hypothalamus, the amygdale, and the hippocampus.

becomes simultaneously a diving deep into the mysteries'.[12] According to Neutzsky-Wulff, religion only manifests itself when a true *hieros gamos* takes place, where the woman becomes a sacred prostitute who ensures the god's presence by being devoted to him in all aspects of her life. I will get back to the implications of this later on. To Neutzsky-Wulff, religion *is* sexuality and, furthermore, it is masochistic.[13]

His main argument is that the religious, and thus the supernatural, was once part of what was considered natural and that it is a necessary part of the human worldview and reality. However, reality is no easy category in Neutzsky-Wulff's writings. Actually, most of his novels imply several levels of reality. This should lead us to his perception of what reality "really" is, namely a projection from the brain. This implies a radical constructivism according to which reality is fundamentally determined by language as an inter-subjective cultural creation. This apparent subjectivism is counterbalanced by pragmatism: "what is real is what works",[14] which is how science and scientific progress can be explained. Not as a dogma stating the superior truthfulness of X about exterior reality Y, but as a system that in itself is able to produce results and prognostications, which enable man to improve his interaction with a reality that ultimately can never be known:

> With its insistence on observation science has tried to escape metaphysics but has still received it through the back door. Metaphysical problems have been ignored rather than solved and with modern physics the time had come.
>
> Observation might be formalized experience but is still experience nonetheless, and in this century scientists suddenly found themselves in a universe of experience where everything depended on the chosen model. With the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, the watertight floodgates between "what is" and "what we can observe" have finally broken down.
>
> If one had to avoid the metaphysical, which is in principle immeasurable, one would have to dismiss the notion of a reality behind the observations. Reality is what the scientist observes; or rather it is his observations arranged in a tasteful and appropriate way. The world is experience.[15]

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[12] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Den frygtelige virkelighed 2'.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See for instance Larsen, *Forsvar for Verden*, Part I, for a description of Neutzsky-Wulff's perception of reality.

[15] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Kabbala 1'.

What we experience as reality is sense perception filtered by the different centers of the brain and which then manifests itself as the "physical reality" through communicative language. Reality, in our common understanding of the word, is thus established through a linguistic consensus that dominates the underlying cognitive aspect of language. This leads Neutzsky-Wulff to the conclusion that experience and thus reality are nothing but neurological processes and sense perception that become manifest through language. More precisely, reality is established through the inter-subjective linguistic processing that basically forms our culture.

Consequently, according to Neutzsky-Wulff, there are two main factors involved in the creation of reality, namely language and sense perception. Language can be divided into cognitive language and communicative language, where the former is seen as primary, and the latter as secondary. The cognitive language is what creates and shapes the world through perception. The communicative language, on the other hand, can only talk *about* the world; in doing so, it maintains the dualism between the consensual and the cognitive worlds and holds the culturally dependent human being firmly in the consensual, projected reality, thus restricting the cognitive language.[16]

However, it is possible to transcend this projected reality by "cheating" the brain, as a first step, by overruling the prefrontal cortex. The goal of this is to release sense perception from the linguistic conceptualization of the world and to reach, or at least recognize, what can be termed "unmanifested" reality, or at least a higher or more fundamental reality, which, as we shall see, is equaled to the kabbalistic concept of *Ein Sof*. 'The brain constantly works to *create* a world from the needs of the organism, which are *transcendent*, as they are *behind* the world, are "supernatural", non-conceptualized. It is this transcendent dynamics that the kabbalah names en soph, that is, without end or border, undefined'.[17]

Certainly, *Ein Sof* itself can never be reached, only the reality, as it gradually manifests itself in the course of the seven lower sefirot, can be accessed. Neutzsky-Wulff's book *Det overnaturlige* describes this process. As Neutzsky-Wulff writes in the introduction: 'Most of us

[16] Neutzsky-Wulff, *Det overnaturlige*, 196. For a short representation of Neutzsky-Wulff's ontological and epistemological theories see Larsen, *Forsvar for verden*, part I, especially 17–58.

[17] Ibid.

naturally live relatively unconcerned on this epistemological Titanic. This book will not have much to say for them, but only for those who seek "the golden key that unlocks the palace of eternity"'.[18] In Neutzsky-Wulff's view, *Det overnaturlige* should be seen as such a key, a book that provides the theoretical foundation for the true mysteries of religion, and thus of reality. These mysteries are sexuality and neurology.

3. Religion as Sexuality—Sexuality as Religion

According to Neutzsky-Wulff, religion is the most radical devotion possible, as exemplified by the temple prostitute or the slave girl who unconditionally consecrates herself to her master/god. This also reflects Neutzsky-Wulff's theory of mankind, according to which the ultimate devotion for men is directly to the gods, while for women it is to the gods incarnated in the man. This devotion has to be unconditional, and the modern *myste*[19] has to return to the condition of the temple prostitute. She has to let go of herself and become nothing else but the object of her god's attention. Without the god's attention and proximity she is nothing. Neutzsky-Wulff describes an "academy", with which he allegedly was involved, for this type of modern priestesses: *Huset* ('the House') where girls aspiring to become sacred slaves can apply for admittance.[20] They have to sign a contract giving the governors of the house absolute control over them, after which they become nothing but a piece of property. Their education is described as follows:

> They take their clothes off, which they will never get back, and spend a couple of days in the cage that will later function as "qodhesh haqqodashim"[21] for those who will be elected priestesses. It is a cage made of

[18] Neutzsky-Wulff, *Det overnaturlige*, 15.

[19] Neutzsky-Wulff obviously derives the term *myste* from the Greek word *mystes*, meaning initiate. For him the term denotes someone, usually but not necessarily a woman, who is engaging in the mysteries, that is, who is exploring the full reality behind the consensual and communicative reality.

[20] Like in the case of the satanic group, it is doubtful whether this academy actually existed or whether it is just part of Neutzsky-Wulff's mythical framework.

[21] "The Holy of Holies" refers to the innermost part of the Jewish tabernacle and later of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was the part of the temple where the presence of god, the Shekhinah, was said to dwell, and where only the High Priest could enter, and this only on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

> iron bars, one meter high and wide and one and a half deep. After this, their disciplinary training begins.
>
> They receive an erotic version of the maiden's uniform, which in its simple form is the peplos of the priestess [...]. Furthermore they have to be at their master's sexual disposal.[22]

The means of discipline are whipping, hand, neck and foot fetters, bridle, and the pillory: 'The collar reduces the slave to a pet; the handcuffs make her give up resistance towards sexual advances and the foot fetters prevent escape. Another effective means of discipline is the pillory where she is freely available in a humiliating position'.[23] However, these are more than mere disciplinary tools, because the consequence of this treatment is the experience of transcendence. To Neutzsky-Wulff the relationship between the master and his slave is that of ultimate love with absolute mutual devotion. While he becomes her god she will be his gateway to the divine. In Neutzsky-Wulff's view it is in this relationship that the world comes into being.

Men's tasks on their way to transcendence are much more complicated. It is not enough to be the master of a woman and thus to be her god. Man has to go a long way in studying and slowly changing his own mindset and reality perception. A key to this lies in the book *Rum* ('Space'),[24] published in 2001, which is meant to be read like a kabbalistic treatise, with several layers of meaning and different possibilities of interpretation. One of the ways to read the book is through the use of gematria. With the aid of this method one can find one's way through the different cross-references spread throughout the book. However, the gematria here is not restricted to the traditional numerical values of Hebrew words and letters. It is broadened so as to correspond to other religious systems as well, so for example, when examining the Hebrew letter *nun*, the significance is not only imbedded in its numerical value but also, among other things, in its association to the Egyptian god of chaos "Nun". In this way Neutzsky-Wulff establishes a transmythological and transcultural framework of interpretation that, at its very outset, implies an essentialist approach to the concept of religion as it is so clearly outlined in *Det overnaturlige*.

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[22] Neutzsky-Wulff, *Det overnaturlige*, 170.

[23] Ibid., 172.

[24] The Danish word "rum" denotes both the abstract "space" and the more concrete "room". Furthermore, the word does not vary from the singular to the plural. The book plays on all of the different connotations of the word.

This, of course makes the book a challenge to the reader, who is expected by the author to be acquainted with his former works and with ancient mythology in general. Without any knowledge of Neutzsky-Wulff's previous works, *Rum* probably does not make much sense, but rather gives an impression of a rambling mess of separate parallel stories without any connection. In this sense, Neutzsky-Wulff's books can be said to present a sort of textual initiation. *Rum* and *Det overnaturlige* are supposed to offer the higher knowledge necessary for the initiate to begin the ritual practice. While the earlier books had provided the theoretical background, these latter two are more or less ritual manuals hidden behind literary narratives in the case of *Rum*, and mythological readings in that of *Det overnaturlige*. If they are studied thoroughly and seriously, and their guidelines are followed, the reader/initiate should be able to reach a state where his perception of reality expands and, furthermore, where he can give shape to and take control of this reality. As such the books are regular manuals and descriptions of initiation. As Neutzsky-Wulff's points out with regard to *Rum*: 'Not surprisingly there is, in the 1200 pages of the book, room for a regular pornographic novel, which, however, functions as a "blow-by-blow" description of an initiation. This, by the way, can be seen as a sort of traumatic complement to the giant kōan that the book forms.'[25]

The books have been accompanied by a series of articles in Neutzsky-Wulff's magazine *Bathos*,[26] whose purpose is to facilitate the shift from theory to practice that the two books propose. The series is mainly aimed at the male aspirant to initiation who does not have a (female) *mystagogue* to manage the initiation. In her place, he must attract a *succubus*, a female entity who can replace the *mystagogue*. The title of the series, 'Transcendens for Dummies' ('Transcendence for Dummies') suggests the arrangement of an *adytum*, a restricted room meant only for the work on "transcendence". The room ought to be sound- and light-proof, and furnished only with a mattress covered with leather and a set of fetters hanging from the wall, in order to cre-

[25] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Den frygtelige virkelighed'.
[26] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Transcendens for dummies'.

ate the impression of being in a cell.[27] The "initiand"[28] should always enter the room naked, and after taking a shower. He should remain in the room in the dark for a certain amount of time, for instance from sunset to sunrise, or even longer, locked to fetters in the wall. Since the initiand is alone, the fetters are mostly of symbolic nature, because he will need to have the key at his disposal. However, the main purpose of the process is to attract the *succubus* who has to be convinced that the initiand is a prisoner and thus accessible and unthreatening to her.

Obviously this kind of sense deprivation has psychological consequences. As Neutzsky-Wulff explains, the mind will defend itself and try to make the initiand give up and return to the safe, ordinary perception of reality. Thus, one might expect boredom, followed by anxiety and feelings of blindness and numbness. To overcome this, it is of the utmost importance to respect the scheduled time of stay in the *adytum*. The conviction of being in a prison or of being a slave is the key to achieving the experience of transcendence, since it will not only be a recognition from the side of the initiand, but also on the side of the transcendent entities, whose actualization is the goal of the whole ritual. This leads to one of the major points in the teachings of Neutzsky-Wulff, i.e. that transcendence and "descendence"[29] are two sides of the same coin. The initiand can transcend only if an entity descends at the same time. The entity is tempted to approach the initiand, and therefore to descend, because he is a prisoner. The initiand will become her slave but, in the process, he will be able to control his experiences of transcendence and actively navigate in the expanded realms of reality.[30]

The relationship between the "ordinary" reality and the transcendence is explained as follows:

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[27] An even more explicit description of the *adytum*, where it is furnished according to Neutzsky-Wulff's tarot cards is described in Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Tarok'.

[28] I prefer to use the term "initiand" here, as opposed to "initiate", because I would like to emphasize the fact that it indicates a person in the *process* of being initiated, from the earliest preparations until the actual initiation is accomplished. According to Neutzsky-Wulff, this process already begins by reading books such as *Rum* or *Det overnaturlige*.

[29] The Danish term is "descendens" and since this is a very important term in Neutzsky-Wulff's teachings I have chosen to translate it as "descendence". The term refers to the idea that no one can transcend without the simultaneous descent of an entity.

[30] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Transcendens for Dummies', 12–14, 4:17, 34–49, and 60–69.

> Neither the theurgist nor the entity exists in any "real" sense. It is only the self-manifesting nothing that, following the same rules, adopts the role of an object. The difference between everyday experience and transcendence is not that they have two different worlds as object, but that only the latter is an experience in the proper sense of the word (by which reality is generated), whereas the first is illusory (images and signs).[31]

This is an important realization for the initiand. He has to realize that what is usually perceived to be reality is nothing but a consensual projection of the mind. We experience what we expect to experience. This is what the *adytum* is supposed to transcend. It helps the initiand to override the pre-frontal cortex, which is the place where reality takes its consensual form, and thereby to gain access to unfiltered, direct experiences. But, to obtain transcendence is one thing, to be able to use this new perception of "reality" and to navigate in the transcendent realm is another. This is the point where kabbalah becomes central.

4. Neutzsky-Wulff and Kabbalah

According to Neutzsky-Wulff, the most accurate approach to the concept of reality is to be found in kabbalah. Kabbalah is seen as a map of the cognitive universes that lie behind sense perception and communicative language. Reality is seen not just as a mirror reflecting the transcendence of *Ein Sof*, but also as a step-by-step neurological process, where the various steps correspond to the sefirot.[32] This process is the manifestation or creation of one's own reality, where the sefirot designate the level of actualization from pure potentiality or transcendence in *Ein Sof* to the blueprint of the physical world in Malkhut. As Neutzsky-Wulff explains in *Det overnaturlige*: 'When we are "rising" through the sephiroth, the steps and layers of actualization/conceptualization, we are actually moving "backwards" in the brain; [this means that] inferior brain centers manifest themselves without the interference of PFC [i.e. the pre-frontal cortex].'[33]

The point is that we should see the pre-frontal cortex as the kabbalistic veil separating the kabbalist from the world of the sefirot. When this veil is pushed aside the kabbalist/initiand can begin the

[31] Ibid., 12: 4.
[32] Neutzsky-Wulff, *Det overnaturlige*, 127.
[33] Ibid., 131.

journey through the neurological, sefirotic landscape. With kabbalah as the theoretical guiding principle, one can navigate in the neurological landscape and create one's own reality, and this is the process of actualization. This is closely connected to transcendence/descendence. When the *myste* "transcends" through the sefirot, the unmanifested reality descends simultaneously and becomes increasingly materialized.

The ten sefirot are thus seen as different cognitive levels. Malkhut is the veil that one has to pass through in order to start the actualization that leads to transcendence. The rest of the sefirot, consequently, correspond to specific centers of the brain and neurological processes. According to this theory the upper triad of the sefirot (Keter, Hokhmah, and Binah) is seen as lying even below the limbic behavior pattern and thus corresponds to the autonomous nervous system.[34] The pillars of Din–Hod and Hesed–Netzah are interpreted as the negative and positive side of the limbic system, where Hod and Netzah more specifically are seen as the negative and positive centre of approval in hippocampus. Tiferet corresponds to the hypothalamus, Yesod to the thalamic filter, and finally Malkhut to the cerebrum, where the projection of the physical world takes place.[35]

Each of the ten sefirot is understood to possess individual geographical characteristics and also to be inhabited by certain types of entities. Since the two lowest sefirot, Malkhut and Yesod, are the easiest accessible locations of the sefirotic system, the description of them are the most elaborate ones, as the following examples from two transcendence accounts show.[36] Similarly to the woman in a cage, the male initiand who spends his time in the *adytum* might experience what in Neutzsky-Wulff's terms can be called "precipitating transcendence". This type of transcendence experience will bring the *myste* to Malkhut, that is, to the borderline of the actualized world, but she/he will not be able to control the experience yet. With time she/he will be able to transcend consciously and to navigate in the astral realm. Malkhut is described as a fairytale place, the forest that the initiand, as the main

[34] This upper triad of the sefirot is the closest one to *Ein Sof* and therefore beyond any conscious reach. The part of the sefirotic realm in which the initiand can navigate is thus restricted to the lower seven sefirot.

[35] This is most explicitly explained in *Det overnaturlige*, part IV, especially chapter 4.

[36] These two descriptions of transcendence were given at a seminar in Vinstrup by two of Neutzsky-Wulff's female initiates: Helena, to whom Neutzsky-Wulff was married, and "Vaticina".

character of the tale, is supposed to enter in order to find "the wise woman", "the evil witch," or "the troll".[37] These supernatural figures are entities that descend while the mystic is ascending.

A *myste* of Neutzsky-Wulff gives the following description of Malkhut, which is matched by other transcendence accounts:

> In Malkhut they [the entities] are often children, dwarfs or maybe pixies. They are very hospitable and usually treat you as if you were the Queen of Saba (but then, to them, you are). They serve you and tell you edifying stories around the table, where you get the most honorable seat. It is like visiting a peasant family hundred years ago. They offer you food and drinks that keep you in the astral because they want you to stay as long as possible […] The old men are kind and grave, the women meek and shy. The children, who for some reason are always boys, are teasing and annoying.[38]

The importance of the entities residing in Malkhut lies in their function as guardians of the gate to the other realms. To continue the astral journey to Yesod it is necessary to acquire both enough confidence in the astral realm to have the courage to delve deeper into the system, and a key to be able to enter the next sefirot. This can be a name or a number which can be subject to gematria upon returning to the "ordinary" world.

> In Yesod the circumstances are not as cozy. You might be pinned on a cross or a tree, put in a cage, raped by ten raving beasts or boiled, cut to pieces and vacuum packed. Here, the trick is not to be afraid or panic. It is easier than it sounds, as the prefrontal cortex (where the fear for this kind of totally harmless things belongs) is so to speak on a stand-by, or works on your/the transcendence's side. Let yourself be killed, raped and humiliated, preferably without too much murmur (which makes them so sad). Try to be an object or an animal, then in time you will pass the test and continue to Rachamim.[39]

In Yesod the temple service truly begins and it is where the initiand can attract the upper transcendent entities through her sexual service. Here the *myste* has the responsibility of the actualization of the world(s), of her own transcendence and of the descendence of the "supernatural" entities. In Malkhut the *myste* is still a novice who has to learn how to

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[37] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Transcendens for Dummies', 16:14–27.

[38] H. Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Indvielse og transcendens'.

[39] H. Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Indvielse og transcendens'. Rachamim is another name for Tiferet.

navigate, still not quite aware of the territory in which she is situated, but if she has managed to proceed to Yesod she commits herself to the duties of the priestess. As one of Neutzsky-Wulff's *mystes* states, she has become a female *tzaddiq*:[40]

> Through the transcendence I have become what you could call the world's servant. I have been in the service of the world as restorer of the contact between the world and its underlying spirit. I serve—to use a Jewish term—as a female caddiq. I contribute to the maintenance of the world machinery and do what I can to keep the paths between the worlds clean (tiqqun).[41]

As in much of Neutzsky-Wulff's own writings, the inspiration from Lurianic kabbalah is evident. The Lurianic concept of the breaking of the vessels has in the context of Neutzsky-Wulff become equal to the degeneration of religion, that is, the division between sexuality and religion. With the removal of the priestess/temple prostitute the direct connection between the divine and the world was interrupted.

The *Sefer Yetzirah* is seen by Neutzsky-Wulff as the most important kabbalistic text,[42] and he has published a Danish translation of it made by one of his followers.[43] In this version the title is not *The Book of Formation*, as it is often translated, but *The Book of Actualization*. This is a central term in the teachings of Neutzsky-Wulff, as "actualization" is closely linked to one's own conceptualization of the world. The main purpose of the *Sefer Yetzirah* is to give a precise representation of the process of creation as expounded in Genesis. However, the scope is radically different from a purely mishnaic exegesis. The explanation of the act of creation is nothing less than the possibility of reproducing the divine creation. As Joseph Dan notes:

> This is not a description of Genesis I but a *scientific statement* that a certain combination of these thirty-two paths brings about the creation. This is not a formulation or a description, but a *formulation* which seeks to find the *scientific truth regarding the way that the world was created*—

[40] *Tzaddiq* literally means "righteous one". In Lurianic kabbalah, the *tzaddiq* is a most pious kabbalist who by his righteousness takes part in the cosmic restoration.

[41] Vaticina, 'Transcendens set fra en mystes side'. The term *Tikkun* is a reference to the Lurianic *Tikkun Olam*, literally meaning "the restoration of the world which is the theurgic goal of the *tzaddiq*.

[42] Even though the *Sefer Yetzirah* is not a kabbalistic text in the scholarly sense of the term, there is a widespread idea in kabbalistic circles that the *Sefer Yetzirah* is one of the oldest kabbalistic texts, often even attributed to Abraham.

[43] Amden, *Sefer Yetzirah*.

> and if this is scientific truth, then bringing it to light means that one will be able to repeat the process, in all or in part. Thus whoever knows the secret of the thirty-two paths can possibly participate in the process of creation, either of a world or a creature.[44]

The *Sefer Yetzirah* is a cosmogonic treatise, and Neutzsky-Wulff sees it as a manual of creation. Since the world is perceived as essentially subjective, this text can be used as a do-it-yourself guide to your personal cosmogony. It teaches the *myste* to be aware of the creative mechanisms of language, mechanisms that in Neutzsky-Wulff's vision are mostly neurological. As he explains in his commentary to the *Sefer Yetzirah*:

> The verse ends with a request to accommodate the wisdom of the book and to "reinstate the creator on the throne". Here, the creator is man, who, by the adoption of the communicative aspect of language, has lost the cognitive one, the logos. It is the declared purpose of Sepher Yetzirah to teach the student the cognitive language—to Teach Yourself Creation.[45]

Again, it is the concept of language that is central. Neutzsky-Wulff's reality as a neurological concept is essentially linguistic, hence it is no surprise that the *Sefer Yetzirah* is held in such high consideration in his teachings.

Neutzsky-Wulff rarely gives any explicit or precise references to his sources, but there are, at least in *Det overnaturlige*, references to some of the direct quotations. Here, the most common references are to the Zohar and to the *Sefer Yetzirah*. However, there are no precise indication as to which version or chapter these references belong to. Among other sources of inspiration, Isaac Luria, Abraham Abulafia, and the Ashkenazi kabbalists should be mentioned.

5. The Occult Connection

As is often the case with the creator of a new religious system, Neutzsky-Wulff claims to be highly independent and to supersede every other contemporary religious and literary tradition. However, some important sources of inspiration that he concedes are Plato, Shakespeare,

[44] Dan, *Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, 202 (emphasis original).
[45] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Kabbalah 2'.

Milton, Mozart, Goethe, Oehlenschläger, and Wagner. According to him, all religions since antiquity have been in a state of increasing degeneration. Even the medieval kabbalistic works that are held in high esteem are seen by him as showing the inevitable signs of depravation. This is one of the reasons why the *Sefer Yetzirah* is perceived to be of even more importance than the Zohar. On the other hand, Neutzsky-Wulff considers kabbalah as one of the few religious traditions since antiquity having any value at all, an important exception being the influence of esoteric ideas in the Renaissance.

Even though he is obviously inscribed in a long history of esoteric tradition that has developed since the early modern period, he dismisses most other modern and contemporary esoteric teaching as being pure nonsense. Prominent occultists such as Eliphas Lévi or Aleister Crowley are barely mentioned, and, when they are, they are mocked at as amateurs.[46] However, as shown by Olav Hammer with regard to modern esotericism in general,[47] and by Egil Asprem with regard to occultist kabbalah in particular,[48] what was characteristic of *fin de siècle* occultism was the reinterpretation of available religious material through the lens of scientific methods and rhetoric. And this is exactly what Neutzsky-Wulff is doing. In his attempt to address mystic or religious experience, Neutzsky-Wulff comes close to the sensitive borderline between religion and science. One might be inclined to categorize his approach as an attempt at legitimization through quasi-scientific terminology. This has become standard practice in contemporary esotericism, especially in the New Age, but Neutzsky-Wulff's general focus on neuroscience and his radical linguistic constructivism seem to mirror twentieth-century academic developments on levels that are deeper than the superficial tendency to apply scientific terminology as a means of legitimization.

The remarks made by Asprem in his analysis of Aleister Crowley's use of kabbalah can reasonably be applied to Neutzsky-Wulff as well:

> The comparative methodology of Frazer is applied, but in place of Frazer's skeptical agenda we find here an esoteric, *perennialist* agenda. The main argument of this article will show how *disembedded* elements

[46] See for example Neutzsky-Wulff, *Det overnaturlige,* 166 and 220. In the whole book, these are the only two references to Crowley, while Lévi is not mentioned at all.

[47] Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, ch. V. See also Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*; Pasi, 'Occultism'; Vitale, 'Method of Science'.

[48] Asprem, '*Kabbalah Recreata*'.

> of the Kabbalah, through an instance of religious creativity, are put to the forefront of this novel occult methodology, as the very matrix which makes the innovations possible.[49]

Asprem then goes on to show how Crowley, in his book *777*, uses kabbalah as a basic system of classification into which all religious phenomena might be applied and is thus used as a taxonomical device.[50] Furthermore, we might consider the first three of the seven definitions of kabbalah that Crowley presents in his appendix to *777*:

> Qabalah is:
>
> a) A language fitted to describe certain classes of phenomena, and to express certain classes of ideas which escape regular phraseology [...].
> b) An unsectarian and elastic terminology by means of which it is possible to equate the mental processes of people apparently diverse [...].
> c) A system of symbolism which enables thinkers to formulate their ideas with complete precision [...].[51]

Although these definitions are not directly applicable to Neutzsky-Wulff's perception of kabbalah, there are important similarities. First of all, the implications of (a) and (b), that kabbalah is a symbolic language, which is superior to ordinary language and which enables the user to speak of extraordinary realities with the utmost precision, is a claim made again and again by Neutzsky-Wulff in *Det overnaturlige*. Second, that kabbalah can be used as a terminology applied to mental processes, is also, as we have seen, a theme easily recognizable in the teachings of Neutzsky-Wulff. Furthermore, the propensity to write fictional works with kabbalistic themes is a common trait for both writers.[52]

This having been said, the similarities between Crowley's and Neutzsky-Wulff's understanding and use of kabbalah should not be stretched too far. For Crowley, kabbalah is a universal, not strictly Jewish system, whereas for Neutzsky-Wulff kabbalah is a specific Jewish phenomenon which, however, provides a general hermeneutical approach to reality. For him, knowledge of Hebrew is essential in order to be able to use kabbalah properly as a classificatory and navigational tool, and to understand its specialized symbolic language. Moreover,

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[49] Ibid., 136.
[50] Ibid., 138.
[51] Crowley, 'What is Qabalah?', 125. See also Asprem, '*Kabbalah Recreata*', 138.
[52] See especially Crowley, 'The Wake World'; Neutzsky-Wulff, *UFO*; idem, *Rum*.

Neutzsky-Wulff's knowledge of traditional kabbalah[53] is much more profound than Crowley's. The reason for this is first of all the linguistic competence of Neutzsky-Wulff. That he is proficient in Hebrew means that he has direct access to the actual kabbalistic sources and does not have to rely on other translations and interpretations, as Crowley did. Second, in Crowley's times there were simply not that many kabbalistic texts available, since many texts only became known to the wider public through the efforts of Gershom Scholem. Now my point here is not to make any value judgments as to the "authenticity" or "quality" of the kabbalistic interpretations made by Neutzsky-Wulff or Crowley. Both can be seen as quite radical innovators, but their background is very different and this is obvious in their writings. In Neutzsky-Wulff's works, language and the kabbalistic texts themselves are of the utmost importance, whereas in Crowley's interpretation the emphasis is laid on the symbolic character of the kabbalistic system and the inherent correspondences.

But there are other similarities between the two authors. As Asprem shows, kabbalah is used by Crowley to fulfill the motto 'The method of science, the aim of religion'. It seems evident that this motto can be easily applied to Neutzsky-Wulff as well, and that he takes the motto to its ultimate consequences. In Neutzsky-Wulff's interpretation, the kabbalistic approach to the world coincides with that of the scientist's, as the following quotation illustrates: 'The kabbalists square God in the same way in which a physicist would square a wave function. The world is language and thus linguistic analysis as deduction is a viable alternative to scientific induction'.[54] This again leads back to Neutzsky-Wulff's interpretation of the first lines of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, where the created—that is, *actualized*, in Neutzsky-Wulff's terms—world is divided into three aspects of reality formation, namely the person who

[53] By the term "traditional kabbalah" I refer to the historical current of Jewish kabbalah which arose in medieval Europe and the textual output of this group (part two of the following demarcation of kabbalah). Although this is not the place for a detailed discussion of the definitions of kabbalah, a problem that I have discussed elsewhere (Thejls: 'From Divine Names', chapter 1.2), I can present my tentative conclusion to this problem, namely a two-fold approach to kabbalah: (1) Kabbalah can be seen as a discourse transmitting esoteric teachings claimed to belong to ancient Jewish wisdom lore. Thus the definition does not rely on a certain set of doctrines but rather on the mode of transmission. (2) Kabbalah is the product or activity of a historical current of people, the *mequbalim* (kabbalists), who use the notion of kabbalah as a designation of the practice and transmission of Jewish esoteric knowledge.

[54] Neutzsky-Wulff, 'Kabbala 2'.

describes (writes), that which is described (written), and the description itself (writing).[55] Here the kabbalist/scientist can put himself in the place of God as the master of creation, and this is the utmost purpose of transcendence.

6. New Age Nonsense or Creative Interpretation

The perception of kabbalah as a map of the transcendent and of the neurological realm, and of the sefirot as corresponding to certain brain centers, cannot but challenge the prevailing conceptions of kabbalah. Already the occultist kabbalah of Lévi or Crowley has been looked at with disdain by most kabbalah scholars, and where early twentieth-century occultism would interpret the doctrine of the ten sefirot in a framework of psychological processes, Neutzsky-Wulff even goes one step further. His radical physiological and neurological interpretation of kabbalah moves way beyond mere psychology when attributing the very creation of reality to specific brain centers. As has recently been argued by Boaz Huss,[56] the academic study of kabbalah has been characterized by a polemical attitude towards contemporary kabbalah practitioners, and Neutzsky-Wulff is no exception to the rule. So far, in Denmark the sole mention of Neutzsky-Wulff and his kabbalistic enterprise is in a short article written by Marianne Schleicher for the Christian anti-cult movement Dialogcentret.[57] In this article she examines the adoption of kabbalah by New Age representatives, and as examples she discusses Madonna's involvement with the Kabbalah Centre on the one hand and the kabbalah of Erwin Neutzsky-Wulff on the other. Her conclusion regarding these phenomena is as follows:

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[55] Ibid. The reference here is to a part of the *Sefer Yetzirah* whose translation is highly problematic. In Peter Hayman's edition the first chapter is translated as follows: 'Yah, the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, the Living God, God Almighty, high and exalted, dwelling for ever, and holy is his name, carved out thirty-two wondrous paths of wisdom. He created his universe with three groups of letters (*separim*): with *seper* and *seper* and *seper*', *Sefer Yetzirah §1*, version A in Hayman, *Sefer Yesira*, 59. Hayman's translation is a synoptic edition based on the earliest manuscripts. One of the other renderings of this paragraph reads in the last line: 'He created his universe with three types of things: *seper* (writing), *separ* (numbers) and *sippur* (speech)' (version C). The root letters however are the same: ספר.

[56] Huss, 'Ask No Questions' and '"Authorized Guardians"'.

[57] Schleicher, 'Kabbalah'.

> No, neither Madonna nor Wulff engage in kabbalah. They merely reuse elements from a Jewish mystical theological praxis and subjugate them to their modern worldview in their religious/spiritual seeking of meaning. Then, at the same time they can benefit from that aura of insight and wisdom which has always surrounded Jewish mysticism.[58]

Since Schleicher does not give any explicit demarcation of kabbalah it becomes difficult to follow this conclusion. I do not see any good arguments as to why the kabbalah of the Kabbalah Centre or Neutzsky-Wulff should not be considered as kabbalah. Moreover, the Kabbalah Centre can hardly be considered a New Age phenomenon per se. It is rather a New Religious Movement that has been significantly inspired by New Age thought, but at the core of its teachings it still has quite traditional Jewish kabbalistic themes. These themes have nonetheless been given a universal value and are presented in a rhetoric typical of New Age culture.[59]

The Kabbalah Centre is a perfect example of a religious organization's adaptation to the challenges that postmodern Western society poses to traditional religion. In certain ways the Centre can mistakenly be perceived as presenting "New Age spirituality" in the guise of kabbalah. But I would argue that it is actually the other way around. Even though the Kabbalah Centre evidently makes use of typical New Age strategies and rhetoric, it does not share the crucial eclectic elements or the loosely defined structure that is so characteristic of New Age.[60] On the contrary, the Kabbalah Centre offers traditional kabbalistic teachings in new bottles, adapted to the conditions of postmodernity. The Centre is aware of which rhetorical strategies work in a consumer-oriented culture and it has managed to establish itself as an attractive religious or, as its members would say, "spiritual" choice in the subjectivity-centered mode of life that Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead have found so central to the religious milieu of postmodernity.[61] These

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Jody Myers' recent book on the Kabbalah Centre, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, offers an excellent study of the history and religious ideology of the Centre and places it in the context of the development of religions in contemporary Western society. See also Thejls, "Exploring Contemporary Kabbalah" for an analysis of the main doctrines of the Kabbalah Centre and Huss, 'The New Age of Kabbalah'.

[60] I rely on Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*, and Hammer, 'New Age' for my understanding of the term "New Age".

[61] See Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*. This is not the place for an extensive discussion of the distinction between religion and spirituality. However, this topic has been discussed extensively by Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, esp.

New Age traits that can be identified in the discourse of the Kabbalah Centre are, in Schleicher's view, enough to exclude the group from kabbalah proper. This is not an exceptional way of looking at contemporary, non-traditional types of kabbalah. Joseph Dan adopts the same attitude towards the Kabbalah Centre when he terms its teachings 'a New Age mishmash of nonsense'.[62]

The designation of Neutzsky-Wulff as a New Age representative seems even more arbitrary, as he has nothing whatsoever to do with what is usually characteristic of the New Age milieu. His use of kabbalah is, like that of the Kabbalah Centre, grounded in traditional kabbalistic ideas, even if interpreted in a radically creative manner. As we have seen, the concept of language is ubiquitous in the kabbalah of Neutzsky-Wulff and, as in traditional kabbalah, it is a language of creation. Even more, one could argue that Neutzsky-Wulff continues the "scientific" discourse already prevalent in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, as Joseph Dan noted above. Consequently, referring to my proposed two-fold definition of kabbalah, the Kabbalah Centre can be said to be on the line between the historical and the typological part of the definition. On the one hand, the group can inscribe itself in the historical Jewish kabbalistic traditions; on the other hand, it explicitly renounces, or at least heavily downplays, intrinsic features of traditional kabbalah, such as the necessity of being Jewish and the importance of keeping the *mitzvot*. Neutzsky-Wulff's teachings are clearly only kabbalistic in the typological sense of the word, but that still qualifies for the label "kabbalah".

These cases seem to indicate how New Age is used as a sort of terminological garbage bin instead of an analytical tool. What the Kabbalah Center and Neutzsky-Wulff do is to put central elements of traditional kabbalah into new frameworks of interpretation. As Wouter J. Hanegraaff points out in his contribution to this volume, innovation and new interpretations are needed for a tradition to continue. In its outset, medieval kabbalah was highly creative in its interpretation of ancient Jewish material, so it can be no surprise that contemporary kabbalah

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vol. I, chapter 3, and vol. II, 6–13; Heelas, 'The Spiritual Revolution'; Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious*; Sutcliffe and Bowman, *Beyond the New Age*. Apart from their respective viewpoints, what is common to all these discussions is their basic agreement that a distinction of the two terms is of intrinsic value to the academic study of contemporary religion, an assumption that I do not contend.

[62] Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*, 285, n. 56.

is just as innovative with regard to its interpretation of "traditional" sources. Moreover, medieval kabbalah was not a unified movement either. Rather, there were many varieties of what has been termed kabbalah.[63] Even if there is no agreement among kabbalah scholars as exactly how to demarcate medieval kabbalah, there is as least some agreement on the fact that diverse currents existed within what we can define as kabbalah. If it is possible to speak of theosophical, ecstatic, practical, or magical kabbalah within medieval Jewish kabbalah, and also to acknowledge the later currents of Christian kabbalah, it should not be too problematic to establish new taxonomies within contemporary kabbalah. As such, concepts like occultist kabbalah and New Age kabbalah can be used as analytical tools without negative connotations as to not being "proper" kabbalah. Even though Neutzsky-Wulff is obviously quite radical in his reinterpretation of kabbalah, this does not imply that what he does is not kabbalah. It is definitely not "traditional kabbalah", but his ideas of the sefirot as a map of the brain is not necessarily more extreme than the Renaissance Christian kabbalists who interpreted kabbalah to prove the truth of Christianity.

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[63] Abraham Abulafia, for one, distinguished between the kabbalah of the *sefirot* and the kabbalah of the divine names. The latter was seen as more advanced than the former. See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, 6 and part II, especially 104–106.

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PART IV

KABBALAH AND POLITICS

'THE GREAT GOAL OF THE POLITICAL WILL IS LEVIATHAN': ERNST JÜNGER AND THE CABALA OF ENMITY[1]

Steven M. Wasserstrom

1. Introduction

On 1 June 1977, Ernst Jünger turned on his TV to watch soccer, when, of all things, he saw Gershom Scholem on the screen. He decided to write to Scholem.

> You alluded to a problem that has troubled me since my childhood—that is to say: the imperfection of the world. I see that Kabbalah certainly didn't solve the problem, though it gave a convincing explanation, or in any case better than by the banishment of man out of Paradise.[2]

I hope that the following pages will show that these remarks were anything but casual.

For over fifty years, in many genres, the German man of letters Ernst Jünger (1895–1998) elaborated what I shall call a cabala of enmity.[3] However "fictional", his cabala engaged political reality, in so far as, in effect, it constituted a weaponry of esoterica. In the following I mean by cabala of enmity, first, distinctive features of his Leviathan myth, second, Jewish esoteric traditions he associated with that myth, and,

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[1] Some of the material in the present paper was first delivered in a lecture on 'Ahriman, Leviathan, and ZOG. The Jew as Planetary Antagonist in Archetype and Stereotype,' for the conference on 'Völkisch Religion, Neopaganism, and Anti-Semitism,' held at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, October 1996. I thank Guy Stroumsa for the invitation and the hospitality on that occasion. A subsequent version was prepared for the international conference on Kabbalah and Modernity, Amsterdam, 4–6 July 2007, co-organized by the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. It is my pleasure to thank Kocku von Stuckrad, Marco Pasi, and Boaz Huss for the invitation. Research was subvented by the Reed College Paid Leave Award, for which I extend my gratitude. Production of the final version of this paper would not have been possible without the help of Kathy Kennedy, Vahid Brown, and Michael Salk.

[2] *Soixante-dix s'efface II,* 286–287, my translation. Jünger went to school with Scholem's brother Werner and they corresponded about it. See Triendl & Zadoff, 'Ob mein Bruder Werner gemeint ist?'. Jünger also reported this correspondence to Schmitt. See the letter of October 4, 1976 in *Ernst Jünger/Carl Schmitt Briefe 1930–1983*, 422.

[3] In other works, *cabala* and not *Kabbalah.*

third, his application of it, explicitly and consistently, antagonistically and mystically, in an anti-Jewish politico-theosophical program.

As an historian of religions, I am concerned neither with Nazism nor with politics *per se*.[4] The present paper concerns the uses of esotericism in twentieth-century culture, and is not intended as ideological critique. Rather, I am interested in the uses of his political mythology, political theosophy, and political mysteries.

To understand this politics of myth, it is vital to know that Jünger concocted his cabala of enmity within the framework of a long and deep conversation with Carl Schmitt (1888–1985).[5] While we now have the admirable work of Raphael Gross on Schmitt and the Jews, we possess nothing remotely like it concerning Jünger.[6] The present paper assumes that a quasi-mystical belief in Jewish enmity was as central for Jünger as it was for Schmitt. Heinrich Meier, a semi-official interpreter of Schmitt, concisely summarizes the centrality of this belief for Schmitt. 'It is certainly no coincidence that Schmitt calls [the Jews] the central figure of thought [*Denkfigur*] and that, in his *Leviathan*, he "reveals" the cabalist "secret teaching" of the millennial banquet of the Leviathan…'[7] Both men provided memorably provocative aphorisms with which to focus interpretations of their cabala of enmity. Schmitt: 'I think, therefore I have an enemy; I have an enemy, therefore I am'.[8] And Jünger: 'The great goal of the political will is Leviathan'.[9]

2. Leviathan and the Cabala of Enmity in Jünger's Fiction

Jünger's eight novels, *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939), *Heliopolis* (1949), *Visit to Godenholm* (1952), *The Glass Bees* (1957), *The Slingshot* (1973),

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[4] In fact, I have similarly traced the trope of kabbalah in Adorno's corpus. See Hammer & von Stuckrad (eds.), *Polemical Encounters*, 55–81.

[5] The original version of this paper, as delivered in Amsterdam, concerned Jünger and Schmitt equally. Due to restrictions of length, the Schmitt materials must await publication on another occasion. Schmitt was the godfather (*Taufpate*) to Jünger's son Carl Alexander Jünger.

[6] For a thorough treatment of Schmitt's use of Leviathan in the context of his anti-Semitism, see Gross, *Carl Schmitt and the Jews*. I have also used the amplified German and French editions: Gross, *Carl Schmitt und die Juden*; Gross, *Carl Schmitt et les Juifs*. Of the many recent discussions on this subject, I find especially insightful Caldwell, 'Controversies over Carl Schmitt'.

[7] Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, 158.

[8] 'Ich denke, also habe ich Feinde; ich habe Feinde, also bin ich', in Schmitt, 'Die andere Hegel-Linie', 2.

[9] Jünger, *Eumeswil*, 378.

Eumeswil (1977), *Aladdin's Problem* (1983) and *A Dangerous Encounter* (1985) share themes of political anti-modernism, cultural elitism, chivalric militarism, and dreamy esotericism. In *Heliopolis*, *The Glass Bees*, and *Eumeswil*, Jünger both employs the Leviathan mytheme by name and illustrates the cabala of enmity in colorful detail. His final three novels deal with "the Jewish question", either directly or allusively, in sustained detail. Leaving aside *The Slingshot*, which is essentially a memoir of his youth, all the novels touch on our themes in one way or the other.

To be sure, not all voices in the novels express the author's opinions. On the other hand, the repetition and coherence of such themes are expressed in nearly identical idioms and styles in both his fiction and non-fiction. In the following I assume the truism that Jünger's own positions, in his non-fictional writings, are those documented by him himself in his first person singular voice; when analogous content in the fiction matches these positions, I take it as incontrovertible that they accordingly represent his own perspective.

2.1. *The 'Terrifyingly Threatening Enemy' in* On the Marble Cliffs

The transparently allegorical character of his novels has been recognized since the first of them, *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939). *On the Marble Cliffs* is famous for being an act of Jünger's putative "inner migration", his purported critique of the Third Reich. Such a reading, however, tends to obviate other levels of meaning in the novel, e.g. its implicit nationalistic German militarism and its scapegoating of racial enemies. Without naming Leviathan *per se*, *On the Marble Cliffs* otherwise unmistakably linked the trope of a terrifying enemy to the esoteric practices of Jews. In as much as this aspect of the novel has been largely ignored, and in so far as it bears importantly on his subsequent novel-writing career, I cite a key passage at some length. The narrator is describing certain 'lower rank' huntsman who dwell in

> hovels grey with age [where this] brood of darkness had its cavern homes. When this folk was on its wanderings a sect always remained behind in their nests and grottos [as] scattered remnants of the great robber bands from Poland and from the Lower Rhine […]. Here, too, the magicians and witch doctors who had escaped the scaffold had set up their wizard's kitchens; by the initiated, by Venetians and alchemists these unknown villages were reckoned among the sanctuaries of the black arts. In Fortunio's hands I had seen a manuscript from the pen of

> Rabbi Nilufer—the same who, driven from Smyrna, had on his wanderings been a guest among the woods. In his writings one saw world history mirrored as in muddy pools on the banks of which water-rats nest.[10] Here was to be found the key to many a murky intrigue […].

On April 21, 1938, Jünger mentions a certain 'rabbi Nilufer of Smyrna' in his contemporaneously composed travel diary, *Atlantic Voyage*.[11] Within a matter of months, he fictionalized this Rabbi Nilufer in *On the Marble Cliffs*. Rabbinic manuscripts, initiation, alchemy, black magic, wanderings of a Volk, wizard's kitchens—in this one passage from *On the Marble Cliffs* Jünger deployed the cabala of enmity, interspersed with imagery familiar from contemporaneous anti-Semitic propaganda, directed specifically against Jews from 'Poland and from the Lower Rhine'. Indeed, he bemoaned the poisonous derivation of western European Jews from this eastern 'strain of evil blood,' which appear clearly as stand-ins for *Ostjuden*.

> But from the woods came the dainty deceivers who appear with coach and lackeys and are to be found even at the courts of noble counts. Thus from the forest a strain of evil blood flowed into the veins of the world […]and from time to time [the Ranger] had a dozen or two strung up like scarecrows on the trees if they seemed to spawn too abundantly […].Wherever the structures raised by the ordered life of man began to crumble [they] sprang up like mushroom spawn.

The Ranger (*Oberförster*) is commonly read to be Adolf Hitler. On this reading, Jünger here advocates in 1939 a certain practical shift away from what had been the historically "normal" domesticating of outsiders.

> Formerly rabble of this sort had been dealt with like common petty thieves, and their growing strength pointed to deep changes in the ordered relations, the health and well-being of the people. Now battle had to be joined, and therefore men were needed to restore a new order, and new theologians as well, to whom the evil was manifest from its

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[10] In two propaganda films released the year after the publication of *On the Marble Cliffs*, *Jud Süß* and *Der Ewige Jude*, Jews are likened to rats. Such associations persisted in Jünger's imagination. *Eumeswil* evokes 'extremely importunate persecutorial types [who] thrive in our putrid lagoon', followed by a full paragraph devoted to 'purebred rats' which he characterizes by 'high intelligence', 'subtle' and 'dangerous' (*Eumeswil*, 30). The narrative then immediately leads to 'a cabaret by the wharves [where] there is a lampooner who recites poems farcically as if they were being yiddled by Rabbi Teiteles or squeezed out by someone sitting on a toilet…" *Eumeswil*, 32.

[11] 21 April 1938, in *Voyage Atlantique*, 15.

> outward phenomena down to its most subtle roots; then the time would come for the first stroke of the consecrated sword piercing the darkness like a lightning flash. (84)

Writing in February 1939, three months after the *Kristallnacht*, Jünger exalts in this historical moment, the moment of a climactically dramatic cleansing. In short, in the space of a few pages, *On the Marble Cliffs* recapitulates the invasion of Germany by dangerous eastern enemies, who bear with them mystical powers of the black arts, specifically including dark rabbinic esoterica. His cabala of enmity is then wrought to its crescendo with a 'sacred' call to arms, 'the first stroke of the consecrated sword piercing the darkness like a lightning flash.'

Within months, the 'lightning flash' of *Blitzkrieg* on the eastern front was underway. It bears reiterating that Jünger wrote these words as the most famous soldier in Germany, the most highly decorated veteran of World War I, and the author of several popular books glorifying war in the intervening years. *On the Marble Cliffs* in this historical context can be read, among other things, as a mobilization and militarization empowered by his cabala of enmity.

2.2. 'Behemoth and Leviathan Live': *Revealed Secrets in* Heliopolis

Heliopolis (1949) presents itself as an initiatory novel. Here Jünger followed up mysteries portrayed in two preceding books, relying on the same initiatory master in all three books.[12] In the same way as Rabbi Nilufer appears more or less simultaneously in Jünger's fiction and non-fiction, so did this fictional master represent a real person. Ernst Hugo Fischer (1897–1975), philosopher, intimate friend, and travel companion of Jünger, appears as the author's quasi-cabalistic spiritual guide not only in *Heliopolis*, but also in related incarnations in *Atlantic Voyage*, *On the Marble Cliffs, Adventurous Heart*, and *Visit to Godenholm*.[13] Bullock notes that while 'there is much to suggest a Kabbalistic quality in the learning he acquires from [the Fischer character], it is not specifically identified as Jewish'.[14]

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[12] Fischer is sometimes called Nigromontanus, for example, in *Das abenteuerliche Herz*, 1938.

[13] See Gajek, 'Magister-Nigromontan-Schwarzenberg', 479–500.

[14] Bullock, 'Heiner Müller's Error, Walter Jens's Horror, and Ernst Jünger's Antisemitism', 165.

The protagonist of Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, the paradigmatic novel of the ancient mysteries, is named Lucius, and so too is the protagonist of *Heliopolis*. The latter Lucius arrives at a place of mysteries 'over the entrance to which was hung the menacing inscription, "*Behemoth and Leviathan live*"' (37–38). Here Jünger introduces a major theme of "revealed secrets", consisting of Jews, serpent, and gold, which themes come to the fore in subsequent novels. He furthermore introduces Leviathan in the context of gold and 'Parsis', who more-or-less clearly represent Jews (36–37). Also appearing are mysteries of language, reminiscent of kabbalistic alphabetic mysticism. *Heliopolis* thus invokes the primordiality of the letters, 'on the first day of Creation, when Leviathan had not yet conquered' (218). Like letters of biblical Hebrew, and like some texts of Jewish alphabetic mysticism, *Heliopolis* describes a Law, starkly "carved" with neither vowels nor enjambment.

Heliopolis also dramatizes a nexus of *Jews, money, and Cabala*. The symposium portrayed at the center of the narration in *Heliopolis* is called Ortner's Tale (133–173). Like the fable of Eros and Psyche at the narrative center of *The Golden Ass*, Ortner's Tale provides a tale-within-a-tale lens on the novel as a whole. When the hero is drawn into the demonic orbit of the Faustian financier Katzenstein, he encounters '… the world of talismans, prophetic places and times, cabalistic systems' (135). This world is invisible but influences our thoughts (135). It is the incarnation of the principles of domination (138). With the insights gained, he returns to the world to enter 'the mysteries of the marketplace' 'ruled by princes of money' (152). These mysteries are epitomized in the figure of Katzenstein (155–159). After Katzenstein's suicide, the now wealthy protagonist exploits women 'like Shylock' (160).

Tantalizingly, *Heliopolis* also includes a character named Sievers. Jünger enjoyed a long-term friendship with Friedrich Hielscher (1902–1990), co-founder of the *SS-Ahnenerbe*—Jünger's published correspondence with Hielscher runs for 48 years and 556 pages.[15] Hielscher is said to have 'mentored' the Executive Secretary of the *SS-Ahnenerbe,*

[15] See Jünger & Hielscher, *Ernst Jünger / Friedrich Hielscher, Briefe 1927–1985*. For full documentation on Sievers, see The Harvard Law School Library Nuremberg Trials project, online at http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/php/search.php?DI=1&FieldFlag=1&PAuthors=102 (accessed 19 November 2008).

SS-Standartenführer Wolfram Sievers.[16] Sievers was perhaps responsible for a widely-circulated claim that Hitler said 'Nothing's to happen to Jünger' ('Dem Jünger geschieht nichts').[17] The notorious but influential popular work of Pauwels and Bergier, *Morning of the Magicians*, claimed that Hielscher was Sievers' occult mentor and even that he performed blessings on Sievers before he went to the gallows.[18] Sievers was hung for war crimes on 2 June 1948 and Jünger published *Heliopolis* in 1949, in an interesting recapitulation of the temporal relation between Kristallnacht and *On the Marble Cliffs* cited above. While the nebulous accounts in *Morning of the Magicians* inflate Hielscher's "spiritual leadership", it is certain that Hielscher directed a kind of cult that influenced his longtime friend, Jünger. It is equally certain that Jünger in turn invented a character "Sievers" precisely while Hielscher's *Ahnenerbe* colleague by that name was being publicly tried and executed before the eyes of a defeated Germany. In short, the choice of this particular name in *Heliopolis* could not have been coincidental.

A quarter-century after he wrote *Heliopolis*, Jünger re-affirmed its message with self-consciousness and pride. The Jünger-approved Henri Plard translation of *Heliopolis* thus was published with a note facing the title page: 'This allegory collects all the themes of Jünger's mature work; it is the summa of the Grand Old Man of German letters, published on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, in the definitive form he personally chose for it'.[19]

2.3. *Esoterica in* Besuch auf Godenholm *and* The Glass Bees

Besuch auf Godenholm (1952), among other things, reiterates near verbatim transcriptions of the author's LSD trips with psychedelic pioneer Albert Hofmann, discoverer of the magic potion. Here again the Leviathan motif appears in the context of 'menace', 'a secret life' and 'danger'.[20] And, here again, as was the case in *On the Marble Cliffs* and

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[16] Pauwels & Bergier, *Morning of the Magicians*, 293–298.

[17] Cited in Nevin, *Ernst Jünger into the Abyss*, 109.

[18] Pauwels & Bergier, *Morning of the Magicians*, 293–298.

[19] 'Ce récit allégorique contient tous les thèmes de de l'oeuvre de Jünger en sa maturité; c'est la somme narrative du 'grand viellard' des letters allemandes, publiée à la occasion de ses quatre-vingts ans, dans la form définitive qu'il a choise pour son texte.'

[20] "On sentait une menace présente en germe. La coque de l'oeuf était sans couleur; de legers ramous décelaient une vie secrete. Peut-être le jaune de l'oeuf du phénex

Heliopolis, Jünger conflated his contemporaneous life experiences into fictions of the same moment.

The Glass Bees (1957), considered to be a major German novel of the Cold War period, was reprinted in 2000 as a 'New York Review Book'. Its antagonist is a technological entrepreneur, Zapparoni, 'present as an invisible master' (132), 'very close to the invisible axle' (84)—'an initiate' (95), 'like Caliban, Shylock, and the Hunchback of Notre Dame' (136). In his library are 'early technical treatises, books on the cabala, Rosicrucianism, and alchemy' (55.) Observing that the long future may be adumbrated in tiny things, Zapparoni observes that 'there are as many organs in a fly as in a leviathan' (132). The insectoid metaphor here, in a book on bees written by a famed entomologist, underscores the role that these little mechanical Leviathans play as a governing image. Like the warning sign 'Behemoth and Leviathan Live' in *Heliopolis*, *The Glass Bees* highlights this central message with the repeated, portentous mantra at the heart of the novel, '*Beware of the bees!*' This great danger is identified, moreover, with '*the revealed secret*' (142–143).[21] In short, terrifying artificial bees are assimilated with Leviathan, which in turn is described as a 'secret' and 'mystery' employed by a man, Zapparoni, who knows his 'cabala'.

2.4. *Aphorisms of the Cabala of Enmity in* Eumeswil

In 1977, at the age of 82, Ernst Jünger published *Eumeswil*. Not long after its publication, historian Lutz Niethammer called it 'the most developed "posthistorical" novel that can be read today'.[22] I read *Eumeswil* as a philosophical exposition of sorts, as indeed reviewers like Niethammer and Jünger himself have read it. Most importantly for present purposes, in *Eumeswil* Jünger brought his mythmaking to bear explicitly on Leviathan and the cabala of enmity. The novel, in fact, is replete with aphoristic expressions of the cabala of enmity: 'The study of [the Templars], combined with a study of the Old Man of the Mountain, is a gold mine. Alamut *and* Famagusta, Baphomet *and* Leviathan' (251). 'The theft of fire: first by Prometheus for the hearth,

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sommeillait-il sous cette envelope, ou l'embryon de Léviathan." En tout cas, il était dangereux de l'égratigner." *Visite à Godenholm*, 21.

[21] This 'revealed secret' recurs in *Eumeswil*, see below. Other relevant passages in *The Glass Bees* include Leviathan, 132, Cabala, 55, 'revealed secret', 143, initiate, 85, 95, 98 ('I had seen his library'), and 189.

[22] See Niethammer, *Posthistoire*, 26.

then by the Uranians for Leviathan' (344). These portentous maxims culminate in a Schmittian 'Cabala':

> According to a Cabalist exegesis, Leviathan dwells in towering citadels that are remote from one another, perhaps on cliffs; the Jews are scattered among them as strangers. From those heights Leviathan battles behemoth. Behemoth defends himself with his horns; Leviathan tries to suffocate him by stuffing his fins into Behemoth's nostrils—'which, incidentally, is lovely example of defeating a land by means of a blockade.' *The simile comes from don Capisco*… (360–361).[23]

'Don Capisco' was Carl Schmitt's *Spitzname* (nickname), and this 'exegesis' was drawn almost directly from the notorious sections of *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes* that Schmitt explicitly assigned to 'Cabalists'.

> Like any fundamental corpus of work, the Cabala contains prophetic nuggets. This struck me in that depiction of Leviathan, which is also one of the Titanic symbols of the catacombs. […] [these subterranean catacombs can be] insulated like termitaria.'[24] 'These strongholds—and this recalls both Fourier and the Cabala—rule the intermediary spheres' (361).[25]

The nasty antagonist of the novel is called The Condor. 'Granted, the Condor lived off leviathan. But this leviathan was a corpse. No longer a gigantic toy for the world spirit to have fun with, it was already a cadaver, washed up by the tides' (183). Finally, six pages before the novel's end, resoundingly, we hear the summary pronouncement: '*The great goal of the political will is Leviathan*' (378, 384). This explicit political spin on the Leviathan mytheme corroborates an earlier use in *Eumeswil*, where Leviathan is modeled on the Vendéans (253–254, 306–307). The Vendéan rebellion is 'the classical situation for the forest flight, the kind achieved some two centuries later against Leviathan [*sic*]' (253).[26]

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[23] Emphasis added. Schmitt referred to himself as Don Capisco. See Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 181.

[24] Here again Jünger borrows from Schmitt, who early in their correspondence referred to *the termite state*, later to become a key mythic image for Jünger.

[25] Compare the interview with de Towarnicki, *Ernst Jünger,* 60, on Bosch and the vision of a society of insects.

[26] In other words, Leviathan is the real genocidal enemy. In the so-called Vendéan genocide, 'At least 117,257 people disappeared between 1792 and 1802', and up to 14% were exterminated, according to Secher, *A French Genocide: the Vendée*, cited at See http://www.fsmitha.com/review/r-secher.htm (accessed 25 November 2008). In two

The 'revealed secrets' identified with Leviathan are explicated at some length in *Eumeswil*.

> In one of our nocturnal conversations, Bruno said that there were three "revealed secrets": the Serpent, the Jews, and gold. 'In each of them salvation and disaster still cling together, which spells doom for reason' (194).[27] 'It could turn out very nicely. The Jews, gold, and the serpent—these are revealed mysteries' (356). 'A magical bond exists between gold and art' (190). 'Gold is available beyond demand; that is the chief reason why it must be hoarded; its invisible might lies in its hoarding' (191). '*Serpent*—a hissssing of the passing second. In *gold,* the unslaked craving, in *sold*, the slaked craving emphasizes the shiny yellow vowel' (202).

The anti-trinity of the three 'revealed secrets' in *Eumeswil* exemplifies Jünger's cabala of enmity. In a parallel nexus developed in the novels since 1939, such "mysteries" recur in his non-fiction, from as early as 1929. Such a Jewish mystery, for example, is portrayed in a nexus of symbol/economy/Jew in the 1929 edition of *Das abenteuerliche Herz*.[28] In his journal for 23 July 1942, the wartime writer meditates on King Ahasver's golden scepter. 'Out of this fabulous and terrible empire, only the Jews have survived to this day—it's the serpent of antiquity, who turned to bronze.[29] Thus, I witnessed this myself very clearly—in the form of a Polish Jew, for example, whom I noticed at the Silesian Station in Berlin'.[30] Similarly, in a journal entry dated 17 April 1945, Jünger asserted ancient Jewish women used physical and spiritual charms with potentates, 'certainly like interventions in our quarrels today, though in a more secret manner. As gold is among the metals, so they are in the reign of the senses'.[31] This 'revealed secret' of Jews/

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fairly lengthy excurses on the Vendéan 'genocide' *Eumeswil* exploits this episode as an historical precedent. On the one hand, Jünger 'sided' with the Vendéans, Catholic peasants whose rebellion was crushed by republican forces in 1792. On the other hand, his sympathies lie with the aristocrats. What is consistent in these two seemingly antagonistic sympathies is that both parties were enemies of the Revolution, identified with 'The State', which the novelist in turn associated with Leviathan.

[27] Bruno here would seem to be styled on Bruno Bauer (1809–1882), the subject of repeated correspondence between Jünger and Schmitt.

[28] For example in reference to "die gefährlichen Bankiers und mystischen Wucherer Balzacs: deutsche Juden'; reprinted in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 9, 134. As cited in Bullock, "Heiner Müller's Error", 157.

[29] An allusion to the Bronze Serpent in Numbers 21:5–9.

[30] Jünger, *Strahlungen*, 111. Interestingly, anxiety when entering the Silesian station recurs in *Heliopolis* (162), directly following a disquisition on the 'enemy'.

[31] 17 April 1945, in *La cabane de la vigne*, 18.

gold/serpent is found again in his entry of 23 May 1945, that is, less than two weeks after V-E Day. 'Re-read *Salut par les Juifs* of Léon Bloy. What would Hamann have said of this author? His treatise penetrates into the secret chambers of great mysteries and leads to sources of sacerdotal power, on the one hand, and magical power on the other, in confronting Jews and gold'. Bloy, he continues, is like a technician of terrible forces.[32] Jünger expands on the theme on 'the mystery of the bronze serpent, terrestrial immortality' on 17 April 1945.[33]

2.5. *Jünger's* Problem *in* Aladins Problem

It is crucial to understanding Jünger's sustained preoccupation with the world-historical mystery of The Jew to remember that this fascination was one of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. On 27 August 1943, he likens the morbid German relationship to Jews as that of an Oedipal complex.[34] Over forty years later, in an interview, he reverted to his relationship with his own father in terms of the Oedipus complex.[35] It is not my intention to undertake a retrospective psychoanalysis of a man who wrote almost daily for close to eighty years. In advanced old age, however, Jünger himself began *Aladins Problem* (1983), his next-to-last novel, with a psychoanalytic touch.

> It is time I focused on my problem. Who does not have a problem?—everybody has one, and indeed several. Each problem has its rank; the main problem moves to the center of one's life, displacing the other problems. It incessantly haunts us like a shadow, casting gloom on our minds. It is present even when we awaken at night; it pounces on us like an animal. (9)

And what was this internal conflict, his 'problem'? The problem of identifying the problem recurs throughout the novel.

> 'My problem is not my profession' (43). 'When my problem started afflicting me, I went to see her and also spent the night' (98). 'However,

[32] Schmitt wrote to Jünger when he, Schmitt, finished reading *Salut*, on 4 August 1943. See Jünger & Schmitt, *Ernst Jünger/Carl Schmitt Briefe,* 163–164. '[*Salut*] becomes ever greater and truer. How one was able to forget the simple fact that the truth is not accessible in every situation!' ('Das wird immer größer und wahrer. Wie konnte man die einfache Tatsache vergessen, daß die Wahrheit nicht jeder Situation zugänglich ist!') (164).

[33] Jünger, *La cabane de la vigne,* 18.

[34] Jünger, *Strahlungen*, 302.

[35] Julien, *Details of Time*, 33.

> madness is only part of my problem' (114). I am still with my problem—say, the *decisions* demanded of us by the power that streams toward us [...]. A description that designates itself as a *problem* can offer no *solution* [...]. Today, *solutions* are really white lies, for they do not belong within the framework of our times: *perfection* is not their task. The approach can only be gradual. *Aladdin's problem was power*. (123–124 emphasis added)

It makes some sense then, that war 'automatically solves many problems' (25). This "solution" recalls the preceding novel, *Eumeswil*, where our author explains, 'yes, [war] is where the problem begins' (309). *Eumeswil* specifies the origins of this 'problem'. 'A problem surfaces; it is thrashed out and illustrated by a historical reference. Flavius Josephus; a synagogue on the upper Rhine during the Crusades; the Prague Cemetery; Dreyfus, his epaulets torn off, his saber broken' (357).

In a rather uncanny return of the repressed, Jünger let go, as it were, in advanced old age. In *Eumeswil* of 1977 and again in *Aladins Problem* of 1983, he addressed the problem he had never solved: the existence of the Jews. Other writings from his later years only confirm the sense of this abiding if not deepening preoccupation. To sum up: Jünger addressed his own deep-seated Jewish problem, his *Judenfrage*, as it were, in the "cabalistic" symbology of Leviathan. This self-confessed 'problem,' would seem to be the contemporaneous 'problem' mentioned in his 1977 letter to Scholem cited at the opening of the present essay.

One can interpret *Aladdin's Problem* as being peculiarly preoccupied with Jews without suggesting that either Jünger's or Aladdin's problem is singularly reducible to the National Socialist *Judenfrage*. That being said, it is also true that Jünger's preoccupation with a Jewish problem not merely manifested itself in negative images of Jews in *Aladdin's Problem* but indeed in negative images of Jews fatefully familiar from anti-Semitic discourses, such as the rats in *On the Marble Cliffs* and *Eumeswil*.

Aladdin's Problem marks the literary moment when the elderly Jünger's thanatosophical association of Jews and death resurfaced yet again, now re-appearing as almost an obsession. The plot of *Aladdin's Problem,* such as it is, concerns the creation of a planetary necropolis. When the protagonist Baroh introduces himself as a member of a decayed nobility, he observes that one 'can go on like that for a century, living off your inheritance, and then you have to admit more or less bluntly: "The Jew won't pay a penny for what you used to have"' (17). As his professional life developed, he

> had often to deal with cemeteries and crematoriums [...] I had relatively little trouble with a Jewish graveyard that was being plowed under [...] I particularly liked this place because of the old, mysterious headstones. Inscriptions that we cannot read inspire a deeper level of thinking—there was a touch of Zion and Babylon to it. (62)

Baroh meets a Jewish character, Sigi Jersson.

> [Baroh and Jersson] had met in a Jewish cemetery that been opened only recently. The headstones gave me pause to think: each was shaped like an open book with one or two names inscribed in it; underneath stood a list of the missing—not people who had fallen in battle, but people who had been deported and murdered. (84)

Baroh describes the Jersson family as having a 'natural relationship to money' (85). The family narrative reads like a compressed stereotypical history of the Jews of Germany, possessing self-irony (86), helping 'boot out the Kaiser' (86), running a major newspaper (87), being liberal, revolutionary, then moving to the right (87). When Sigi makes the joke that they 'should rig up the moon as a mausoleum', he adds that 'it's also good business' (89). That all this is connected with Jewish mysticism becomes clear when the narrator comments dryly that 'He must have had a Chasidic rebbe among his ancestors' (89).

Aladdin's Problem alludes—almost directly—to the Leviathan myth. Jersson becomes rich in the petroleum trade, in which 'oil magnates have taken on the role of kings—their nets encompass lands and seas' (90). Here the author marks the geopolitical theme of lands and seas, familiar from Schmitt's lucabrations on the theme. As a banker and 'genius in financial matters', his range extends to 'a worldwide clientele' and the 'very rich'. The narrator associates this financial world with magic (95) and with 'the blending of religion and economics' (96)—in other words, again, the 'revealed secrets' of Jews and gold. We catch a glimpse of the sinking monster, Leviathan. The attentive reader might recall Jünger's repeated sentiment that his own world he 'is comparable to the passenger in a rapidly moving vehicle whose name may be "Titanic," but also "Leviathan"'.[36]

[36] Jünger, 'The Retreat into the Forest', 129.

2.7. *Cabala of Enmity in* A Dangerous Encounter

Jean-Luc Evard considers *Heliopolis* and *Aladdin's Problem* each to be an 'allegory of the Jewish condition' ('allégorie de la condition juive').[37] To these "allegories of the Jewish condition" I add *Dangerous Encounter*, Jünger's final novel. Published in conjunction with his ninetieth birthday, Jünger was interviewed by Julien Hervier just as he was completing *A Dangerous Encounter.* The author specifies that the Dreyfus Affair provides its social 'frame of reference'.[38] 'I introduce characters like Sandheer and Schwartzkoppen, who played an important role in the Dreyfus Affair. That was an era I consider highly fruitful, in regard both to the decadence and the maturing of very different forces'.[39] Like *Aladdin's Problem*, *A Dangerous Encounter* deals at great length and considerable detail on "the cabala of enmity", the "encounter" with which poses a "problem."

Part Two of *A Dangerous Encounter* contains a concentrated but highly detailed profile of one Inspector Dobrowsky, a Polish Jew. This portrait succeeds analogous personifications of the cabala of enmity in previous novels—Katzenstein in *Heliopolis*, Zapparoni in *The Glass Bees*, The Condor in *Eumeswil*, and Jersson in *Aladdin's Problem*. Dobrowsky personifies the cabala of enmity in a portrait of some forty pages. The Jew Dombrowsky is identified with mysteries and enmity.

> 'I have to initiate you into our mysteries, dear friend' (102); '"At Stephanie's" was a codeword among initiates' (119); 'known to initiates as the classic place for such encounters' (168); 'the initiates who had a key to the service entrance' (183); 'the Mystery the Vestals preside over is tremendous' (184).
>
> 'Dobrowsky's office resembled a command post during battle' (124); 'One had—almost like when the Prussians came—a common enemy' (124).

A Dangerous Encounter reads like the boiled-down essence of the previous novels. The very title, which in this sense parallels that of *Aladdin's Problem*, is itself the quintessence of his cabala of enmity. That is, the 'encounter' between Jews and Germans was 'dangerous' in a cosmic and totalizing sense.

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[37] Evard, *Ernst Jünger, Authorité et domination*, 213.
[38] Hervier, *Details of Time*, 10.
[39] Ibid., 108.

3. Leviathan in Jünger's Non-Fiction

In addition to the foregoing novels, Jünger published variegated non-fiction, including some 900 pages of political writings published between 1919 and 1933.[40] Jünger's letters, which are now being published by the hundreds, include numerous deployments of his Leviathan.[41] In the course of a correspondence on birds and snakes as symbols, Jünger queried Schmitt about Leviathan on November 8 1940.[42] Writing to Schmitt on August 28 1941, Jünger again invoked Leviathan from his reading of *Moby Dick*, that "the interest of the economic world in these sovereign animals is that of a coverup."[43] And in April 2 1942, Jünger again returned to "Leviathan or any monster."[44] Shortly after war's end, on 7 January 1946 he worries about the power of the solitary individual "to seize the head of the Leviathan".[45]

In addition to his newspaper articles and correspondence, the cabala of enmity also appears in Jünger's journals. For example on 20 April 1943, he alludes to things that cannot be spoken because 'we still live in the egg of the Leviathan'.[46] At war's end, 10 April 1945, reflecting on the image of antennae on tanks, he evokes a kind of magical fishing, 'perhaps fishing for Leviathan'.[47] Shortly after the war, he returns to this piscine imagery. In what follows, I concentrate only on his sustained, essayistic non-fiction, referring only when necessary to the

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[40] See http://www.juenger.org/bibliography_political_journalism.php (accessed 25 November 2008). This is a tiny percentage of his corpus, the most complete bibliography of which is Mühleisen, *Bibliographie der Werke Ernst Jüngers*. For his attitude towards Jews and Judaism in this period, see Evard, 'Ernst Jünger et les juifs', Evard, *Ernst Jünger, Authorité et domination,* and Vanoosthuyse, *Fascisme et littérature pure.*

[41] These include separate volumes collecting his correspondence with Carl Schmitt, Gottfried Benn, Martin Heidegger.

[42] "Sollten die Juden ihn neben Leviathan und Behemot, die Land und Meer beherrschen, als Gebieter der Lüfte vorausgeahnt haben?" *Ernst Jünger/Carl Schmitt Briefe*, 107.

[43] "Ich bin immer noch beim *Moby Dick*, der wirklich kosmische Züge besitzt. Mir kommit dabei oft der Strophe 'und der Leviathan spielet' in der Sinn, die Glaube ich von Klopstock ist. Das Interesse der ökonomischen Welt an diesen herrlichen Tieren ist das einer Abdeckerei." *Ernst Jünger/Carl Schmitt Briefe,* 127.

[44] "den Leviathan oder irgendein Monstrum." *Ernst Jünger/Carl Schmitt Briefe,* 147.

[45] *Ernst Jünger/Carl Schmitt Briefe,* 147. The image is repeated in his interview with de Towarnicki in October 1981, *Ernst Jünger. Récits d'un passeur de siècle,* 149.

[46] *Second Journal Parisien*, 48.

[47] *Second Journal Parisien*, 426.

several thousand pages of his political writings, correspondence and journals.[48]

3.1. *'A Fin of the Leviathan' in* Der Arbeiter

Perhaps the most influential of Jünger's non-fiction was his 1932 *Der Arbeiter*. In the brief 'Vorwort' to *Der Arbeiter*, signed on the blatantly revolutionary date of 14 July 1932, Jünger disingenuously worried that this treatise 'succeeded in rendering only a fin of the Leviathan'.[49] While this is his only use of the name Leviathan in *Der Arbeiter*, the book five times invokes its synonym, Ahasver (94, 100, 101, 131, 273). *Der Arbeiter* attacks the cabala of enmity with and without names he would repeat through subsequent decades. Leviathan and Ahasver were pseudonyms for an un-named planetary enemy forebodingly characterized as invisible, market-driven, secretive, a global threat as the 'adversary' (*Gegner*), satanic, diabolic, even Antichrist. *Der Arbeiter* postures as an intervention, explicitly, of a conservative revolution against the forces of this enemy.

It is worth recalling that *Der Arbeiter* is a call to arms by the best-known man of arms in Germany. This provocation, published just months before the death of the Weimar Republic, roused and justified re-mobilization, if only in symbolic terms. As Eva Horn accurately observes, Jünger worked with an "ever-acute sense for the topical."[50] Topical relevance accentuated the timelessness of the enemy—at any time, the Jew was a mystically eternal threat. *Der Arbeiter* said as much, just as Schmitt's *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* would do, with explicit credit to Jünger, a half dozen years later. For both writers, the enemy was an inhuman monster. Accordingly, there was to be no negotiation, no compromise, no debate.[51] The time for decisive action was at hand.

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[48] The correspondence is vast and emerging rapidly in recent years. These include separate volumes gathering his correspondence with Carl Schmitt, Gottfried Benn, Martin Heidegger, Stefan Andres, Gerhard Nebel, Alfred Kubin, Rudolf Schlichter and Friedrich Hielscher. Details are available on the Klett Cotta website. These volumes come to nearly 4000 pages. There are almost certainly more to come, considering that there are roughly 50,000 letters in the Jünger collection at the DLA.

[49] He returns to the "fins" in an journal entry of October 10, 1939, in *Jardins*, 64.

[50] Horn, 'Waldgänger, Traitor, Partisan', 131.

[51] *Der Arbeiter* is signed with the revolutionary date of 14 July 1932. Less than a year later, in April 1933, Gottfried Benn (Jünger's correspondent from 1949 to 1956) thundered on the radio, 'Don't waste your time with arguments and words, be lack-

Der Arbeiter identifies its enemy as invisible and secretive.[52] While it labels only one enemy as such, Leviathan and Ahasver seem to be two names for the same thing, that is, for 'the liberal Jews'. Ahasver is named five times, and 'liberal Jews' only once, in a volume of precisely 300 closely printed pages. However, the chapter in which 'liberal Jews' are specified (254) repeatedly invokes 'the adversary'. The careful reader would make the connection, given the internal consistency and the cumulative snowballing that distinguish Jünger's narration.

3.2. *The Leviathan in Jünger's Later Non-Fiction*

Atlantic Voyage (*Atlantische Fahrt*), published in 1949, recorded journeys taken in the thirties. Following the lead of his friend and travel companion Hugo Fischer, *Atlantic Voyage* conjures the 'Dragon-State', described in terms of economy, in the present, technicized 'titanic age' (182–183). On 7 May 1936, Jünger makes it clear that the dragon symbolizes both the technical age *and* Leviathan.

> The dragon is a symbol of the earth's energy and serves as guardian of its treasures, rather like the element of fire and of inspired wisdom. It is connected to the primitive forces of paganism, and *becomes invisible* with the progress of civilization. The word here is understood in terms of *intellectual formation,* in the European and not in the Chinese sense, because the dragon, below, *accompanies culture in life* and is refined along with it. (35, emphasis added)

The snake, he furthermore claims, is the most perfect animal, and 'the high physical perfection of the snake corresponds to Lucifer's perfection in the immaterial sphere' (130).[53] In *Der Arbeiter*, Jünger had described 'Perfektion' as a lower state of evolution (169). Such a critique of "perfection" was to be elaborated by his brother Friedrich in *The Failure of Technology: Perfection without Purpose* (*Die Perfektion der Technik*, 1946).

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ing in reconciliation, shut the gates, build the state.' Cited in Habermas, *The New Conservatism*, 84–85.

[52] 'Entire libraries could be collected in which man's complaint resounds in a thousandfold variations that he *sees himself attacked from unseen regions* and sees himself robbed of his meaning and his ability in every respect. This is *the great, the only theme of the literature of destruction of our days*', cited in Vondung, *The Apocalypse in Germany*, 315, emphasis added.

[53] For imagery of serpents Jünger assimilated to Leviathan, see Rohkrämer, 'Die Verzauberung der Schlange'.

Heidegger's 1949 'The Pathway', with its theme of flight from the technical age and withdrawal to the forest, was followed by Jünger's 1951 similarly themed *Der Waldgang*.[54] In *Der Waldgang*, written at the outset of the Cold War, the author is explicit that Leviathan is the agent of mass death: 'The individual no longer stands in society as a tree in the forest, but resembles a passenger in a fast-moving vessel whose name might be the *Titanic* or also Leviathan'.[55] *Der Waldgang*, with its theme of liquidations and annihilation, located Leviathan center stage, even while it relativized other genocides. 'The selection of the persecuted groups is question of secondary importance. There will always be minorities'.[56] While he denied the *distinctiveness* of the destruction of European Jewry, Jünger never denied that it happened as such. The *Waldgänger* are portrayed as those in danger from the world-enemy Leviathan, those 'confronted with ultimate annihilation'.[57] In *Waldgang*, he says: 'As collective powers gain ground, the individual becomes separated from the old, established associations and stands alone. He now becomes the opponent of Leviathan, even its conqueror, its master'.[58]

In 'Über die Linie' (1950), Jünger characterized Leviathan as a kind of anti-life: 'Whenever two beings love one another, they deprive Leviathan of a part of his terrain'.[59] 'Über die Linie', which occasioned a major response by Heidegger, further invokes 'a space in which man can return in hopes of waging combat, and perhaps triumphing […] [in] those gardens to which Leviathan has no access'.[60] In a 1981 interview Jünger alluded to these works of his early Cold War period, with another Leviathan allusion. He recalled writing 'Über die Linie' at a time when 'I was too optimistic. After the defeat [of Nazi Germany] I was saying in effect: "The serpent's head has already broken through the line of nihilism. It has gotten out, and the whole body will soon follow, and which shall soon enter a better spiritual climate, etc."'[61]

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[54] Jünger also responds directly to *Holzwege*. See Jünger, *Passage de la ligne*, 100.

[55] See Niethammer, *Posthistoire*, 73.

[56] 'The Retreat into the Forest', 130.

[57] Ibid., 132.

[58] Translation at http://www.quantara.de/webcom/show_download.php/_c-496/i.html?PHPSESSID=133099 (accessed 1 December 2008).

[59] See Hervier, *Details of Time*, 42. The first publication was Jünger, "Über die Linie." On Leviathan, see especially pp. 275–284.

[60] Jünger, *Passage de la ligne*, 92. For some discussion, see for example, Figal, 'Der metaphysische Charakter der Moderne'.

[61] See Sheehan, 'Nihilism'.

An die Zeitmauer (1959) includes two mentions of Leviathan, both of which appear at narratively loaded moments. The first comes at the very end of the first major unit, 'Birds of Passage', much as Leviathan comes just once in *Der Arbeiter*, but again with a similarly highlighted salience, as in the second mention (in section 164). And as in previous works, *An die Zeitmauer* (section 86) "reveals" Dreyfus and the Titanic to be keys to the secret of the age.

Twice in *Annäherungen: Drogen und Rausch*, a 1970 collection of his treatises on drugs and ecstasy, Leviathan's stomach is adduced. 'It swarms with revolutionaries who themselves can't do without a car and who nest themselves as parasites, like lice on whales, against the stomach of Leviathan, on which they depend, for better or worse'.[62] The second occurrence is with reference to Gottfried Benn, and being on the Titanic: 'Material security is delicate [...]. Matter that the Leviathan can't digest, it vomits up'.[63] These are two explicit examples, though *Annäherungen: Drogen und Rausch* includes numerous invocations of a dragon or a serpent, consistent with the mosaic piecing-together of his larger Leviathan mytheme. Thus, at his most obvious, the State is 'the dragon with the thousand scales'.[64]

Leviathan also appears in Jünger's occasional, selected ruminations. In the collection *Autor und Autorschaft,* Leviathan again is Jünger's prime enemy, in a world in which, 'under Leviathan's empire' death lurks like herrings in a net.[65] 'Rund um den Sinai', composed on 27 August 1973, was published first in 1975, then again in his collected works, in 1979. Perhaps most strikingly, its first half includes a kind of synthesis of his myth of the snake, drawing the connections between the snake in the Garden of Eden, the bronze serpent in Numbers, the demiurge snake of the Gnostics, and the ophidian powers of modern technology. With familiar notes of *Mysterienkulten*, magic, myth, and the like, 'Rund um den Sinai', synthesizes what might be called a *Mysterium Judaicum*. This Mystery recurs across the world ages, for the Jew transcended time and space. 'The Jew is eternal', as Jünger wrote verbatim in his journal entry for 23 December 1944.[66] Accordingly,

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[62] See Jünger, *Approches/Drogues et Ivresse*, 372.

[63] 'La sécurité materielle est mince, tandis que croit la presence d'esprit. Matiere que le Leviahan ne peut digerer; il la vomit' (ibid., 382).

[64] Ibid., 20. He uses much the same image, of a scaled dragon, in *Passage de la Ligne*, 85.

[65] Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, 185.

[66] Jünger, *Journal III*, 370.

in his 1968 journal re-published by him in 1980, he astrologically located Leviathan as a perennial secret teaching recurring throughout the '*Weltalter*'.

> Do cosmic powers become symbolic victims at the end of epochs? The Bull dies in the Golden Calf, the Ram in the Lamb. And how does the Fish perish? Perhaps in the Leviathan [...]. [Such symbolic victimage] is no longer effective after Golgotha. But it is felt perennially in plays, myths, secret teachings.[67]

4. The Homogeneity and Legacy of the Leviathan in Jünger's Corpus

Jünger's corpus is vast, multi-generic and under-studied. From what I have been able to study of it, there is a notable and instructive consistency between his different genres. Jünger deployed paragraphs between journal, letter, essay, and fiction more or less without differences accountable to genre. The novels can read like anthologies, which in turn can appear indistinguishable from the journals. Therefore, it seems virtually beyond question, given the consistency of these statements with those found in his essays, journals, and letters, that these novelized ideas express Jünger's own positions.[68] This homogeneity of his literary corpus makes it both harder and easier on the researcher. To be sure, scholarship on Jünger must not simply lift passages wholesale from novels and assume them to be Jünger's personal convictions. That being said, based on my limited familiarity with the totality of his work, I have suggested that Jünger employed a Leviathan mytheme consistently across genres, fiction and nonfiction, for many decades.

The Leviathan mytheme is explicitly employed and the cabala of enmity implicitly suggested in all provinces of Ernst Jünger's work, that is (a) In six novels (of a total of eight) published between 1939 and 1983; (b) in the major theosophico-political statements from *Der Arbeiter* in 1932 virtually to his last writings; (c) in the miscellaneous

[67] 'Findet im Ende der Epochen ein symbolisches Opfer ihrer kosmischen Herren statt? Der Stier stirbt im Goldenen Kalb, der Widder in Lamm. Und wie gehen die Fische zugrunde? Vielleicht im Leviathan [...]. Die Macht des Stieropfers konnte sich nach Golgatha nicht mehr auswirken. Gefühlt wurde sie immer—in Spielen, Mythen, Geheimlehren', Jünger, 'Aus der Villa Massimo IV', 201.

[68] They are found in other novels, too, most eminently in *Aladdin's Problem*.

occasional writings on a range of subjects; (d) in his published letters;[69] (e) in his published journals. The thousands of pages of published journals alone are a rich source to be studied systematically.

5. Conclusions

In an interview coordinated with his ninetieth birthday in 1985, Jünger's association of Jews, mysticism, and danger returns in the form of a reminiscence, which is sufficiently revealing to warrant citation at length. Jünger had recently attended the funeral of General Hans Speidel (1897–1984), when he found a book.

> On my table, I found in a book entitled *Hassidic Tales*, edited, I believe, by Martin Buber. Anyway, I read several anecdotes, one of which I greatly liked, the one about Rabbi Zousya. He said to his audience or to his pupils: 'When I go to heaven, I won't be asked whether I live like Moses, I'll be asked if I lived like Rabbi Zousya.'.... *That's* very dangerous, of course, for Rabbi Zousya thought that he, Rabbi Zousya, had lived according to the law. But what is the law for someone who is born a pickpocket? Nietzsche has an answer for that, naturally, but Rabbi Zousya lived a long time before Nietzsche. After Nietzsche, the matter looks very different, and it becomes *very perilous*, but that's all I wish to say about that.[70]

The Dreyfus affair was his favored denomination of this age 'after Nietzsche'. 'L'affaire' was perhaps the most thematically consistent emblem of the threat posed by the modern Jew, re-appearing throughout the full range of Ernst Jünger's public expression. In a journal entry for 17 April 1943, the warrior-writer confided that 'the Dreyfus affair was a fragment of a secret history'.[71] The novelist came closer to that history in 1959's *An die Zeitmauer*, where he said that only the Dreyfus affair had the same specific density of the Titanic disaster.[72] At the *Tischrede* (after-dinner address) on the occasion of his hundredth birthday, Jünger recalled his birth date in 1895, recalling that historical moment when the Dreyfus affair was aflame.[73] Insofar as he conflated

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[69] See *Ernst Jünger Carl Schmitt Briefe 1930–1983*, 234. Here Jünger invokes Leviathan and then in the following paragraph 'koscher'.

[70] *Details of Time*, 38 (emphasis added).

[71] *Second journal parisien*, 43.

[72] *Le mur du temps*, 84.

[73] Cited at http://gd.tuwien.ac.at/soc/ctheory/articles/Ethics,_Automation,_and_the_Ear_by_Gray_Kochhar-Lindgren_.html#note1 [accessed on 24 December 2008].

his personal history with universal history, and insofar as, in his terms, the secret history of our time is indexed to the Dreyfus affair, Jünger saw his own very life, then, as fundamentally correlated with a Jewish "problem".

While I think that the evidence cited in this paper is clear regarding Leviathan's symbolic function in Jünger's work, I leave it to more qualified colleagues to assess Jünger's larger role in German history and German literature. For the historiography of religion, I seek simply to identify the size and color of his menacing Leviathan. I agree with the balanced assessment of Wachsmann:

> [I]t would be quite wrong to blame Jünger for the crimes of the Third Reich. His radical rejection of Weimar and his endorsement of the NSDAP was not unique. He was only one of a number of intellectuals who paved the way for the Nazis, and in the 1920s his was not yet the cause celebre it became after the war. Jünger's writings during the Weimar Republic have to be viewed critically; but they also have to be seen in a much wider historical perspective. Narrowing one's vision to Jünger alone will lead to over-estimating his importance.[74]

Jünger was *not* a Hitlerist, *not* a biological racialist, *not* a member of the NSDAP. On the other hand, he was imperialistic, hyper-nationalistic, culturally anti-Jewish, and defiantly guilt-free concerning the Shoah. Jünger certainly did not deny the existence of the Judeocide—consistent with his motto from Bloy, 'tout ce qui arrive est adorable'.[75]

Jünger proceeds poetically, everywhere, in an openly associative and necessarily meandering mode, in which one symbol leads by wandering association to another symbol. The symbol Leviathan he sometimes associates with mythic serpents, sometimes with modern *Technik*, sometimes with The Law (*Gesetz*), sometimes with evil, sometimes with the World State, sometimes with 'the economic world'.[76] Only an extended monograph on this subject can demonstrate that the center, so to speak, of the cabala of enmity's symbolic field was evil, or the modern economy, or the Jews. The most I can do in these

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[74] Wachsmann, 'Marching under the Swastika?', 588.

[75] 26 October 1943. *Second journal parisien*, 192.

[76] Paris, 18 October 1941, in conversation with Schmitt at the Ritz. 'Ich fügte hinzu, daß diese Verhärtung im Alten Testament bereits beschrieben sei, wie es das Sinnbild der ehernen Schlange verrät. Was heute die Technik, war damals das Gesetz' ('I added that this hardening was already described in the Old Testament, how it betrays the symbol of the preceding Snake. What today is technology, was at that time the Law'). *Strahlungen*, 52.

few preliminary observations is to suggest that Jews are one controlling mechanism, but perhaps not the central symbolic governor, for Jünger's playing and re-playing of this mythology.

Jünger reiterated the eternal return of the same in a kind of musicalization. Cosmic forces weave, almost languidly, as melody through a larger orchestration. Leviathan could even be its own apparent opposite, the Hitler regime. 'Under Speidel's aegis, in the centre of the military machine, we formed a kind of [...] intellectual order of chivalry; we met in the belly of the leviathan and searched for the chance to save our hearts for the weak and the unprotected'.[77] Here Jünger portrays the Third Reich as the Leviathan, as he did elsewhere. This inversionary technique reflects, among other things, his philo-Semitism (an analysis of which lies beyond the scope of the present paper).[78] Marcus Bullock suggests:

> The kinship he saw between the German and Jew depends on each finding a way through the esoteric community of its heritage to an existence in which the cosmic connection is intact, and by whose virtue the Jew sustains his position as the wise man, as the teacher and friend who recurs in Jünger's subsequent fiction [...] [this is] a profoundly dangerous continuation of mythic thinking through all Jünger's work.[79]

Ernst Jünger displayed manifest "religious" content in his work even as he otherwise was not identifiably, conventionally, or ritually a practicing man of religion—a cultural profile that I have elsewhere called *religion after religion*.[80] His assault on non-religious Jews thus was fraught with internal conflicts. *Der Arbeiter* is very much an assault on liberalism, which the author allusively indexes to the cultural force of assimilated and liberal Jews. Jews were consistently associated with liberalism, assimilation, and 'civilization' by both Jünger and Schmitt.[81] Shortly after the Second World War Schmitt confided his position with unmistakable clarity in his diary: 'Precisely the assimilated Jew (*der assimilierte Jude*) is the true enemy'.[82] There is little reason to think that Jünger rejected the symbolic logic of this equation; there

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[77] Translation as cited in Barnett, *Hitler's Generals*, 56. A separate study of Jünger's notion of his role in self-styled *Ritterorden* is a desideratum.
[78] See Vanoosthuyse, *Fascisme et littérature pure*, 249–252.
[79] Bullock, 'Heiner Müller's Error,' 170.
[80] Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*.
[81] See Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*.
[82] Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 18.

is, indeed, a substantial body of evidence suggesting that he shared at least some variation on it. Schmitt's assimilated Jew was the kind of enemy portrayed by Jünger, in terms of the *Zivilisations-Jude*, the 'Jew of civilization', in 1930.[83] In other words, '*religious*' Jews were not their enemy. The eternal and planetary threat was, ironically, *the mystical enmity posed by non-religious* Jews. Given that Jünger was not ritually observant in any conventional sense, or at least did not publicly model such behavior, this presents an irony, if not paradox: *an irreligious man who mounts a religious attack on irreligion*.[84]

Jünger joined Schmitt to project a *political mythology of the planetary antagonist*. Consistent with the well-understood mutability of myth, their modern World-Enemy operates not as a fixed sign but as a floating signifier. The common feature of these mutating images, for present purposes, is the *compression of the world's negative totality into a vivid myth*. Jünger, in other words, elaborated a *conflictual tropology in mythic diction*, for, as he put it, '[Myth] does not belong to time, it creates time'.[85] I thus agree with Bullock that the 'essential principle that runs through all of Jünger's thought across the full span of his ninety years is this mythology and metaphysics of struggle, danger, and heroic affirmation of a great circulation of cosmic forces. This is the measure of all things'.[86] In poetic variations on the theme—he explicitly named Leviathan in works from the 1932 *The Worker* to *Eumeswil* in 1977—Ernst Jünger remained "cabalistically" coherent in

[83] 'Der Jude aber ist nicht der Vater, er ist der Sohn des Liberalismus, wie er überhaupt in nichts, was das deutsche Leben anbetrifft, weder im Guten noch im Bösen, eine schöpferische Rolle spielen kann' ('But the Jew is not the father of Liberalism, he is the son, he can play no creative role in what the life of the German people will meet, neither good nor bad'), from Jünger's 'Über Nationalismus und Judenfrage', reprinted in Berggötz, *Ernst Jünger*, 590. See also Robertson, *The 'Jewish Question' in German Literature 1749–1939*, 189. See French translation and discussion in Evard, 'Ernst Jünger et les juifs'. See also Evard, *Autorité et domination*, 192–193. For another discussion see Vanoosthuyse, *Fascisme et littérature pure*, 62. Compare Heidegger's 1929 letter: '… the fact that we are confronted by a crucial choice: Either to infuse, again, our German spiritual life with genuine indigenous forces and educators, or to leave it at the mercy, once and for all, of the growing Jewish contamination, both in a larger and a narrower sense'; from 'Brief an Victor Schwoerer vom 02.10.1929', translated in Stassen (ed.), *Martin Heidegger*, 1.

[84] Jünger converted to Catholicism at the very end of his very long life. See Kiesel, 'Eintritt in ein kosmisches Ordnungswissen', 55.

[85] Jünger, *Eumeswil*, 179.

[86] Bullock, 'Heiner Müller's Error', 167.

his struggle (*Kampf*) against his mythic enemy over an astonishingly long career.

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[87] Given the vast scale of Jünger's output and the preliminary stages of research into it, no pretense has been made here to be systematic in bibliographic terms. For publication history until 1996, see Muehleisen, *Bibliographie der Werke Ernst Jüngers*. Jünger has been especially influential in France, and his French translations are authorized by him. I use some of them here for reasons of accessibility.

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PRAGMATISM AND PIETY: THE AMERICAN SPIRITUAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF JEWISH RENEWAL[1]

Shaul Magid

> 'America, land of freedom. I love thy people. I will come back and work for thy people and establish Buddah's Dharma'.
>
> Dharmapala, "Diary Leaves"

> '[Nature] is an infinite sphere, the center of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere'.
>
> Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*

> 'our natural religion is polytheism…'
>
> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*

> 'As a moralist I am a monotheist; as an artist I am a polytheist; as a naturalist I am a pantheist'.
>
> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

1. Introduction: Neo-Pragmatism and Religion

Richard Rorty, one of America's great contemporary philosophers and public intellectuals died on 8 June 2007. Rorty abandoned a successful career in analytic philosophy in favor of new kind of pragmatism (sometimes called neo-pragmatism), deciding that it is impossible to step outside the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our philosophical thinking and self criticism.[2] This statement represents a small cadre of analytically trained philosophers in America who abandoned the apolitical analytic style of philosophy in favor of a reconstituted pragmatism initially by William James in the early part of the twentieth century.[3] The spirit of this transition at the end of

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[1] For P.O.

[2] See *New York Times* obituary, 11 June 2007. One of Rorty's first major statements of his neo-pragmatism can be found in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Cf. West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, 3.

[3] Another noteworthy representative of this "movement" is Hilary Putnam. Other contemporary (neo)pragmatists of note are Cornel West, Ian Hacking, and Richard Bernstein.

the twentieth century is aptly captured by Cornell West, one of neo-pragmatism's most vocal and prolific voices.

> The distinctive appeal of American pragmatism in our postmodern moment is its unabashedly moral emphasis and its unequivocally ameliorative impulse. In this world-weary period of pervasive cynicisms, nihilisms, terrorisms, and possible exterminations, there is a longing for norms and values that can make a difference, a yearning for principled resistance and struggle that can change our desperate plight.[4]

Although not speaking for all who turned to pragmatism, West expresses here a sense of urgency among some American intellectuals to re-enter the public sphere with a program that could contribute to the rejuvenation of American (and world) civilization founded on (American) principles of pluralism and democracy. These neo-pragmatist philosophers offer more than a political program; according to West they offer a philosophical and metaphysical basis for understanding the nature of truth and reality that they hope will contribute to the larger project of reconstructing society. They seek to offer a philosophical foundation to the day-to-day political rhetoric of American society. One of the tenets of pragmatism, primarily but not exclusively the pragmatism of John Dewey, was the commitment to social change through human and collective experience and taking seriously the ideas of ordinary people born from their experience of the world.[5]

Beginning with Ralph Waldo Emerson, this was viewed as an anti-philosophical and anti-ecclesiastical movement as it was a move away from the elitism of European thought and church which Emerson held were constitutively anti-democratic. While this philosophical turn did not yield a cultural populism, it took democracy and egalitarianism as metaphysical principles that would be the foundation of a new conception of truth. Both for those who come from the analytic and realist traditions propagated in Great Britain where philosophy was not an integral part of the public arena and those who come from the continental tradition where philosophy espoused idealist theories of politics (e.g. socialism, Marxism, The Frankfurt School), the return to pragmatism is a radical re-orientation of philosophical thinking. And,

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[4] West, 'Why Pragmatism?,' re-printed in West, *Cornell West Reader*, 144.

[5] See Dewey, *Essential Dewey, volume 1*, 1–36. Cf. James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 18; West, *Cornell West Reader* ('Why Pragmatism?'), 151. Cf. James, *Varieties*, 392. This notion emerges from Emerson. See his 1837 essay 'The American Scholar' cited in West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, 12.

just as important, it is a return to an American tradition of philosophy and culture that began with Emerson and took concrete form with William James and John Dewey.

In this essay I explore a somewhat surprising form of American pragmatism in the contemporary Jewish phenomenon called Jewish Renewal. I argue that Renewal's ostensible roots in the Jewish mystical tradition (especially Hasidism) and the ethos of the American counter-culture, including the 1970's by-product known as New Age Religion, to some extent it belies a deep dependence on American metaphysical religion in general and American pragmatism in particular as an intellectual basis for its new religiosity.[6] By extension, I argue that Jewish Renewal comprises a novel and unexamined indigenous form of American spirituality.[7]

As a religious movement, Jewish Renewal constitutes more than a fifth denomination of American Judaism (in addition to Orthodoxy, Conservatism, Reform, and Reconstructionism). It may be the first fruits of a post-denominational period in American Jewry and better categorized as a type of New Religious Movement (NRM), a fairly new category in the social analysis of religious society. According to J. Gordon Melton, NRM's are religious movements that are viewed as outside the mainstream of established religious society, are sometimes 'feared, disliked, or hated by outsiders', and are movements that espouse what are perceived to be radical doctrines that undermine established practice and dogma.[8] The NRM began as a category to offer

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[6] On the concept of American metaphysical religion, see Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*.

[7] There are many studies dealing with the phenomenon on New Age Religion in America. For some examples, see Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*; Wuthnow, *After Heaven*; Roof, *Generation of Seekers*; Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious*; Lattin, *Following Our Bliss*; Sutcliffe & Bowman (eds.), *Beyond New Age*. Cf. Schmidt, *Restless Souls*. On New Age Religion more generally, see the indispensable Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*. Most recently, see Kripal, *Esalen*. It is surprising that in Albanese's *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, an exhaustive history of American metaphysical religion, Jews and Judaism are entirely absent. The only reference to Jews appears on page 510 where she dismisses those who claim that Jews are overrepresented in New Age religious movements. This is not the case with Leigh Schmidt's *Restless Souls*. Schmidt includes numerous Jewish rabbis and theologians who took part in spiritualist movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[8] See Melton, 'Introduction to New Religions', 22–25; and idem, 'Perspective'. In relation to "new" Jewish religious movements, see Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 34–73. Whether Jewish Renewal constitutes a NRM is a topic for another essay. My only mention of it here is to broaden the ways in which we consider categorizing these religious phenomena in contemporary Judaism.

a more value-free assessment of what was previously called "cults" but its parameters have expanded to include off-shoots of conventional religious movements that offer more than cosmetic changes to the *status quo*. Elsewhere I have examined some of the basic tenets of Jewish Renewal and its founder Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and thus I will not rehearse them here.[9] In this essay I wish only to explore the intellectual roots of Renewal in the tradition of American pragmatism, specifically the pragmatism of William James, in order to highlight the extent to which Renewal is an American phenomenon, geographically, culturally, intellectually, and spiritually. I begin by situating Jewish Renewal in the topography of contemporary American Judaism, particularly those Judaisms that are influenced by the Jewish mystical tradition, and then briefly discuss the spiritualist inclination of American religion more generally before moving on to James, pragmatism, and Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's new metaphysics.

2. Contemporary Jewish Mysticism in America: Jewish Renewal in Context

At present there are three main branches of contemporary Jewish mysticism in North America. All three have, to some extent, absorbed the American ethos, even against their will. Yet of the three I suggest only Jewish Renewal is a truly American phenomenon; a Judaism whose theology and metaphysics are born from American's intellectual and spiritual tradition of pragmatism, democracy, and theological pluralism. The other two American Jewish mysticisms are American Habad crafted by Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneersohn, and The Kabbalah Center founded by Rabbi Phillip Berg.[10] Habad and The Kabbalah Center each draw from different kabbalistic sources converging with the Zohar that functions as a kind of *Ur*-text of modern kabbalah. Habad is built on the extensive Hasidic writings of the Habad dynasty founded by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady in late eighteenth-century Belarus (White Russia) and takes its present more activist and

[9] See, for example, my 'Jewish Renewal—A New American Religion?'; 'Holocaust and Jewish Renewal'; 'Jewish Renewal, American Spiritualism, and Postmonotheistic Theology'; 'Jewish Renewal Movement'; and 'Necessary Heresy of Translation'.

[10] On Habad see Fishkoff, *Rebbe's Army*; Ehrlich, *Messiah of Brooklyn*. On The Kabbalah Center, see Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, esp. pp. 75–108. Cf. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, as well as his contribution to the present volume.

"American" form in the extensive writings of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn (d. 1995).[11] The Kabbalah Center draws from the kabbalistic work of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, a Polish kabbalist who spent his later years in Mandate Palestine and then Israel and is also influenced by the Sephardic tradition of kabbalah, particularly the Beit El School of Rabbi Shalom Sharabi.[12]

While Habad is rightfully credited with being the first Hasidic court to lay roots in America with the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe Joseph Isaac Schneersohn's visit to the US in the 1920's (he returned to Europe and immigrated to the US from war-torn Warsaw in 1940), Ashlag may have been the first kabbalist to actively cultivate the American market when his student Levi Krakovsky arrived in the US in 1937. Although Ashlag's student Krakovsky returned to the US for personal reasons (he was brought up in the US and then immigrated to Mandate Palestine as a young adult), upon his return Ashlag encouraged him to disseminate kabbalah in English to an American audience.[13] The Americanism of Habad and the Kabbalah Center is an interesting topic for further study but beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that both absorbed and continue to brilliantly utilize the late capitalist and commodified economy of America and understand the way the entertainment industry in the US is the most potent way to reach their audience.[14] The annual Habad Telethon in Los Angeles and The Kabbalah Center's use of high-profile entertainers such as Madonna, Rosanne Barr, and Demi Moore to spread their message of contemporary kabbalism are two examples among many of how both have made their brand of Judaism/kabbalism a commodity in the American spiritual marketplace.[15] Yet neither Habad nor the Kabbalah Center seems

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[11] For an interesting "Americanized" presentation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's teachings, see Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life*. Wolfson's forthcoming *Open Secret* promises to be the defining study of Schneersohn's metaphysical writings.

[12] On Yehuda Ashlag, see Huss, 'Altruistic Communism'; Garb, *The Chosen*, 57–63 and 99–113; and Hansel, 'Origin in the Thought of Yehuda Helevy Ashlag', 37–46. On Sharabi, see Giller, *Shalom Shar'abi*.

[13] See Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest*, 23–31. It is also noteworthy that Myers shows how Phillip Berg, the founder of The Kabbalah Center, studied with Krakovsky in the US (p. 31). Myers is highly skeptical that either Krakovsky or Ashlag intended their works for non-Jewish audiences. This is more explicitly the case with Schneersohn. The Kabbalah Center, on the other hand, has become more invested in teaching Kabbala to gentile audiences.

[14] See Huss, 'New Age of Kabbalah'; idem, 'All You Need is LAV'.

[15] On this more generally see Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 77–110. It is significant that while all three celebrities mentioned above are non-Jews The Habad telethon

particularly interested in engaging with the American philosophical and theological traditions except as they could be used as avenues to further their missionary agenda (missionizing itself being a big part of the American religious ethos). It is true that both movements make limited use of comparative analysis, juxtaposing their kabbalistic Judaism to other spiritual traditions (this is especially true after the mainstreaming of eastern religions in American in the 1960's). But in both cases, or at least surely in the case with Habad, the other religions are viewed as inferior and, even if valid for gentiles, deficient for Jews. On one reading, these groups package their mystical Judaism as an alternative to the popular eastern mysticisms and occult philosophies that flooded the American landscape in the 1960's. This is to say that their engagement with the spiritual "other" and thus their American context did not compromise their mystical and absolutist idealism that each culled from their traditional sources. In short, the American ethos of liberalism, democracy, pluralism and pragmatism never permeated the walls of their (neo)kabbalistic Judaism.

This is not the case with Jewish Renewal. Although Renewal, like Habad and the Kabbalah Center, draws from the Hasidic and kabbalistic traditions in Europe and the Levant, its Americanism is not occasional and external nor is it purely tactical—it is integral to its very theology and metaphysics. Below I argue that Renewal is founded on two central—and connected—components of American religion and philosophy: pragmatism and pluralism.[16] The former undermines or at least problematizes two central tenets of mystical Judaism: the apophatic principle that God transcends human experience—even if the mystic can access divinity through contemplative means—and the authority of the collective as opposed to the individual. By pluralism I do not mean tolerance of the other but a more deep theological pluralism as espoused by William James that I will show challenges the very foundation of traditional monotheism. This does not produce polytheism, or neo-paganism, but comes close to what James calls

almost exclusively uses Jewish celebrities for its cause, e.g. Bob Dylan (whose Telethon appearances from the 1980's can be easily accessed through YouTube).

[16] See Gordon, *Gospel of the Open Road*. Gordon argues that American religious mysticism is a combination of Asian (mostly Tantric) religious traditions and the humanistic and individualistic spirit of American democracy (I include in this pluralism).

pluralistic pantheism and I call, in relation to Jewish Renewal, post-monotheism.[17]

This new adaptation of Jewish mysticism in Renewal is not made from whole cloth. Those familiar with the Jewish mystical tradition know that many components of theological pluralism have roots in traditional kabbala's doctrine of the *sefirot*.[18] Yet kabbalah succeeded, at least after the sixteenth century, not only to conform to a normative theological position but to become the predominant Jewish theology and was thus interpreted to conform with "orthodox" monotheism. I will try to show below that Renewal moves beyond these "orthodox" boundaries into what I suggest is a post-monotheistic Jewish theology in accord with the American tradition beginning with Emerson's transcendentalism and continuing with James' pragmatism and pluralistic pantheism, later refracted through New Age spirituality.

3. American "Metaphysical" Religion

Americans have been spiritual seekers long before America became a sovereign nation. American spirituality, often radical and anti-ecclesiastic, played a crucial role in the formation of American society in all its facets.[19] Spirituality in the US was sometimes anarchic, often rebellious against the church (e.g. Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and David Thoreau), and often proffered new ideas to subvert orthodox Christian community, doctrine, and practice. Emerson's controversial and arguably heretical 1838 Divinity School Address to the graduates

[17] This is not to suggest that James and Corbin share a common position here. It is, rather, to suggest that Corbin and James both posit a pluralistic universe that is open to human experience of "otherness" and that both may be implicated in Renewal's post-monotheistic theology.

[18] For a good introduction to the doctrine of the *sefirot* in English see Hallamish, *Introduction*, 121–166. The debate about the legitimacy and even monotheism of kabbalah is on-going among scholars. Anti-kabbalistic tracts in the Middle Ages argued that kabbalah was a marginal and even heretical branch of Judaism. One jurist, Isaac ben Sheshet went as far as calling kabbalah (with its ten *sefirot*) no better than Christianity (with its Trinity). For a general survey of this phenomenon, see Baer, *History*, 243–305.

[19] On this, see Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, esp. 1–24 and 143–180. Catherine Albanese rightly notes forms of American spiritual seeking even earlier. See, for example, Hannah Adam's *Dictionary of All Religions*, published in 1817 and Convers Francis's three-volume *Progress of Religious Ideas* in 1855. Cf. Myerson, 'Convers Francis and Emerson'. Cf. Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 347–349; Tweed, 'American Pioneer'.

from Harvard Divinity School entitled 'Self-Reliance' is a case in point. Its anti-ecclesial sentiment and call for 'self-divinization' would inspire generations of American spiritual seekers including, I suggest, the counter-cultural generation that would produce Jewish Renewal.[20]

The nineteenth century, following Emerson, witnessed a veritable spiritual renaissance in American culture that included transcendentalists, theosophists, New Thought spiritualists, occultism, and the introduction of Buddhism and Hinduism to America resulting in the establishment of the Vedanta society toward the end of the century, the first Hindu society devoted to the "spiritualization" of the West. It could be argued that the beginning of a post-monotheistic America that only came to fruition with New Age Religion in the latter part of the twentieth century began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in various venues; one being James' philosophical thinking and another being the arrival of the Hindu master Vivekenanda to American in the 1890's.[21] The mid 1890's saw the climax of this first phase of new spirituality with the 1893 World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago and the subsequent founding of the Greenacre community in Eliot, Maine in 1984, a popular "spiritual retreat" owned and operated by Sarah Farmer and frequented by such Reform rabbis as Emile Hirsch (the son of the German Jewish philosopher Samuel Hirsch) and Felix Adler who later left Judaism to found The Society for Ethical Culture.[22]

The World Parliament of Religions brought together members of dozens of religious faiths with the expressed intent to create a new religion liberated from the confines of classical (that is, biblical) theism. While it is true that the introduction of Eastern religions at the World Parliament was filtered through a monotheistic lens, it nonetheless opened new vistas for American spiritualists seeking fulfillment in unorthodox ways. The Beats, who popularized Eastern spirituality

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[20] Published in Emerson, *Self-Reliance and other Essays*. There has been much written about Emerson and this essay in particular. See, for example, Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*; Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*.

[21] See Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 496–515, where she argues that New Age Religion is now passé but the very sources that produced it are now inspiring a new American spirituality.

[22] See Seager (ed.), *Dawn of Religious Pluralism*; Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, 181–226. On Adler, see Kraut, *From Reform Judaism and Ethical Culture*, esp. 108–134. For a more comprehensive a record of the Jewish contributions see Union of American Hebrew Congregations (ed.), *Judaism at the World Parliament of Religions*.

(combined with jazz and drugs) in the late 1940's and 1950's America owe much of their spiritual inheritance to the radical clergy at the beginning of that century.[23]

This all leads to what has been termed New Age spirituality in America, beginning in the 1970's but having deep roots in earlier American religious traditions. While it is true that Jewish mysticism and particularly Hasidism serves as the bedrock of Jewish Renewal, Renewal's deviations from these more idealistic and conformist traditions is quite obvious. Moreover, given the strong influence of the Christian kabbalist Emanuel Swedenborg on American religion we can also speak of the ways in which kabbalah as Jewish mysticism had a home in American long before the arrival of Hasidism around the middle of the twentieth century. While Hasidism may have begun as a non-conformist critique of eastern European rabbinism, by the end of its second generation (around 1815), it had already retreated from the margins of Jewish Orthodoxy with a few notable exceptions.[24] Renewal, on the other hand, has not retreated from these margins but has largely embraced them. I suggest that this spirit is, in fact, culled from a long tradition of American spiritualism (perhaps much of it unconscious) from Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau and James, to Ram Dass (Richard Alpert), Alan Ginsburg, the archetypal psychologist James Hillman and, of late, the contemporary American theoretician of consciousness, Ken Wilber.[25]

4. James' Pragmatism

William James' work encompasses a wide area of research into psychology, mysticism, and philosophy, each having a profound impact

[23] On the role of drugs in American Religion see Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven*; Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception*. Cf. Kripal, *Esalen*, 112–134.

[24] See, for example, Shatz-Uffenheimer, 'Autonomia'; Magid, *Hasidism on the Margins*, esp. 205–248.

[25] James Hillman, one of the founders of archetypal psychology is very important in the transition from Jamesean psychological analysis through Carl Jung, especially on the question of the panpsychism and the new polytheism. See Hillman, 'Many Gods, Many Persons', and 'Anima Mundi', both collected in *The Essential James Hillman*, 36–49 and 95–111. Ken Wilber is known as one of the most prolific exponents of contemporary spirituality. He has written many books on the subject. For a representative introduction, see Wilber, *Integral Psychology*. Wilber and Schachter-Shalomi are colleagues in Boulder, Colorado, and have worked together on many projects.

on American thinking in the twentieth century. I will focus on three dimensions of this thinking. First, his theory of truth in his *Lectures on Pragmatism* first published in 1907.[26] Second, his theory of pantheism and pluralistic panpsychism in his lectures published as *A Pluralistic Universe*.[27] And third, his notion of 'piecemeal supernaturalism' in the Postscript to his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.[28] In each case I will attempt to show that Renewal's new metaphysics and social theory of Judaism reflects ideas raised and developed by James in these three areas. While it is certainly true that the direct influence of Schachter-Shalomi on these issues came from New Age thinkers such as Matthew Fox and, later, Ken Wilber[29] (combined with his own creative reading of kabbalah and Hasidism) the intellectual foundations for the entire New Age movement in America can arguably be rooted in the intellectual and spiritual trajectory from Emerson through James.[30]

If one had to point to a genealogical origin of the American intellectual tradition (admittedly a difficult if not impossible feat) one might very well choose Ralph Waldo Emerson, particularly his essay 'Self-Reliance'.[31] This essay scandalized generations of Americans with its call for individualism, "self-divinization" and its ostensible subversion of institutional religion. Regarding Emerson and transcendentalism as the arbiters of this new American movement Catherine Albanese notes, 'The Transcendentalist revolution was installing a different religious future. It was catalyzing vernacular and elite currents in a higher pragmatism that was quintessentially American and that brought blessing and delight to ego-selves on a this-worldly landscape'.[32]

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[26] James, *Pragmatism*. All page references will be to this edition.

[27] James, P*luralistic Universe*.

[28] James, *Varieties*.

[29] Wilber's *Spectrum of Consciousness*, first published in 1977, introduced his notion of transpersonal psychology to the New Age mix. Wilber is strongly influenced by theosophist and New Thought spirituality combining it with a post-Jungian perspective of Abraham Maslow who first coined the term "transpersonal psychology". See, for example, Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*, and the discussion in Kripal, *Esalen*, 148–152. Schachter-Shalomi was influenced by Maslow in the 1970's.

[30] The more social activist branch of Jewish Renewal can be found in the pages of *Tikkun Magazine*, edited by Michael Lerner. Cornell West is on the editorial board of the magazine and he and Lerner have written numerous books together. Here one can see the connection between neo-pragmatism and Renewal in the social sphere. See Lerner & West, *Blacks and Jews*; cf. West, *Race Matters*; and Lerner, *Spirit Matters*.

[31] See Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, esp. 61–95.

[32] Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 176. For other discussions of Emerson leadership role in this new movement see pp. 162, 164, 168.

William James' *Lectures on Pragmatism* perhaps inaugurates a second stage of that same revolution. It is in these lectures that James first argued that ideas should be valued primarily for their usefulness and practical implications, and, second, that truth is not "discovered" but, in fact, "made" according to the way an idea guides and corresponds to human experience.[33] By doing so James assaulted the venerated notion of truth as correspondence between reality and its representation (in Kant's transcendental object and all its many permutations) and suggested that truth was a tool constructed from the complex contours of human experience rather than discovered through reason or sensory data. James put it this way, 'True ideas are those we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those we cannot [...] Truth happens to an idea, is made true by events. Its verity is, in fact, an event, a process [...]'.[34] The idealists and realists both affirm the existence of absolute truth, even as both disagree on how it can be perceived. And both viciously attacked James as a relativist, subjectivist, and a denier of absolute truth (an accusation with which James had a complicated relationship). James defended his position against the empiricists with what he coined 'radical empiricism', a notion that the perception of empirical date extends beyond the somatic to the phenomenal, intuitive, epiphenomenal, and even paranormal sphere.[35]

The debate on this point is quite animated and beyond the scope of this inquiry and it is likely James held different positions on this at different stages of his intellectual career.[36] For our limited purposes we could say that on the truth question, James did believe in absolute truth. What he did not believe in is that one could know if and when one ever attained it. So that for him the only absolute truth was that

[33] It was Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) who first coined the term "pragmatism" as a philosophical position. In James' first use of the term in a 1898 lecture he credits Peirce with the term. James and Peirce were both members of The Metaphysical Club in Cambridge, MA, that began in 1827 and lasted a little more than a year. On The Metaphysical Club, see Menand, *Metaphysical Club*.

[34] James, *Pragmatism*, 92.

[35] See Lamberth, *William James*, 9–59; James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 45. On this point James continued Kant's philosophical project to some extent, although James placed higher value on non-rational dimensions of human experience. Jeffrey Kripal defines radical empiricism as 'a faithfulness to the full data of human experience that refuses to ignore anomalies simply because they can not be fit into the reigning scientism of the day' (Kripal, *Esalen*, 6).

[36] See Putnam, 'James' Theory of Truth', 170, 171.

there was—or might be—an absolute truth. The absolute can never be verified by experience and thus cannot serve as a philosophical category. There are many reasons for this, one being that for James truth is always *for us* and always *in the making*. It is never stagnant because it always includes and is shaped by human experience. This is based on his firm commitment to the fallibility principle; that all truth (that is, all that we perceive as truth) could turn out to be false given a new set of experiences.[37] And any human experience is not an experience *of* the truth as some realists or idealists might argue but rather is part of what constitutes the truth.

Moreover, truth (as all our beliefs) is, for James, shaped by our subjectivity, by our subjective needs and propensities. Hence, it is, by definition, pluralistic. Truth does not hang out there to be discovered and contemplated but is always being built *by us*, *for us* and in order to be used in a never-ending interplay between our subjectivity and external reality. If truth is pluralistic there can be no absolute that we can determine as truth.[38] This is not to say, by definition, that there is nothing outside human experience; James consistently denied accusations of relativism. It is only to say that what may lie beyond any human experience cannot itself hold together all human experience. Or, that human experience can never be an experience of an absolute. The quasi-mystical nature of James' pragmatism has been examined. It is significant here to note that James' father, Henry James Sr., converted to Swedenborgianism in 1844 and was a friend of both Emerson and Thoreau. Thus the resonances of James' transcendentalist and even "mystical" roots in later works such as *A Pluralistic Universe* may extend from that relationship.[39]

It is hard to overestimate the extent to which this ethos, and for James truth *is* an ethos, permeates American culture, both high and low. This is not only the case for members of the American intellectual

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[37] These ideas are discussed at length in James, *Meaning of Truth* published in James, *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*. A very useful discussion of this can be found in Lamberth, *William James*, 203–225. Cf. James, *Varieties*, 115.

[38] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 25–27, 105, and 131. Cf. Putnam, 'James' Theory of Truth', 166–185. James puts it this way: 'The particular intellectualistic difficulty that had held my own thought so long in a vise was […] the impossibility of understanding how "your" experience and "mine," which, as such are defined as not conscious of each other, can nevertheless at the same time be members of a world-experience defined expressly as having all its parts co-conscious, or known together' (*Pluralistic Universe*, 107).

[39] See Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 413.

elite such as West or Rorty but for religious American communities as well, in this case, in the contemporary Jewish Renewal mystical pragmatism espoused by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. I will explore a few ways this is manifest. First Renewal's commitment to what is known as Paradigm Shift Judaism, an idea that posits "truth" as evolving through history whereby a religious truth of a previous age, or epoch, is replaced by a new truth (and subsequently a new vision of Torah, in theory and in practice) to conform to the present epoch. The "truth" of a previous epoch is not denied as truth in its time but rejected as truth for the present. This is not a historicist claim but a metaphysical claim. While this idea has roots in the anonymous medieval kabbalah of the Book Temunah (ca. 1400) the theosophist ideology of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, New Thought, and subsequently New Age astrological religion, it is also rooted in James' notion of human experience as a central factor in determining truth as utility or the fruits of an idea rather than the idea itself. Secondly I will argue that what I call Schachter-Shalomi's post-monotheistic theology and Gaia consciousness Judaism is a reflection of James' pluralistic universe and his piecemeal supernaturalism.[40]

5. Jewish Renewals' Metaphysical Innovation

James's pragmatism has been viewed as one of America's most indigenous philosophies. He defines pragmatism broadly as "an attitude of looking away from first things, principles, categories, and supposed necessities; and of looking toward last things, fruits, consequences, facts."[41] For James, ideas are true if they also help us "into satisfactory relations with other parts of our experience."[42] Truth is never absolute and always "in the making." That is, since truths are born from the totality of human experience and are meant to serve certain subjective needs, one can never make a truth claim that is absolute—that cannot

[40] Gaia consciousness, the notion that the earth is a living organism, has become popular in New Age religions. It shares some basic traits with the philosophical idea of panpsychism that was very popular in the early twentieth century. There are many forms of panpsychism but it is generally a doctrine that holds that all matter, even organic matter, has consciousness and some sense of awareness. See Edwards, 'Panpsychism'. On Gaia, see Lovelock, *Gaia*; idem. *Ages of Gaia*, 15–40 and 191–228. For Gaia in Renewal, see Schachter-Shalomi with Seigel, *Jewish with Feeling*, 149–180.

[41] James, *Pragmatism*, 29.

[42] Ibid., 30.

be refuted given new circumstances produced by new human experiences. Severing truth from both the eternal verities of rationalism and idealism and undermining realism's claim that truth lies outside human experience only to be discovered by it, James' anti-foundationalism moved psychology (construed widely) into the center of philosophical and theological discussions about God and truth in America.[43] It is here, more specifically in the American post-Jungianism of James Hillman and Ken Wilber, that New Age religion in general and Jewish Renewal in particular discovers pragmatism. Given the limitations of this essay I will illustrate this influence in one example from Schachter-Shalomi's metaphysical writings.

In an article entitled 'God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown', published in the Jewish Renewal on-line journal *Spectrum*: *A Journal of Renewal Spirituality* in 2006, originally given as a lecture on 8 January 1985, Schachter-Shalomi discusses the concept of *zimzum* or divine contraction as a condition for creation made popular by the sixteenth-century Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria.[44] His discussion focuses on the centuries-old controversy about the nature of *zimzum* rather than the doctrine itself; that is, should *zimzum* be understood literally or metaphorically—did God *really* withdraw, creating a void, or is this doctrine to be understood as a metaphor, that is, that all reality remains permeated by God even in his apparent absence—that divine absence is only a state of concealment. The literalist position opts for a more theistic construction of reality whereby God stands outside creation, the conditions of which were made possible by His withdrawal. This loosely corresponds to what James calls theism 'where God and his creatures are *toto genere* distinct in the scholastic theology, they have absolutely nothing in common [...]. There is a sense, then, in which philosophic theism makes us outsiders and keeps us foreigners in relation to God'.[45]

In traditional sources the literal and metaphorical interpretations of *zimzum* exist both within a dualistic-theistic construct (a Jamesean category). The metaphorical reading suggests a pantheistic (as opposed

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[43] This is one of the underlying theses of Cornel West's book of pragmatism, *America's Evasion of Philosophy*.

[44] On *zimzum* in Lurianic kabbalah, see Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 128–134; and my 'Origin and Overcoming the Beginning'. On *zimzum* more generally, see Moshe Idel, 'On the History of the term *Zimzum*'.

[45] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 23.

to dualistic) type of theism, raising the problem of God's presence even in the "lowly places" of creation. That is, if God exists in the very place of his absence, the absolute distinction between God and world that is implied in a dualistic theism that supports the literal interpretation of *zimzum*, is undermined. These positions have been well-researched and needn't concern us here.[46] Suffice it to say that the stakes of the controversy are so high for kabbalists because they are committed to the idea of one transcendent God and assert that there can only be one true conception of God: either he is a part of or distinct from creation (obviously leaving room for various gradations). Thus, one could say that even the metaphorical renderings of *zimzum* that have a pantheistic resonance never quite step outside the absolutism that in inherent in theism.

Schachter-Shalomi begins his discussion of *zimzum* with a different premise. 'Perhaps [...] our idea of God is less about God than about our capacity to conceive of God. And thus it follows that our idea of God has evolved through the centuries [...]'. This is not a perspectival claim that merely posits a distinction between divine and human perspective. Perspectival claims do not go outside theistic doctrine and remain wed to a notion of an Absolute constituting the All of existence. Perspectival claims, often apophatic in nature, are also generally founded on the position that truth lies outside human experience.[47] Thus divine absence is merely a product of the limits of human experience to discern absolute truth, which in this case is God's presence. Hence, the human perspective is, by definition, limited and even illusory. James calls this a monist point-of-view and claims it fails even on monistic principles.

> They [monists] speak of the eternal and the temporal 'points of view'; of the universe in its infinite 'aspect' or in its finite 'capacity'; they say that '*qua* absolute' it is one thing, '*qua* relative' another; they contrast its truth with its appearances [...] but they forget that, on idealistic principles, to make such distinctions is tantamount to making different beings, or at any rate that varying points of view, aspects, appearances, ways of taking, and the like, are meaningless phrases unless we suppose outside of the unchanging content of reality a diversity of witnesses who

[46] See, for example, Ross, 'Two Interpretations of *Zimzum*'; Yosha, *Myth and Metaphor*, 188–200; Dan, 'No Evil Descends from Heaven'.

[47] On one version of perspectivalism in kabbalah, see my 'De-Constructing the Mystical'.

> experience or take it variously, the absolute mind being just the witness that takes it most completely.[48]

This is to say that the perspectival argument that is a common way for the quasi-panthesitic theism of many kabbalists to hold immanence and transcendence together (sometimes problematically called panentheism) cannot bear the weight of its own argument. This is because to acknowledge "aspects" as anything other than pure illusion (and thus false) is to acknowledge "different beings". If there is an absolute, then one who perceives it by definition compromises and thus undermines the absoluteness of the absolute through the subject's non-absolute gaze. In this case James exhibits an anti-mystical posture if we define the mystical as the human ability to transcend the limitations of humanness. James would likely respond that subjectivity can never be erased but human experience can, in fact, draw from non-rational and non-empirical reality but that reality is experienced only as refracted through the subject.

Schachter-Shalomi explores this perspectival solution in the theistic section of his essay suggesting that *zimzum* (metaphorically rendered) may be one way of beginning to move beyond theism while maintaining its basic apophatic structure of an unknown/unknowable God that exists outside human experience.[49] He even holds onto this idea in the final section called 'Aquarius: Pantheistic *Zimzum*' where he deploys the Habad distinction between *eyn sof* (the wholly transcendent infinite) and '*or eyn sof* (the light of infinitude, or compromised infinitude) as a way of transitioning from a monistic pantheism to a pluralistic pantheism, that is, affirming a pluralistic construction of God without abandoning theism altogether. But here I would suggest that the Hasidic rendering of *zimzum* is only the first stage of his pantheistic and pluralistic vision that requires yet another stage of development, what Schachter-Shalomi calls elsewhere 'the fourth turning of Hasidism'.[50]

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[48] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 97.

[49] He also notes that even a literalist view of *zimzum* begins to move beyond the more radical transcendental monism (or negative theology) of someone like Maimonides who denied the human ability to know anything whatsoever about God. On Maimonides and his rejection of mysticism more generally, see Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*.

[50] This is most comprehensively described in his Hebrew work *Yishmaru Da'at: Chassidic Teachings of the Fourth Turning*. For more on his Hebrew writings see Magid, 'Translating into Tradition'. Cf. Schachter-Shalomi, 'Future of Neo-Hasidism'.

I think the understanding of *zimzum* that is implied here takes a more decidedly pluralistic and pragmatic turn and does, in fact, take us beyond the theism of earlier articulations of *zimzum* although, admittedly, Schachter-Shalomi seems reluctant to make that radical turn explicit. In the above quote, 'Perhaps […] our idea of God is less about God than about our capacity to conceive of God. And thus it follows that our idea of God has evolved through the centuries […]', he is making a pragmatic claim about the "truth" of God as constructed through human experience ('our capacity to conceive of God').[51] Schachter-Shalomi is suggesting that individuals and communities create these "truths" in response to experiences that mandate, or affirm, these imaginal categories, not simply as responses to historical phenomena but because these various positions serve a useful purpose. That is why, for Schachter-Shalomi, 'our idea of God has evolved through the centuries'. I read Schachter-Shalomi as presenting us with a model of *zimzum* that emerges primarily as a conscious response to the collective human experience of the age and not as a theological statement about the absolute. Moreover, he subsequently suggests that this is always the reason theological development occurs, intentionally blurring the lines between scholarship and confessional theology. His *zimzum* (as well as other definitions of *zimzum*, at least for him) is not about the true nature of God but (always) about 'our capacity to conceive of God'. Whether this is an apophatic claim that the true nature of God is beyond comprehension or that the true nature of God *is* how we perceive God, remains ambiguous in his writings.

Embedded in all this is what I take to be a pluralistic, or pragmatic, notion of truth—that truth is always "in the making" through individual and collective human experience of the world and our place in it. In this sense, both the literal and metaphorical notions of *zimzum* are "true" in and for their time, and for different communities, as pragmatism defines truth to be something that 'happens to an idea. It becomes true, it is made by events'. As I read him, Schachter-Shalomi's interests are solely about the "truthfulness" that is useful in order to ascertain

[51] More generally, Schachter-Shalomi uses the pragmatic strategy of determining "what works" to define his approach to halakhic "truth". See, for example, his very pragmatic version of *ta'amei ha-mitzvot* ('reasons for the commandments') in his *Integral Halachah*, 117–119. There he determines the survival of any tradition is dependent on it being a 'functional tradition'. Most recently, he expressed a similar sentiment in his 'Renewal for All', 53–55.

(1) whether we can accept one as true and the other false; and (2) whether a new position must be forged if both truth claims are understood to be based on experience foreign to the contemporary reader.

Paradigm Shift Judaism offers a collectivist notion of James' experience model that is largely founded on the individual. This emerges in Schachter-Shalomi's notion of 'reality maps'. For Schachter-Shalomi, clusters of human experiences coalesce to form what he calls 'reality maps'.[52] These maps are

> contemporary container[s] for the *magesterium* of a tradition. [They are] a kind of oracle to which the spiritual seeker brings her confusion. It is everything to her. But it is also a container for ideas whose shape represents but a stage in the development in the whole history of ideas. It speaks to a particular world-situation, to that culture, and it is in accord with the knowledge of the day.[53]

Communal norms (i.e., reality maps) or (post) "halakha" (Jewish law and practice) in its widest sense are forged through what Schachter-Shalomi calls 'shared consensus', a modern version of the medieval scholastic category of the 'consensus of the pious'. 'What I am trying to say is that the pious of our time are identified by the way in which they bring Jewish spiritual practice out into the world; they way they make it come alive'.[54] These norms and practices become true when they express the pious values of those who hold them—values that are intended to express a love of God, however conceived.

For Schachter-Shalomi these reality-maps are epochal in nature and work through historical periods cultivated by the ethos of a society at a particular stage in its history. This reality map theory reflects the spirit of what Cornel West might mean when he writes,

> […] once one gives up on the search for foundations and the quest for certainty, human inquiry into truth and knowledge shifts to the social and communal circumstances under which persons can communicate and cooperate in the process of acquiring knowledge. What was once purely epistemological now highlights the values and operations of power requisite for the human production of truth and knowledge.[55]

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[52] Schachter-Shalomi, 'God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown'. Cf. Schachter-Shalomi, *Paradigm Shift*, 299–308.

[53] Schachter-Shalomi, 'God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown', 3.

[54] Schachter-Shalomi with Siegel, *Integral Halachah*, 49.

[55] West, 'On Prophetic Pragmatism', 151.

More directly, Schachter-Shalomi's reality maps are an amalgam of the medieval kabbalistic notion of 'world-cycles' with New Age astrological models of epochal history and illustration what Catherine Albanese calls the 'combinative' dimension of American metaphysical religion. Human creativity and theological innovation function best in the transition from one epoch to another. In many cases the transition is initiated by one individual whose own experience breaks free of one reality map in search of another to conform more readily to his or her experience. 'The Copernican-like revolutions of the diaspora, or physics, could hardly be conceived by the reality-maps that came before. So the generation living at the end of a paradigm, reaches out in openness, seeking genuine response, and received not living words, but an apparently condescending recapitulation'.[56] That is, in other cases, the tension is born at a grass-roots level, where segments of a population (usually the young) feel trapped by the confines of an old paradigm that no longer conforms with their experience of the world. 'For when the reality map no longer serves the needs of its adherents, they quite naturally feel betrayed by it. This is the angry rebellion of youth against the religion of childhood'.[57] Schachter-Shalomi reads the *zimzum* controversy in this framework using it as a metaphysical template to illustrate the emergence of a new reality map by extending an old paradigm until it breaks.

Toward the end of his rendition of the Hasidic approach he writes,

> At this point, it will be easy to have forgotten how we got here, and why. And some may be asking again, "What is the purpose of a metaphor of divine lack?" Well, we started-out to explain how an infinite can become finite… and we have succeeded, though it is not easy to see […]
>
> This is what we have been building to […] this space, void of God, is only 'dark' and 'vacated' with respect to us […] For God, it is still light, as though *zimzum* had never taken place. This is all to say that the "withdrawal" was not necessary for God, but for us. It is the hiding of God that allows us to perceive ourselves as separate, and thus also allowing us to build a convincing and difficult barrier to be overcome. The

[56] Schachter-Shalomi with Siegel, *Integral Halacha*, 3.

[57] Schachter-Shalomi, 'God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown'. It is significant to note here that Hasidism was largely an adolescent movement (albeit the term 'adolescent' may be a bit anachronistic). Many of those who became great Hasidic masters came to Hasidism quite young (between the ages of 15–20) although it needs to be noted that the average life-span among Jews in eastern Europe at that time was probably around 45 years old. At any rate, this is largely an unexamined dimension of Hasidic Judaism. See Rotenberg, *Dialogue with Deviance*.

> greater the barrier, the greater the wholeness that can come of its being overcome. In actuality, there is no separation from God—God is here and now, in this very place—"No place is empty of Him."[58]

I find this conclusion somewhat ambiguous. Does it simply reiterate the Hasidic notion of perspectivalism (*eyn sof*—'*or eyn sof*) or does it move beyond that to a truly pluralistic pantheism? It arguably could be read both ways. I would like to point to two or three nuances here that I believe move us beyond the Hasidic rendering of *zimzum* to a new place –Hasidism's 'fourth turning'.[59] First, there is no sense whatsoever that "our perception" is illusory or false. The human self-fashioning as "separate" (or, in James' language, independent) is not pejorative but, in fact, positive—it is an expression of "truth". The question is: what is the barrier erected and what does it mean to overcome it? Is the barrier our separateness, which is overcome to produce unity with the theistic God? Or, is the barrier to overcome the need for the absolute at all, leaving us with a God who is intimate and present in the world? By concluding with the zoharic phrase 'No place is void of Him' ('*leit atar panui minei*—in the Zohar this is uttered in what we might call a panentheistic key)[60] is Schachter-Shalomi turning our relationship to the divine fully within God's pluralistic presence in the world? If so, he has broken with the Hasidic rendition, or perhaps over-extended it, to a new theological construction. This would then serve as the metaphysical grounding of his Paradigm Shift Judaism. If not, I cannot see what has been accomplished? Below I will suggest another alternative—something between Hasidism's pantheistic monism and a full-blown pantheism using James' category of 'piecemeal supernaturalism'.

6. Renewal's Post-Monotheism and James' 'Piecemeal Supernaturalism'

Elsewhere I suggested calling Jewish Renewal's theology post-monotheistic, a combination of nature religions, far Eastern non- or poly-

[58] Schachter-Shalomi, 'God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown', end.

[59] Schachter-Shalomi, 'Future of Neo-Hasidism'. This essay was originally a talk delivered via conference video in 2003 at the '2003 Neo-Hasidism Conference' sponsored by the Institute for Jewish Spirituality at the JCC in Manhattan, New York.

[60] See, for example, in *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* 122b.

theism, transcendentalism, Jungian and neo-Jungian psychology combined with a strong reading of the Jewish mystical spiritualism of kabbalah and Hasidism.[61] The social and cultural climate of late twentieth-century America is quite evident in Renewal's post-monotheistic approach. American late pluralism and multiculturalism along with New Age theories of holistic healing influenced by early twentieth-century spiritualism and New Thought (even or precisely among mainstream Christians and Jews) created fertile soil for Renewal's alternative Judaism. Post-monotheism is distinguished here from neo-paganism in that the latter has, in one sense, a restorative orientation seeking to retrieve a pre-monotheistic paradigm that was corrupted by the (patriarchal) domination of monotheism.[62] For Schachter-Shalomi, post-monotheism is constructive and not restorative; it attempts to "correct" monotheism and not reinstate pre-monotheistic religion common among some contemporary neo-pagan movements.

It is no accident that Schachter-Shalomi describes his movement as a 'Paradigm Shift', a term borrowed from Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Among many others in the New Age community he readily wed science (mostly popular science) to metaphysics (returning to a model reminiscent of Platonists undone by Newton and the moderns) using Kuhn's definition of science to describe the history of spirituality.[63] I describe Schachter-Shalomi's use of paradigm shift here as post-monotheistic because it abandons what some view as the negative dimensions or consequences of classical monotheisms replacing them with more universalist and tolerant spiritual alternatives while retaining monotheism's basic structure.

The religions of the East adopted by American spirituality functioned as a theological bridge between classical Jewish monotheism and what became Renewal's post-monotheistic approach, a move that was fully a part of the shifting American religious culture at that time.[64] But Schachter-Shalomi does not simply adapt American Buddhism as a template for Jewish Renewal. He argues that American Buddhism

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[61] See my 'Jewish Renewal, American Spiritualism, and Postmonotheistic Theology'.

[62] See, for example, Miller, *New Polytheism*, esp. 36–50 and 81–94; Hillman, *Essential James Hillman*, 36–49 ('Many Gods, Many Persons').

[63] See, for example, Marilyn Ferguson's *Aquarian Conspiracy*, 119–144.

[64] On the phenomenon of the east in American religious and intellectual culture more generally, see Cox, *Turning East*.

did for contemporary Judaism 'what Saint Paul did to Torah',[65] that is, it severed Buddhist theology from its ritualistic, devotional, and disciplinary Eastern roots.[66] In part American Buddhism gave us a "Protestant" Buddhism that he configured to his paradigm shift vision of a new Judaism.[67] This approach is not simply about acknowledging the truths of other religions; it is about creating permeable boundaries such that ritualistic and devotional confluence and borrowing can become normative.

Without necessarily intending to do so, the Buddhist renaissance in America served as a transition for some Jews from monotheism to pantheism, from a theology where God exists but is distant to a God who is an organic part of creation.[68] The organicity or 'Gaia consciousness' refracts nature religion and pantheism through a revised monotheistic lens (Schachter-Shalomi's deep respect for Native American Religion confirms this).[69] This all moves decidedly away from the patriarchal roots of biblical monotheism, at least as understood by the rabbinic and post-rabbinic tradition.

Schachter-Shalomi argues that this new world-view is, in fact, deeply embedded in the kabbalistic tradition if we are willing to read these texts outside their classic monotheistic interpretation. He writes, 'It can make of God no less than pantheism […] This is what I have in mind when I say, "No less than […]", that God can be no less than pantheism. If pantheism is a given, what is already there as a minimum, than what else can we say about God?'[70] The 'what else' in this sentence is

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[65] Personal communication with Schachter-Shalomi, 2006.

[66] For a description of a very un-American form of Buddhism by a scholar from the west who spent eighteen years in a Buddhist monastery, see Dreyfus, *Sound of Two Hands Clapping*.

[67] This is also obviously the case in American Christianity. See Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 330–393.

[68] See, for example, in Boorstein, *Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist*, 5–12, 41–59; Kamenetz, *Jew in the Lotus*.

[69] It is significant to note here that there has historically been and remains today a wide-spread myth among spiritualists in America, both white and Native American, that the Native American population are part of the lost tribes of Israel or survivors of the deluge in the time of Noah.

[70] 'God Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown'. Compare this with James in *A Pluralistic Universe*, p. 135: 'I propose to you that we should discuss the question of God without entangling ourselves in advance in the monistic assumption. Is it probable that there is any superhuman consciousness at all, in the first place? When that is settled, the further question whether its form be monistic or pluralistic is in order'. Cf. ibid. p. 143: 'We are indeed internal parts of God and not external creations, on any possible reading of the panpsychic system. Yet because God is not absolute, but

where monotheism lives or dies for Renewal. But Schachter-Shalomi argues that we cannot say anything about God before we acknowledge that God is everything (thus adopting a strong metaphorical/pantheistic reading of *zimzum*)—and once we use that as a beginning classical monotheism is problematized.

While much has been made of Renewal's use of far Eastern religions, less known is that many of Renewal's ideas are strikingly similar to the American philosophical tradition illustrated in William James' work. Above I explored some ways philosophical pragmatism informs Schachter-Shalomi's notion of truth. Here I would like to briefly examine Renewal's postmonotheistic approach by using James' category of 'piecemeal supernaturalism', as discussed in the postscript to his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

In the postscript to *Varieties*, perhaps James' most popular book, he brings his discussion about religious experience to a close by once again attacking rationalism and idealism as absolutist and thus deficient philosophical positions. Here he turns his attack to the question of what he calls 'refined supernaturalism' which he claims is another way of expressing philosophical and theological theism. Wanting to avoid the accusation that he is simply a pantheist who denies a transcendent being, James argues that his radical empiricism can, and must, accept some form of supernaturalism since human beings do have experiences that seem to point to something beyond reason or sense (an exploration of this phenomenon is, in fact, the main subject of the book).[71] James writes,

> Nevertheless, in the interest of intellectual clearness, I feel bound to say that religious experience, as we have studied it, cannot be cited as unequivocally supporting the infinitist belief. The only thing that it unequivocally testifies to is that we can experience union with something larger that ourselves and in that union find our greatest peace.[72]

In *A Pluralistic Universe* he similarly writes, '[…] the only way to escape from all this is to be frankly pluralistic and assume that the superhuman consciousness, however vast it may be, has itself an external

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he himself a part when the system is conceived pluralistically, his functions can be taken as not wholly dissimilar to those of the other smaller parts,—as similar to our functions consequently'.

[71] See Putnam, 'James' Theory of Truth', 174.

[72] James, *Varieties*, 395.

environment, and consequently is finite'.[73] He offers us a category he calls 'piecemeal supernaturalism', defined as '[…] admit[ing] miracles and providential leanings […] find[ing] no intellectual difficulty in mixing the ideal and the real world together by interpolating influences from the ideal region among the forces that casually determine the real world's details'.[74] The point of these experiences for James is not that we have them but that they 'eventually manifest themselves objectively and thus can be corroborated as the fruits of religion'.[75] James does not use these experiences to make the mystics' claim about the falseness of the world. Rather, they are part of the larger scope of how human beings experience the world and thus they function to enrich the way we choose to live in the world.[76] These experiences become part, as they must, of his radical empiricism. In this sense, the supernatural is simply one piece of a larger mosaic that contributes to human flourishing. It is not any truer or more real than the empirical data we absorb every day, nor is it necessarily the root of that empirical data. And James is not wed to a connection between piecemeal supernaturalism and monotheism.

> Meanwhile, the practical needs and experiences of religion seem to me sufficiently met by the belief that beyond each man and in a fashion continuous with him there exists a larger power which is friendly to him and to his ideals […] Anything larger will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next step. It need not be infinite, it need not be solitary. It might conceivably even be only a larger and more godlike self of which the present self would then be but a mutilated expression and the universe might conceivably be a collection of such selves, of different degrees of inclusiveness, with no absolute unity realized in it at all. Thus would a sort of polytheism return upon us—a polytheism which I do not on this occasion defend, for my only aim at present is to keep testimony of religious experience clearly within its proper bounds.[77]

Above I argued that Schachter-Shalomi is trying to move beyond the pantheistic monism of kabbalah and Hasidism but, like James (perhaps for different reasons) does not want to abandon the supernatu-

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[73] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, 140.
[74] Ibid., 392.
[75] Lamberth, *William James*, 138.
[76] In *A Pluralistic Universe*, he writes, 'The absolute is not the impossible being I once thought it was […] It is only the extravagant claims of coercive necessity on the absolute's part that have to be denied by a *a priori* logic' (p. 133).
[77] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 396. Cf. *Pluralistic Universe*, 140.

ral entirely in favor of an orthodox pantheism. Unwittingly, perhaps, Schachter-Shalomi may be advocating a kind of 'piecemeal supernaturalism' I call in relation to Renewal, 'post-monotheism', a theology that can bear the weight of supernatural experience but cannot allow it to dictate the truth in the world as experienced by humans. This is different than the Habad distinction between *eyn sof* and its light ('*or eyn sof*). That position still maintains an *eyn sof* that is All and remains the defining category of everything else. James would surely see that as simply another version of the refined supernaturalism he rejects and I think Schachter-Shalomi may very well agree. Such a stance may get us out of a theological conundrum but it does not solve the problem of how truth underlies human experience.

7. Conclusion

Schachter-Shalomi's attempt to leap outside conventional "monotheism" is still a work in progress. Israelite monotheism (the extent to which it is, in fact, monotheistic) posits God as creator and also gives us a God who elects one people (Israel). Hence monotheism can be, and has been, a weapon to discredit other claims of revelatory truth. One can even go further to argue that it naturally functions that way: monotheistic religions, even those that are ostensibly "universalistic", are wed to the notion of exclusivity and exclusion.[78] In a lecture 'The Future of Neo-Hasidism' delivered in 2003 and published in 2007 Schachter-Shalomi argues that Renewal is the fourth turning of Hasidism as it enters its 'post-triumphalist stage'.[79] That is, given the global consciousness of human civilization we can more readily adopt the truths of another religion for our own spiritual practice. In affect this suggests a deep metaphysical pluralism, a rejection of the exclusivist notion of election, and a sincere celebration of other's theological claims as true and not merely tolerated in the spirit of camaraderie. Noteworthy here is the fact that while many Jewish movements today espouse a commitment to pluralism only Renewal, as far as I know, is willing to seriously experiment with constructing a pluralistic metaphysics to accompany that social commitment. One could argue, in fact, that social and even theological pluralism without re-vamping the

[78] On this see my *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 143–195.
[79] Schachter-Shalomi, 'Future of Neo-Hasidism'.

old monotheism of classical Judaism is merely a well-meaning attempt to fill old casks with new wine.

Like Jewish Reform (perhaps with Reconstructionism the last great experiment in Jewish theology in America), Renewal uses Jewish nomenclature to describe the global project of building a better world (*tikun ʿolam*). However, Renewal is making a more radical metaphysical claim than classical Reform. Using kabbalistic imagery, Schachter-Shalomi puts it this way in classic pragmatist fashion.

> The *malchut* of the past has collapsed; the *malchut* of the old paradigm no longer works *or is what we really want* (my italics). We are involved in *binyan malchut ha-shekhina* (constructing a space for a new dwelling of the divine, *my translation*); we are trying to help the Earth rebuild her organicity and establish a healthy governing principle.[80]

This illustrates one of the major shifts in Jewish Renewal from traditional Judaism and traditional Judaism's response to the Holocaust.[81] Maintenance and reconstructing the past are no longer the goals. Survival for its own sake is insufficient. Abraham Joshua Heschel stated this quite succinctly in a 1965 address to the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in Montreal when he said, 'There are two words I would like to strike from our vocabulary; "surveys" and "survival." […] The significance of Judaism does not lie in its being conducive to the mere survival of a particular people but rather in being a source of spiritual wealth, a source of meaning relevant to all peoples'.[82] This statement brims with an American spirit that also captures the spirit of Renewal.

While Renewal readily invokes the names of Hasidic masters such as Israel Baal Shem Tov, the Seer of Lublin, and Nahman of Bratslav, it is just as influenced by the voices of Emerson, Whitman, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, Thomas Wentworth Higgenson, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Thomas Merton, the Beats, and many other

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[80] Ibid.

[81] See Schachter-Shalomi with Siegel, *Integral Halachah*, vi; Magid, 'Holocaust and Jewish Renewal'. In a lecture at the 2008 OHALA conference on 7 January 2008 in Boulder, Colorado, he said, using the computer nomenclature he often deploys, that one can no longer speak of updating the older system of Torah because the Holocaust crashed the entire operating system. We have to therefore construct an entirely new operating system.

[82] Cited in Schrage, 'Abraham Joshua Heschel'.

American spiritualists.[83] More pointedly, Schachter-Shalomi articulates in a distinctly Jewish voice the pragmatism and "sympathetic" religiosity espoused by William James in the early decades of the twentieth century. A thorough exploration of Jewish Renewal and its indebtedness to pragmatism and the American philosophical tradition would require going deep into the subversive spirituality and philosophical teachings of the American frontier and not only the Hasidic masters of the Jewish Pale of Settlement who, in the end, chose conformity over radical critique and never succeeded in moving beyond the theistic framework of the old paradigm they initially challenged. The trajectory of American spirituality, philosophical pragmatism and New Age religion being two noteworthy articulations, is the very well-spring of Renewal's project and identity. It may even be its forgotten ancestor. In the final analysis Jewish Renewal is as much an American Judaism as the Judaisms of rabbis Isaac Meyer Wise, Mordecai Kaplan, or Solomon Schechter, and as much an American religion as the spirituality of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, or Benjamin Franklin.[84]

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[83] Schachter-Shalomi had an on-going relationship with Thomas Merton and visited him at Merton's monastery Gethsemane in Bardstown Kentucky numerous times in the late 1950's and early 1960's. There is a collection of their correspondence in the Merton archives in Gethsemane. In 2002, I was involved with a conference organized by Edward Kaplan of Brandeis University on Merton and Judaism. For the publication of the papers see Kaplan et al. (eds.), *Merton and Judaism*. In preparation for the conference, Professor Kaplan and I visited Schachter-Shalomi in Boulder, Colorado, and videotaped a two hour interview with him about his relationship with Merton. A shorter version of the video interview was screened at the 2002 conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

[84] In his *American Judaism: A History*, Jonathan Sarna does indeed pick up on some of these threads, especially on pp. 322–355. He writes about Schachter-Shalomi on pp. 349–355. I argued here that this phenomenon goes far deeper into the American intellectual and spiritual tradition than has been previously noted.

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CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MYSTICISM AND PALESTINIAN SUICIDE BOMBING

Gideon Aran

This article deals with kabbalah and modernity in contemporary Israel, and dwells mostly on manifestations of kabbalah in the public domain, which is obsessed with issues of national security. More specifically, I shall try to lay the groundwork for general conclusions about the status of kabbalah in the Jewish world of today, based on the connection between kabbalah and suicide terrorists. I shall do so by close examination of the way a particular religious group handles the tragic consequences of the phenomenon of terrorism.

When we speak about popularization of the kabbalah and its present-day relevance—and mainly about the appearance of the kabbalah in Israeli society and politics, and the appearance of Israeli society and politics in the kabbalah—we do not refer to Kabbalah often spelled with a capital K. In other words, we do not deal here with a systematic and crystallized body of knowledge, but with a collection of metaphors, idioms, stories, formulas, and non-clarified general ideas. Moreover, the kabbalistic concept dealt with here is mostly latent, mentioned only incidentally and inadvertently. Sometimes the kabbalists to be described refuse to admit that their interest is kabbalistic, and abstain from calling their kabbalah by name. I may add that as far as the "Kabbalah" plays a role in contemporary Israeli discourse, it is mainly a relatively simplistic version of the "Kabbalah" of Ha'Ari (Isaac Ashkenazi Luria). This choice may be explained by the collectivistic emphasis of Lurianic mysticism and its messianic and nationalistic character, easily amenable to translation and application to Israeli and Middle Eastern reality.[1]

[1] See Jonathan Garb's research, which focuses on some developments in the Israeli world of "Kabbalah" today whose complexity, style, and method may be considered as a continuation of classical "Kabbalah" trends (Garb, *The Chosen will Become Herds*).

1. The Presence of Kabbalah in the Jewish Nation-State

It is well known that religion and nationalism are interlocked in Judaism; and in Israel, religion and state are inseparable. One of the outcomes of this complex situation is the significant presence of religion in the public domain. Jewish religion—or more precisely, Israeli orthodoxy of all shades—intervenes in all issues of the social and political agenda, even those not obviously "religious", including issues of national security derived from the Middle Eastern conflict. The connection between religion and a politics of war and peace is usually ascribed to modern Israeli orthodoxy, especially to religious Zionism in the style of the Torah Faithful emanating from the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva and its extensions: orthodox believers dedicated to settlement in the Palestinian-populated West Bank. Their positions on strategic and tactical issues, especially defendable borders and sovereignty over the land, are backed by Talmudic reasoning and by quotations of halachic rules and rabbinical verdicts. However, there is a kabbalistic layer in their reference to such issues of nation and state—e.g. the exact location of the security fence dividing between Israel and the Palestinian Authority—that, in spite of being mostly invisible, is easily identifiable. The teaching of Rav (Abraham Isaac) Kook which guides the national-religious sector in the religious and political preferences of most members is an important link in the Jewish mystical chain.[2]

Since the kabbalah has been influential in Judaism over the last few generations and has had a revival in Israel, it is only natural for it to leave its mark on the public domain here—although most of the population is not really orthodox.[3] We find evidence of kabbalistic influence in Israel in social and political arenas, some piquant and even scandalous—such as the use of blessings and amulets of famous kabbalists in order to mobilize voters for parliamentary parties. In a deeper sense, the kabbalah subtly directs Jewish individuals, institutions, and

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[2] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, first lecture; Ish-Shalom, *Rabbi Kook between Rationalism and Mysticism*; Rotenstreich, *Jewish Thought in Our Age*. We should differentiate between the mystical teaching of Rav Kook and "Kookism"—a popular version with a national-political tendency of Rabbi Kook's original teaching, interpreted and practiced since the last third of the twentieth century in Zionist yeshivas, mainly in settlements beyond the Green Line. See Aran, 'From Religious Zionism to Zionist Religion'.

[3] The distribution of the Jewish population in Israel: 50% secular, 30% "traditional", 20% religious (just under 10% of them Haredi).

religious sectors in Israel in forming their stands about controversial issues. The two outstanding religious movements in the Jewish world over the past three decades—Gush Emunim and Habad—enjoy a high public profile and hold blatant political views on the one hand, yet have a mystical component on the other hand. These movements play a crucial role in formulating an old-new Jewish theology (suffused with messianic spirit), and consequently in shaping an ideology focusing, among other topics, upon Israeli relations with the Palestinians.[4]

Several examples point to a connection between the kabbalah and contemporary Israeli existence which is centered around the conflict. A typical and interesting case, though little known, is that of Rabbi Itzhak Ginsburgh and the growing circle of disciples who worship him and act upon his inspiration. Ginsburgh is a charismatic rabbi who has become popular mostly among young people in the periphery beyond the Green Line. He is a repentant of North American origin, a former scientist who developed an original mystical-messianic system rooted in Habad writings on the one hand and Rav Kook's writings on the other—along with other influences, even touches of New Age ideas.[5] Although Ginsburgh's kabbalah is quite complex, he has contributed to its spread in the religious and born-again Jewish circles. Ginsburgh's kabbalistic lessons and writings, as well as his personal manner, place him between Hasidic ultra-orthodoxy and nationalistic neo-orthodoxy. His religious logic hides an extremely radical right-wing geo-political agenda. He encourages, among others, the settlement project in Greater Israel even at the price of severe damage to the basic rights of local Arabs. Ginsburgh denies the Palestinian rights of property, and upholds the distinction between (Arab) blood and (Jewish) blood. He has called for a campaign of vengeance against the Palestinians for their terror acts, and even publicly praised the 'holy martyr' Dr. Baruch Goldstein—a Jewish terrorist settler who entered the mosque at the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron and killed nearly thirty Moslems while at prayer.

The mutual connection between kabbalah and modern politics in Israel has two aspects. First, as already stated, we may identify in the Israeli scene of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century,

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[4] Aran, 'Jewish-Zionist Fundamentalism'; Ravitzky, 'Contemporary Lubavitch Hasidic Movement'.

[5] Ginsburgh, *Barukh Hagever*; Ginsburgh, *Panim El Panim*.

in the space between culture and politics—or rather in the political culture—the fingerprints of a rather traditional Jewish mysticism. Two poles may be identified in the range of uses and misuses of the kabbalah. On the one end—in official expressions of state leaders and spokesmen, and in popular use—a vague use of symbols, general ideas, and phrases from the Zohar, from the teachings of Ha-Ari and other classical sources; on the other end, activist interpretations of esoteric kabbalistic texts used as a platform for violent illegal cells undermining the authorities of law and order. Second, political, national, and military concepts and values are infused into religious thought and practice, as well as into oral texts or teachings which—although not yet widely acknowledged or of canonic status—are already an integral part of what may be taken as proto-kabbalah or neo-kabbalah. Thus, kabbalistic components affect not only religious but also national life in Israel; while religious life, kabbalistically inclined, is imbued with a contemporary Israeli spirit.

The ultra-orthodox are also becoming interested and involved in national and regional politics. If in the past they tended to take a passive, pragmatic and "dovish" stand regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, recently, they have turned to the opposite option—an activist, right-wing "hawkish" stand. Ultra-orthodox interest in national issues requires that they adopt a religiosity that can stand up against the modern secular nationalism of the Zionists. To this end, they recruit the kabbalistic layers already existing at the sub-surface of ultra-orthodox Judaism.

I shall focus here on 'Zaka' (Hebrew: זק"א, an abbreviation for *Zihuy Korbanot Ason*, literally: 'Disaster Victim Identification'), a leading actor in the growing integration of ultra-orthodoxy into the daily life of the state. Terror—Zaka's specialty—is a significant factor through which the ultra-orthodox sector connects with the modern, secular national majority. Zaka develops and provides a religiosity whose center is terrorism. There is of course in Zaka's terror religiosity a halachic aspect, but also a clear Jewish mystical aspect.

2. On Israeli Ultra-Orthodoxy

Zaka is a Haredi organization, i.e. it belongs to Jewish ultra-orthodoxy in Israel. Its motto is Haredi, its leadership and most of its active membership are Haredi. They dress and talk in a Haredi style, and such are

also their religious and political standpoints. Zaka is an offshoot of the distinct and secluded Haredi world, infiltrating modern secular Israel. Thus, Zaka heads the changes in the status of the Haredim in Israeli society, as well as changes in Haredi culture itself.[6]

Haredi is a self-given, proudly carried epithet. It derives from the root h'r'd'—'fear' or 'awe'—and means God-fearing. The Haredi stereotypic image is based on their special appearance: men are bearded with side-locks, wearing a black hat, white shirt and a dark coat summer and winter; women dress in clothes that hide sexual characteristics, including a head covering, a maxi skirt and long-sleeved buttoned-up blouse. This uniform appearance manifests a traditionalist identity. Traditionalism is by definition a modern phenomenon. It began in the Jewish case a hundred to two hundred years ago, when the Jewish community in Europe disintegrated following emigration to the west, political emancipation, the Enlightenment (*Haskalah*), massive secularization, and assimilation. A reaction arose then, mostly against those forces for change that retained their Jewish identity: religious reform on the one hand and territorial nationalism on the other. Some Jews—choosing voluntarily and consciously against other, quite attractive options—preferred to adopt a conservative religious path which they termed the most authentic Judaism, the consistent follower and legitimate heir to historic Judaism. This novel phenomenon—if only by acknowledging changing reality and opposing it—received the title "orthodoxy".[7]

All varieties of orthodoxy defined their Judaism according to the halakha, and followed the Torah and its commandments (*mitsvot*). At an early stage they were divided into neo-orthodox who adopted modern characteristics as long as these did not contradict the halakha (e.g., local dress and language, study of the professions as long as Kashrut and the Sabbath could be observed) and the ultra-orthodox who opposed in the name of the Torah any kind of change, even that which was not forbidden by the original sacred texts and did not seem to be directly related to religion. This militant approach was translated on the one hand into a conception of Jewish society in late Middle Ages in Europe as an ideal to be followed; and on the other, into a total rejection of hegemonic values and norms in contemporary culture

[6] Sivan & Kaplan (eds.), *Israeli Haredim*.
[7] Katz, 'Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective'.

(science and arts, consumerism and entertainment, as well as liberalism, democracy, and nationalism). The ultra-orthodox also criticized Jews whose religiosity appeared compromising, such as the national religious, despite their strict observance of the Torah and all commandments.

The ultra-orthodox are concentrated in homogeneous communities, secluded from their surroundings. They usually live within the metropolis of tolerant affluent society, mostly in Europe and North America, and lately also in Israel, which has recently achieved numerical and moral dominance in the Haredi world. These are actually ghettos in which all religious, social and material needs are supplied; and private as well as public life are subordinated to the authoritative rule of the rabbinate and to effective social supervision.

The Haredi Jews are a recent version of ultra-orthodoxy. Their number in Israel is about 700,000, i.e. about 9 percent of the Jewish population. They are not a monolithic bloc, forming many groups and sub-groups who persevere in old controversies, theological or ethnic-geographical (e.g. Hasidim vs. Lithuanians, or Ashkenazi vs. Oriental); or who split off recently on the basis of conflicting political interests, competition for funds or prestige, and variations in style or mode of life (e.g. Neturei Karta, Satmar, Aguda, and Degel Ha'Torah). Differentiation between them may be made according to their accommodation to their modern surroundings, and their partnership in the Israeli public and institutions. Most Haredis are reserved about the state, refusing for example mandatory service in the armed forces. Some Haredi sectors are extreme in negating Zionism and Zionists, to the point of turning Israel's Independence Day into a day of mourning. The anti-Zionist attitude was until recently a focus of identity and a tenet of belief, but has now undergone some change. In growing Haredi circles there is an emotional and ideological rapprochement to Israeli individuals and public, and even de-facto recognition of Israeli authorities. This is expressed by political participation, which began with minimal involvement in elections and has reached full membership in the government and administration that implied unqualified solidarity and responsibility. After they had gained a sizable political influence, they also achieved substantial financial support that enabled their vast institution building, and even raised their standard of living. Thus, Haredism is undergoing significant transformation, often overtly denied and despite inner opposition. This is apparent in the status of women, the attitude toward employment, leisure activities,

and the use of advanced technologies. However, the Haredis are still a unique sector, haughty, cautious, and conservative. One of their characteristics is the very high birth-rate (7.4 births per woman; a dozen children in a family is not uncommon), and low economic status (60% are under the poverty line, the highest ratio of people per room, and the lowest ratio of private cars and TV sets).

Contrary to the prevalent belief that the Haredis attempt to implant, today's ultra-orthodoxy is not a true representation of past Judaism, but a revolutionary creation—a religious peak, unprecedented in earlier or recent history. Its most convincing expression is the novel phenomenon called "society of learners". Yeshiva studies as a way of life and a full-time occupation was rare even in golden ages of Judaism, characteristic of a highly intellectual and motivated small minority of privileged status and sound economic background. This elitist sect, or *avant-garde* order, was a paragon for the whole community, most of whose members worked for their livelihood and could only afford to engage in studies in their spare time. Today, all of males aged 4 to 40 spend more than twelve hours a day in the yeshiva. This institution has become the focus of Haredi life, where one learns—from books and rabbis—"to be Jewish". Jewish religiosity is no longer an exclusive and self-evident reality which one learns mimetically from one's immediate surroundings, from street, home, kitchen, and synagogue. The yeshiva is not only a learning framework but the axis of family, social and political life, regulating also aspects of livelihood and leisure time. The consequences are far-reaching. On the one hand, the yeshiva has become a total institution, with impressive achievements in socialization and social control, and its heads have an almost papal authority. On the other hand, the yeshiva gathers into its fold many whose individual traits do not suit such a demanding regime. As a result, people appear within the society of learners who seek release from their frustrations in alternative ways, not all acceptable to the community. Along with the appearance of disciplinary problems and the development of novel ways to express manliness, curiosity, and initiative, there appears a trend of religious extremism. This is expressed mainly by strict exegesis of the halakha. Jews in former generations could not have measured up to the high standards of rabbinical rulings of the last decades. Paradoxically, the setting of the modern, affluent, and technologically advanced city within a free and tolerant welfare state seems ideal for religious radicalization in the Haredi style. In general, Haredi society—basically voluntary, homogeneous, and selective—is

more radical than the traditional Jewish community, which could not have afforded to become radical for fear that it could not maintain internal cohesion and adaptation to the external world.[8]

3. Zaka, Death Management, and True Kindness

Suicide terrorism (henceforth ST) has cast a shadow on the world over the last generation. The horror and fear of ST have had an acute and especially traumatic effect in contemporary Israel. As elsewhere in the world, ST in this region of Jewish-Palestinian conflict poses challenges to individuals, nations and states, communities and cultures. ST raises issues of physical security and well-being that require solutions at the political, tactical and strategic levels. ST also raises ideological, philosophical and ethical questions. It is only natural that religion confronts the issue of ST directly related to matters of life and death, suffering and justice. In any case, ST is identified with religion—more precisely with specific religious groups—as it usually appears in the context of inter-religious conflicts and its initiators, implementers, and supporters proclaim their religious motives and aims.[9]

The various religions must account for ST not only when they support it but also when they are uninvolved observers, especially when it is aimed at them and their supporters. Much has been written about the religiosity of terrorists and their reference groups; but what about the religiosity of the victims of ST, and that of those dealing with its deadly outcomes? Islamic ST has received much research attention because of its global and spectacular dimensions;[10] but what about the Jewish side of the ST equation? In this case, we should direct our attention away from the religious sources that motivate and justify ST; but rather describe and analyze the ways religion tackles its grave impact.

In the arena of Palestinian ST in Israel—as is the case with terrorist activity in other places—several factors play a role in addition to the

[8] Heilman & Friedman, 'Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews'.

[9] On terrorism in general and religious terrorism in particular, see Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*; Kushner, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*; Turk, 'Sociology of Terrorism'. On suicide terrorism, see Bloom, *Dying to Kill*; Pape, *Dying to Win*; Barlow, *Dead for Good*.

[10] On Islamic Palestinian suicide bombing, see Shay, *Shahids*; Israeli, *Islamikaze*; Berko, *Path to Paradise*.

terrorist himself and his direct victims: emergency forces dealing with medical rescue and evacuation, police forces, intelligence agents and sabotage experts. Another factor, unique to the Israeli case, is known as Zaka, a voluntary organization which has acquired a monopoly and expertise in handling terror victims' bodies. Zaka experts are among the first to arrive at the scene, usually only minutes after the explosion, and are responsible for locating body parts, collecting and identifying them, preparing them for burial in a way that respects the dead, and dealing with them according to Jewish halakha. This task bears a central significance from both national and civil society aspects.[11] It also has an important and acknowledged religious significance. Zaka's self-, as well as public image, is that of carrying out a "sacred mission".

Zaka boasts of the epithet "True Kindness" in its internal discourse and in the community with whom it is identified. This is the traditional way of grasping the care for the dead, who can never repay the grace accorded to them. Therefore, from the point of view of the granter, this grace is pure and far-reaching. Zaka volunteers are well known to the public and to TV viewers at home and abroad as those bizarre figures, bearded with side-curls, in white overalls under glowing yellow vests, wearing overshoes and gloves, leaning over chunks of torn and burned flesh and pools of blood, holding scrapers, rolls of paper towels and mostly plastic bags for packing. After collecting the bodies and body parts, they try to match and identify them; then place them in numbered bags and move them to the Institute of Forensic Medicine or to the cemeteries. After the other forces have left, they stay for long hours to ascertain that not even the smallest bit of flesh or blood stain remains in the area.

Zaka enjoys fame and prestige, free access to high-echelon officials, and plentiful funding. The organization has received semi-official recognition from the authorities and cooperates with such official bodies as the Israeli Red Magen David and the Civil Guard. Zaka first appeared after the terrorist acts at the beginning of the 1990s, grew and became institutionalized with the waves of terror at the beginning of this century. Today it numbers a few hundred volunteers, all men, distributed in branches all over the country but mainly in the towns, with headquarters in Jerusalem. The organization puts its volunteers through intensive training, uses up-to-date equipment and technol-

[11] Stadler, ben Ari & Masterman, 'Terror, Aid and Organization'.

ogy, effective organizational methods, and smooth public relations. The volunteers' routine has a semi-military flavor, and the organizational culture has elements of "machoistic" action. With recent decline in terror activities, the organization uses its methods and expertise, its enthusiasm and resources, to deal with cases of "unnatural death", i.e. mainly traffic and work accidents, natural calamities, and suicides. Still, ST is the glorious peak of Zaka's world.

4. Jewish Death, Bad Death, Halakha, and Myth

In order to study the Palestinian terror in Israel, and especially to understand Jewish religious confrontation with terror, I focused my empirical research on the actual scene of terrorist acts. Needless to say, this is a very problematic site for research. I chose Zaka as the instrument through which I could approach the scene of terror as closely as possible (in terms of time and space). I observed the scene from behind Zaka's back. Zaka plays an active role in shaping the impression of a ST event, as well as being an authentic witness and original interpreter of the ST.

I am now in the process of finishing an ethnography of Zaka, based on field research over a few years. My sociological-anthropological work included dozens of in-depth interviews with the leaders and active members of the organization, with Haredi rabbis and laymen, and with representatives of other organizations and groups dealing with terrorist acts along with Zaka, among them police officers and government officials, physicians, and journalists. I conducted "participant observations" both on the actual ST arenas and in Haredi neighborhoods and yeshivas, in the organization's offices and the homes of members, in lectures and professional training of volunteers, in their feasts and their daily work. I paid special attention to Torah studies, to sermons and discussions by rabbis, and was attuned to halakhic rulings and their rationale. I also conducted a survey and content analysis of Zaka documents, both official and private, for internal and external use. I then examined nearly 100 video films, uncensored and unedited, of Zaka's work on the spot.

Behind the horror, the panic, and the chaos that rule the scene of a terrorist act, I found a deep structure the logic of which is symbolic-ritualistic. I claim that there is a "cult of dismembered limbs"[12] operat-

[12] This is the tentative title for my forthcoming book.

ing on the scene. In the framework of this macabre ritual, Zaka and the suicide terrorist (henceforth STT) play parallel and complementary roles, though mostly unknowingly. Each side's exegesis in this complex ritual absorbs that of the other, and the incident assumes its full significance only in the context of the latent reciprocity of the two opponents.

The ritual of blood drops and bits of flesh that takes place on the ST scene is based on rigorous, binding rules of behavior. The way Zaka deals with the outcomes of an ST is anchored in exact prescriptions. Zaka rabbis dictate halakhic rules for dealing with dead victims. The rules are taught in special lessons, distributed as pamphlets, and rehearsed by the volunteers. The rabbis arrive at the actual scene to ensure that all behave according to the halakha. Sometimes there are unprecedented moments with no rabbinic direction, and the volunteers on the scene turn directly to the Torah authorities (usually by cell-phone) to receive an ad-hoc ruling. These rulings will appear later in periodic leaflets and as the subject matter in training and refresher courses. Thus, a halakhic corpus is gradually assembled, methodical and comprehensive, covering the various aspects of religious confrontation with terror.

As against the richness and dynamic of the Zaka Halakhic corpus, and the place it occupies in the socialization of volunteers and in the public relations of the organization, a parallel corpus is conspicuously absent, that will complete and enhance the ritual aspect and meet the need to anchor the actions in religious thought and endow the patterns of behavior with a conceptual and ideological significance. At first sight there seems to be an asymmetry between the normative and the theological aspects of Zaka. A second look discovers signs of a theology; but these are embryonic, partial, vague, and somewhat repressed and denied. Crystallization of the theology may thus be gradual and delayed, and has yet to assume a final shape.

Terror is a new phenomenon which religious Judaism must face. Its tragic effect is so strong that it is difficult to assume that religious imagination can avoid finding a response that will strive to satisfy believers. The development of a Zaka theology seems to be required in view of the horrible nature of ST and the severe circumstances typical of the context of the religious volunteers' activities.

The scene of a terrorist act is a scene of death; a death most horrible. Death in general is the expertise of the various religions, and the Jewish religion is no exception. Almost everywhere and at all times, death brings the individual and society to religion, and the latter attempts

to alleviate adaptation to this crisis. Even in modern Western society, secular to a large extent, death is usually the natural estate of the clerics. Thus, they are to a large extent priests of death. They have a heritage of belief and religious thought—philosophical or mythological—that endows their ritual activity with meaning.[13]

Death by terror presents religion with a great challenge, and requires of it a quite strenuous and complex mobilization. Death by terror is a "bad death", unexpected, with no apparent reason or justification. It is senseless, without acceptance or preparation on the part of the dying person and his or her immediate surrounding; no social or institutional organizing, no ritual preparation. It is always a timeless death, that of a person who has not fulfilled his or her life. Also, a bad death damages the integrity of the body and destroys its form.[14] A death conceived as "bad" must be "ameliorated", even in retrospect. This can be done both by repairing and reconditioning the (dead) body, and by attaching a convincing purpose to the death, as if it came to fulfill an important mission. A bad death raises the need for interpretation that will explain the existence of evil and wrongdoing that may be understood from it, without denying the existence of a benevolent, protective, almighty, and all-knowing Providence. In other words, a bad death—such as death by terror—requires "theodization". This latter may be supplied by the mystical heritage. The waves of Palestinian ST in Israel are accompanied by the growth of Jewish theodicy of a kabbalistic nature.

Death—especially unnatural one—and mysticism are a natural and easily explainable pair. No other issue in Jewish life is influenced by kabbalah as strongly as the issue of death; all the more so bad death, and there is no worse death than death by ST. An infrastructure of an elaborate heritage of Jewish death serves contemporary kabbalistic confrontation with the outcomes of terror. On the kabbalistic as well as the halakhic level, Zaka's rabbis draw from tradition that began in ancient times, continued mostly in the Middle Ages, and ended at the beginning of the modern age. An outstanding example is the book *The Crossing of Jabbok*, written at the beginning of the seventeenth

[13] On death and the sociology of death see Bradbury, *Representations of Death*; Bloch & Parry (eds.), *Death and the Regeneration of Life*; Clark (ed.), *Sociology of Death*; Exley, 'Review of the Sociology of Dying, Death and Bereavement'; Noys, *Culture of Death*.

[14] Abramowitch, 'Good Death and Bad Death'; Parry, *Death in Benares*.

century in Prague by Rabbi Aaron Berechia of Modena.[15] He lists a body of rules and customs, prayers, and beliefs connected with the management of Jewish death. This basic book discusses the codex of the chosen group of volunteers for the tasks of burial (*hevre kadisha*), especially for purification of the bodies; confession, and other issues with typical mystical quality. The same goes for other classical Jewish death books, like those of Rabbi Naftali Ha'Cohen Katz or Rabbi Shimon Frankfurter.[16] A later link in this chain, the so-called *Books of Life*, was written in the twentieth century by Rabbi Tokachinsky. The book *The Bridge of Life* mentions the continuum from life to death, beginning with a grave illness and ending with the immortality of the soul. It still serves as an official guide to those dealing with the dead. This book and its predecessors, suffused with kabbalistic contents, serve the rabbis and volunteers of Zaka. However, as the particular death in ST is unprecedented and its circumstances and characteristics are modern—even post-modern—its mystical adaptation needs original input. Zaka's kabbalah is not just an application and adaptation, but quite creative.

Jewish death literature reflects a general phenomenon: the penetration of mystical elements into orthodox and ultra-orthodox life based mainly on the halakha. A certain "kabbalization" of normative Judaism is a process enhanced by the diffusion of Hasidism in the eighteenth century (Oriental traditional Judaism has lately also introduced mystical elements). For example, in the prayer book (*Siddur*), kabbalism at different levels is organically diffused into Judaism, becoming almost undetectable. Mystical Jewish tradition plays a critical role in justifying religious precepts and clarifying the logic behind obligatory behavioral norms which otherwise may seem arbitrary. Thus the halakha becomes more convincing and enhances identification and enthusiasm. The kabbalah infuses a myth into rabbinical Judaism, endowing it with plausibility and vitality.[17]

The kabbalah has a vital presence in the Haredi world. Under the severe surface of Haredism there is a deep current of various mythical materials. Haredis define their religiosity as "a simple belief", and this by nature blurs and shallows the theological basis. The belief of Zaka

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[15] See Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*.

[16] Bar-Levav, 'Ritualization of Jewish Life and Death'; Bar-Levav, 'Death and the Blurred Boundaries of Magic'.

[17] See Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter History*.

volunteers is especially simple, as most of them are not scholars who excel in a yeshiva career, but practical physical men who, although following all commandments, do not bother to delve into their meaning. Their pious halakhic life is not anchored in knowledge and theoretical thinking but refers to "what is common with us" or "what the rabbis decreed", without much sophistry.[18] This does not contradict the fact that Zaka volunteers' religiosity is pregnant with myths.

5. Terror in the Mind of God

The tendency of Zaka's Haredi activists to think in mythical terms, whose roots are doubtlessly kabbalistic, is expressed in the conception of the scene of ST as a cosmic drama.[19] Those directly involved in terrorism in general and in ST in particular do not attribute to the events on the scene a historic significance only—critical as it may be-but first and foremost a symbolic significance. Events are judged as a reflection of something beyond the immediate and apparent, something spiritual and sublime. The circumstances and outcomes of an ST incident are not only tactical or strategic, but also metaphysical. Ultimate struggle occurs on the scene between good and evil; a "Manichaean" struggle between most powerful, fundamental and contradictory forces. A duel takes place behind the encounter between the ST perpetrator and his/her victims, not only between believers from two opponent communities—believers in truth and justice against infidels, sinners, and villains—but between deities: the Divine God and his bitter enemy the Devil. The Divine power stands for order in society and in the cosmos as a whole; his opponent—also supernatural—stands for chaos. The perpetrator of terror—delegate of Satan, the destroyer of order—sows death. Zaka, the angel of God the restorer of order, defeats death.

The events on the scene are grasped by those involved as "larger than life". The participants feel like actors in a gigantic horror play, in which human and supra-human powers are involved. Its cruel rules are sometimes obscure, but its lesson is clear and has an educational

[18] On simple belief among the Haredis and the relation between custom and halakha see Braun, 'Orthodox Halakhah and Jewish Custom'.

[19] Cf. the conception of cosmic drama among terrorists of different religions as described, e.g., in Jürgensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*.

value that provides meaning and purpose to the life of the collective. The world of terrorism is full of images of critical struggle for life or death. Terror embodies both reality and imagination of steel, fire, and blood. The associations are derived from a mytho-historic reservoir of magnificent past wars, going back to biblical times. The struggle on the scene joins a continuum of clashes in which both those who kill and those who are killed praise the glory of God. Those who care for the dead bodies also sanctify the Holy Name.[20]

"Terror in the mind of God"—namely, symbolic-mythical interpretation of religious terror—has been much discussed in literature, but mostly in relation to the point of view of the aggressor.[21] In terror, as in the heritage of holy wars in the past, the victim also plays an important part in the warlike myth of the aggressor, and vice versa. The behavior of each side in a conflict, as killer or killed, fits into a familiar narrative. It is also interpreted by the opponent in terms of a given and necessary script.[22] In Palestinian ST in Israel there is a third actor—Zaka—who also assumes mythological dimensions. There is a distinguished place in the mythical scheme of Haredi volunteers for the killer, the killed, as well as for themselves. Those who care for the bodies of terror victims have a significant role in both an earthly and a heavenly drama.

In the eyes of the leaders and grass-roots members of Zaka, the ultimate confrontation in the terror scene between the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness is a precondition to the solution of the nation's predicaments, and must end in Jewish victory. In other words, the scene holds the keys to salvation. The Middle East ST integrates in patterns of a quite catastrophic messianic belief of both Palestinians and Israelis, Zaka Haredis included. The exploding and burning bodies in the buses and restaurants are clear apocalyptic material. The ST is

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[20] On martyrdom, especially *Kiddush Hashem* ("Sanctification of the Holy Name") in Judaism, see van Henten & Avemarie (eds.), *Martyrdom and Noble Death*; Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God*.

[21] This is the title of Jürgensmeyer's book. For another example of the symbolic and value world of the terrorist see Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling'.

[22] See the case of Waco, Texas, in which approximately 100 believers belonging to the Davidian cult were killed in a confrontation with US authorities. Post facto analyses assume that had the government agents been attuned to the religious discourse of the besieged—understanding that they themselves are conceived as emissaries of Lucifer who exactly fulfill their role in the scenario of an Armageddonian clash with the followers of God—they could have avoided the tragic ending. See Wright (ed.), *Armageddon in Waco*.

conceived by many in terms of clearly defined apocalyptic traditions, such as Gog and Magog, or Armageddon. Sometimes opponents act in accordance with two apocalypses that are a mirror image of each other.[23] Zaka also lives by the apocalyptic imagination. The volunteers are convinced that their care of the corpses fulfills a vital messianic function.

6. The Blood of Martyrs

Blood is a salient element in (national) religious thought and practice; and Judaism is no exception. The Jew is created in blood (of circumcision). Of course, menstruation and slaughter are also prominent examples of the essential Jewish symbolism of blood. Blood is known as an important ritual element in confrontations between tribes or communities and between religions, including those involving Jews. We know, for example, the Passover blood libels.[24] Blood is also a national and religious ritual axis in the present-day Middle Eastern terror scene. Parallel and complementary to the ritual centrality of blood among the Muslim Palestinian STT,[25] it is also a focus in the Zaka ritual in the aftermath of terror incidents. Blood occupies a cardinal place in Zaka teaching, in the organization's daily discussions and in the work of the volunteers on the scene. There, the members devote much time and effort to blood—including cutting off and gathering upholstery steeped in blood, scraping off drops of blood from high walls, trimming tree branches on which blood was sprinkled—in order to bury it all.

Zaka's obsessive treatment of blood drops in the various scenes of unnatural death is unprecedented in Israeli history and in Jewish tradition. Until the wave of Palestinian ST attacks, almost no attention was paid to the blood of the dead in sites of calamities. However, this preoccupation with blood of terror victims developed during the *Intifada*, and was later applied to the dead of road and work accidents. In

[23] The parallelism of the conceptions of the bitter opponents Bin Laden and Bush has been mentioned elsewhere. The case of the medieval blood libels intertwined with cases of *Kiddush Hashem*—where Jewish and Christian myths feed each other and integrate with each other—has been studied by I. Yuval and presented in his book *Two Nations in Your Womb*.

[24] See ibid.

[25] Oliver & Steinberg, *Road to Martyrs' Square*.

those events which I observed, more time was devoted to the collection and wiping of blood stains than to the collection and evacuation of bodies and their parts.

This preoccupation with the blood of terror victims is not confined to the halakhic level; it also has a mystical and messianic level. Zaka volunteers' care to collect all blood from the scene and to bury it, in addition to their custom of not washing the victims' bodies and not wrapping them in shrouds but burying them in their bloody clothes, derives among other ideas from the belief that when they arrive in heaven their blood will stain God's robes. With every additional blood drop of God's martyrs the measure will be attained, and the garment will ferment with blood.[26] God's wrath will be aroused until he cannot contain himself any longer, and He will embark on a campaign of vengeance against the Gentiles. The biblical quotation (Ez. 24:8) says, 'to awaken wrath and to take vengeance' (hence the saying 'God will avenge their blood'). This theurgic conception is partial and simplistic among the grass-roots volunteers; but not so among some of their rabbis. Its roots lie in the *martyrium* concept of "vengeful redemption" prevalent in ancient times and in the Middle Ages,[27] and it implied "forcing" God to act powerfully against the perpetrators of terror. By a post-mortem magical act, Jewish terror victims become partners to an act of aggression. They turn from a passive to an active agent in the cycle of Middle Eastern violence; from accidental by-passers in the scene of a terrorist act to a fierce fighting arm against the enemies of Israel. The logic behind this blood ritual is basically mystic. "The holy work" of Zaka becomes a kind of kabbalistic ritual.[28]

7. Tikkun: Undoing the Terrorist Effect

As implied above, the particular Jewish mysticism, which revolves around the axis of Palestinian terror in Israel, is not an articulate and systematic kabbalah, but may be termed "kabbalism". It is attentive to canonic kabbalah but touches upon a popular, quite naive religion. It

[26] The traditional Jewish association of a red (bloody) garment with both redemption and revenge appears in Isa. 63:1. See also Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, chapter 3.

[27] On which see Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*.

[28] On kabbalistic ritual see Idel, *Kabbalah*; Scholem, *Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, chapter 4.

is an amalgam of familiar motives in a surprising garb, and modern motives in traditional garb—a diffuse, eclectic patchwork, incoherent, ridden with internal contradictions, open-ended, and ever-changing. Some of Zaka's kabbalism has already appeared in writing (computer drafts, limited-edition pamphlets) but is mostly passed orally and arises in informal talks, study-circles, lessons, or sermons such as those on the annual Zaka memorial festivity ending the fast on the day for the prophet Moses. Embryonic, experimental mysticism emerges before our eyes, on the scene, in oral exchanges while dealing with the outcomes of mass-terror acts.

The picture appearing before the eyes of Zaka's volunteers just moments after an explosion is a horrible one. Chaos rules: wounded crying for help; teams of medics; policemen in trance; hysterical passers-by; screaming sirens and loudspeakers; dust everywhere; ceilings collapsing; broken furniture and torn clothing; scorched and dirty personal belongings strewn about; fire and smoke everywhere. Let us focus on the chaos of the dead, outside the TV frames, over which the volunteers are leaning. This appears in masses of flesh, piles of spilt innards, dismembered limbs, human tissue strewn about, the various liquids collecting into a large pool. On this scene basic distinctions fade, primary categories are wiped out, separate identities are abolished; order becomes chaos. Most important, the boundaries of the body and the boundaries between bodies are breached. Needless to mention that the boundaries of the body are the metaphoric equivalent of the collective boundaries of the tribe, the nation.[29]

One may find in the many terror events that occurred in the markets paradigmatic events, the perfect metonym of tragic chaos. Witnesses claim that in some such cases human flesh and raw beef from the butcheries were mixed together inseparably, as were blood and tomato juice from local vegetable stands. The line separating life and death, the animate and inanimate, human and animal, disappeared. In the conception of Zaka volunteers holy and profane, pure and polluted were also mixed and intermingled. It appears that other significant boundaries are also crossed: the primordial categories of age and gender that separate children from adults, men and women. Zaka members are also sensitive to crossing boundaries between secular and religious Jews, and even more so—between Jew and non-Jew.

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[29] See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

This crossing of boundaries poses a threat to collective identity and to social order, as well as to ethno-national and doctrinal-moral definitions. Thus not only is the ST a direct violent attack threatening the personal and national existence of the Israelis, it is also a symbolic subversive act that undermines the infrastructure of Israeli values and conceptions. The challenge to physical security becomes a challenge to ontological and cosmological security. What is a body? Who is who? Who is ours and who is an enemy? Who is holy and who is impure and detestable? Israeli world order loses its stability in view of Palestinian ST, along with the blurring of differentiations between the weapon and its operator, subject and object, frontline and rear, military and civilian, conventional and non-conventional, legitimate and illegitimate. The threat to confidence, or rather sanity, reaches its peak with blurring the difference between aggressor and victim. In ST, the aggressor is also his/her own victim (and in his/her mind, also Israel's victim). Also, on the scene, the aggressor and his victim blend into one entity. The most effective metaphor for it is "the mingling of bloods". The holy work of Zaka volunteers, the emissaries of Israeli Judaism, is about re-differentiation of bloods, restoration of world order.

Zaka volunteers on the scene attempt to undo the action of the STT. They reconstruct the shape of the body, renew its boundaries, thus restoring to the victim his or her identity. Mostly, they restore the boundaries between aggressor and victims by finding and collecting the latter's body parts, labeling and packing them, and finally separating aggressors from victims. Thus they restore to the collective its identity. The act of separation (*havdalah*) is of central value in Judaism.

Zaka volunteers are intolerant of hybrids, meticulously preserving binary distinctions and various classifications. As orthodox Jews they follow a tradition obsessed with boundaries and exclusion. This tradition devotes a whole chapter of the Mishna to purification (*Taharot*), and other chapters to hybridism and mixing (*Shatnez* and *Eruvim*). This is a tradition of saying *Hamavdil* (a separation prayer)—not only between holy and profane (Sabbath and week days), pure and impure (Kashrut laws), Jew and Gentile (forbidding intermarriage)—but generally between one thing and another. Cultures may be characterized by the sharpness of their distinctions and their tendency to refuse vagueness, duality, and intermediate states. Jewish orthodoxy, and especially ultra-orthodoxy, is an extreme case of either-or and of emphasizing exclusivity, as illustrated by the injunction against mixing flesh and milk, or eating "sundry" animals (pig, frog, eel). The

very Creation appears in Judaism as an act of separation (between heaven and earth, light and darkness, sea and land, man and beast). Strict adherence to these distinctions preserves the primordial order set by God, and disturbing this order—mixing or blurring it—is considered as undermining divine order and the foundation of the world. Religious Judaism accords a particularly high value to separation from Gentile surroundings. This pertains first and foremost to the Jewish body, distinctive by dint of circumcision. There is a taboo on physical contact with the body of the "other", dead or alive. The body of a person whose Jewishness is doubtful is buried outside the cemetery.

The objective of Zaka activists is restoration, reinstitution, and reestablishment of the right order. As I found out during my fieldwork, the rabbis define the volunteers' task as repairing or perfecting the world and the divine. They say: 'When a pile of arms and legs lies before us and we have to put order into this chaos—this is a matter of *Tikkun*'. They comment that here is an opening for salvation, and hint at an act touching on creation. Zaka is an active partner in a cosmic process of struggle between good and evil, of redemption of Judaism and humanity. Their rabbis admit that their inspiration is the kabbalah of Ha'Ari, and add that the Lurianic *Tikkun* aspires to "return everything to its right place". This is the way they behave. Their interpretation of the handling of the outcomes of ST is based on a Jewish mystical-messianic model. This traditional model connects the volunteers with something above and beyond their grasp, inspires them with an energetic wave and the feeling of a fateful mission.

Identification of the Haredi task on the scene of ST with the specific kabbalistic ritual of *Tikkun* is not formal or complete. The use of the concept of *Tikkun*, like Zaka theology as a whole, is still in a process of crystallization by the wise men of Zaka. The *Tikkun* model is still negotiated among the Zaka rabbis, who are very sensitive to feedback from orthodox rabbis outside the organization. This model may still undergo changes, and may develop and become institutionalized or disappear altogether. Alternative theological models are constantly arising and falling, and various formulas undergo trial and error. An optional model—or a follow-up version of the Jewish Lurianic mystery mentioned above—was hinted at in closed and non-committal talks with Zaka rabbis. It is of double interest: first, we have here an unprecedented chance to follow in real time a process of adoption and adaptation of a traditional kabbalistic motive to serve in modern

circumstances; second, a rich interpretative horizon opens before us to a troublesome reality of life.

8. Blowing Up the Dome of the Rock as a Kabbalistic Drama

At the beginning of the 1980's, the Jewish Underground in the Territories was uncovered, which perpetrated a series of terrorist acts against Palestinians, such as throwing a hand grenade and killing college students in Hebron, laying bomb-traps in cars, and wounding mayors of towns in the West Bank. It was later discovered that a subgroup of these zealous settlers planned to blow up the Dome of the Rock in the Old City of Jerusalem—which was considered by them an abomination—in order to remove this disgrace and to enhance the process of redemption that was in crisis. While the destruction of Islamic sanctuaries on the Holy Mount seemed to this messianic group a condition and a catalyst to the erection of the Third Temple on its site, they were well aware of the real-political analysis that foresaw a belligerent reaction on the part of hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world that might spark off a third World War. Yet they did not relent; rather, they were hoping for the final show-down against all the enemies of Israel, and were sure of Jewish victory that would ensure the full realization of redemption. Only the refusal of certain rabbis to permit such a mega-act of terrorism delayed the organization of this group which drew its assurance from the knowledge that their wakening would cause a mobilization in heaven that would bring them triumph.[30]

The plan was based on another belief of some of the conspirators: The Dome of the Rock emanates "high energy vibrations" that reach all parts of the Islamic world and bestow masculine strength on Muslims everywhere. These rays derive their potency from the "foundation stone" on which the structure is built, and possibly also from the remains of the Holy of Holies of the Temple at its foundation. These activists claim in so many words[31] that the building radiates heavenly

[30] A partial primary source about this event is the book of the underground member H. Segal, *Dear Brothers*.

[31] This was already published partially in the daily papers. I have recently confirmed it with two people who had been directly involved in the underground.

affluence (*shefa*) and divine inspiration. The latter is the source of power that Muslims and Arabs—emissaries of the Devil—conquered together with the city and the country, robbing the Jews of their uniqueness and superiority. Destroying this structure will immediately bring about the fall of this hostile power and the castration of the wicked, as well as the exploitation of the positive effect to empower the Jews.

The extraordinary figure of Yeshua ben Shoshan was behind the concept of the negative effect of the abomination and the plan to destroy it. Ben Shoshan who had been a mystic already at a young age, maintains contact with prominent mystic rabbis, and has joined Yehuda Etzion, the ideologist of the underground, who carries the message of redemption. The inspiration for their grandiose clandestine plan derived from the kabbalah of Ha'Ari. They actually updated and applied an inseparable part (though less clear and less known) of the concept of *Tikkun,* namely the element of "selection" (*berur*). According to a simple reading of the myth of selection, Evil achieves its reign over a large part of human existence and is able to struggle against the Divinity and harm human beings, through the capture of the Sparks (*nitzotzot*) by the peels, shells, or matter (*qliphoth*). Evil, which is the essence of matter, has no independent source of power but draws its life-strength from its hold on holiness, which is the substance of the sparks. Divinity is the sole supplier of energies of being and action, and the Devil can exist only as long as he joins the Divine Source, taking it hostage by stealth or by force and sucking upon it. Rescuing the sparks from the grasp of matter is the key to destroying the upper and lower powers of evil. There is no repair (*Tikkun*) to heaven and earth without a clear selection or separation (*berur*) between the emissaries of good and evil.

The scheme of kabbalistic selection may also be applied to the scene of ST: The STT, the Angel of Death, is the matter that clings to the sparks—the Jewish victims—in order to suck their divine marrow and gain power to continue doing evil. The STT has no existence in him- or herself, and will not be effective as long as he or she does not join Israelis and fuse with them, while bringing death upon them. This mythic-political logic does not usually appear in Zaka discourse in a clear and orderly fashion but as a crude and elusive background to actions on the scene. Some of the volunteers, aware of public relations, may deny this claim in its full format. However, Zaka Torah scholars may boast of such "internal layers of significance". They think in terms of "purification" (*tehur*): they purify the holy land from the impurity

of the dead as a whole, and from the special impurity of the body of the STT. They claim more or less explicitly that by separating the body of the STT from those of his or her victims, they purify the Jewish elements from the foreign hostile element that infiltrated them in order to destroy them and usurp their mysterious quality.

It is of course absurd to attribute to the STT and his or her community a kabbalistic consciousness or motivation, as they have absolutely no knowledge of Jewish mysticism or messianism. Palestinian terrorists have their own apocalyptic mythology. For one moment, it is tangential to its Jewish parallel. In any case, the Lurianic scheme of thinking is at most the fantasy of the STT, as it is processed in Zaka volunteers' mind. As it were, all those involved in a scene of terror—including the Palestinian side—suppose that their actions on the scene play a role in the cosmic drama of *Tikkun*. However, kabbalistic selection and repair are completely foreign to the hermeneutic circles of the STT and his or her dispatchers, while they appear in a somewhat diffuse form in Zaka's hermeneutic circles. Zaka volunteers interpret to themselves the terrorist act, and mostly their own mission, in the mystical-messianic spirit they know. While the terror act "breaks the vessels" (*shvirat kelim*), Zaka's holy work is a mission of *berur*, separation of blood from blood, flesh from flesh—similar to separating the sparks from matter. Separation of the remains of the victims from those of the perpetrator redeems the former and destroys the latter. It is a theurgic task: the separation—purifying Jewish bodies from the defiled Palestinian ones—abolishes existential evil and completes divine goodness. It is interesting to note the apparent similarity between the interpretative mystic-messianic model discussed here and the interpretative model suggested by post-colonial literature, which points to the tendency of the conquered to cling to the conquerors by imitating them and assimilating among them in the wish to be empowered, to be free of them and to destroy them.[32] Through the ST, the Palestinian STT clings to the Jews and kills them at the same time: he or she clings to them in order to kill them, and kills them in order to blend and become one with them.

It is difficult to judge with certainty from observation of the terror scene the motives and considerations of the STT. It is only possible to

[32] Fanon, *Black Skin, Black Masks*; Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé.*

describe and analyze the outcome of his or her deed, which he or she did not necessarily plan or expect. We must be content with the place of the ST in the consciousness—or perhaps sub-consciousness—of Zaka volunteers, and in the role the STT plays in the exegetical setup of the Haredis who deal with the bodies of aggressor and victims. By their behavior on the scene and reports about it they suggest, explicitly or implicitly, explanations for the ST, and ascribe to the STT various ideas and feelings. This is largely an "emic" interpretation, testifying mostly to Zaka itself; but it carries interesting insights that may enrich the "etic" interpretation and contribute to refining the assumptions about the impulses and the aim of the STT, and about the ST in general. Thus, local (native) interpretation drawing from kabbalistic mythology may also serve as an inspiration to the effort to understand ST ad STT, and add to the body of conceptions about the regional conflict and the positions of the opponents.[33] Although one may doubt the methodological validity of the doctrine of *Tikkun* and *berur* for discussing ST, as well as discussion about the Haredi mind and the handling of the dead at a terror scene, it is worthwhile to acknowledge their heuristic value. The material discussed here may be read as a basis for further thought, an incomplete and non-exclusive understanding of the deep structure of the odd phenomenon before us.

The Zaka reading of ST events, including the kabbalistic ethnomodel, reverberates in certain states of mind of the Israeli public, both on the right and on the left. According to one interpretation of the tragic regional reality, "Palestinianism" draws its strength from its penetration into "Israelism" and clinging to it. Mostly, the Palestinian ability to implement the animosity toward the Israelis and their wish to exterminate them depends on originally Jewish energies that the Palestinians have expropriated while being absorbed into them. The dual Palestinian dream—to kill the Jews and to be like them—may be realized only within Israelism, in the double death among them. The explosion of the Palestinian along with the Israelis is at one and the same time both the means and the end: redemption. The Palestinian

[33] A Palestinian sociologist to whom I presented the thesis of physical assimilation could not refute the main points. Yet he added that in parallel—and in contrast to the impulse of the STT "to fuse"—the latter has an inborn recoil from touching Jewish bodies, alive or dead, which are considered by pious Muslims despicable and impure as much as are pigs. (See the idea raised once by "security agents" to stop STTs from carrying out their terror acts by burying their bodies with the bodies of pigs.)

cannot achieve this dual dream in his or her life, but only by his or her death. After death, he or she is separated from the Israeliness and removed from it by Zaka, who attempts to abolish Palestinian redemption and realize a Jewish redemption.

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