

## Kabbalah: Four Crucial Phases

### カバラ：四つの重要局面

Mark N. Zion

ザイオン・マーク

**Abstract:** Kabbalah is seen today as Judaism's most important gift to world spirituality, accessible in ways that its other sacred texts, the *Tanakh* (The Hebrew Bible) and the *Talmud* (c. 500 CE), are not. The *Zohar* (c. 1280), the kabbalistic text extraordinaire and Judaism's third sacred text, was originally synonymous with orthodoxy, but it has transcended it. The *Zohar* is the main reason for Kabbalah's continual regeneration. Kabbalah's career, however, has not been even and has itself gone through Exile and Return, its central themes. In this article I will describe a little of Kabbalah's history within Jewish culture in four phases that span about seven hundred years, from the twelfth-century to the eighteenth-century. Each of these phases is very much alive today, in varying degrees, across all branches of Judaism, but more so in Hasidic Judaism.

**Keywords:** the Sefer Yetzirah, the Sefer ha-Zohar, Lurianic Kabbalah, Sabbatianism, the Hasidim

**要旨:** カバラは、タナハ（ヘブライ語聖書）やタルムード（500年頃）といった聖典よりも親しみ易い点において、世界のスピリチュアリティに対するユダヤ教の最も重要な貢献と捉えられている。ゾハール（1280年頃）はカバラの特別な聖典であり、ユダヤ教において三番目に重要なテキストであるが、その本来の正統性を越え、カバラの絶え間ない再生の主因となっている。しかし、カバラの辿った道は平坦ではなく、その中心的主題である「追放」と「帰還」を自ら経験してきた。本稿は、ユダヤ教文化におけるカバラの歴史を、12世紀から18世紀のおよそ700年間に渡る四つの局面に分けて記述する。それぞれの局面は、程度の差こそあれ、ユダヤ教の全ての分派、特にハシド派において現在も生き続けている。

**キーワード:** セフェル・イエツィラー、セフェル・ゾハール、ルリア・カバラ、サバタイ派、ハシディーム

## 1. Introduction

The word "Kabbalah" means "tradition" or "that which has been received" in Hebrew, yet Kabbalah's "tradition" is in a deeper context, called the Oral Tradition. Moses, after receiving the revelation on Mount Sinai that included the Ten Commandments (*Exodus* 34:28), passed on its deeper meanings to the elders of Israel (and to the six-hundred thousand men present), who then passed it on to their children, thus this continued through the generations until today (*Dan* 2007:5). Kabbalah, like all mysticism, is subversive, however much it is cloaked in orthodoxy: It both affirms and takes issue

with conventions, since “mystical religion seeks to transform...God...from an object of dogmatic knowledge into a novel and living experience and intuition” (Scholem 1941:10).<sup>1</sup>

Kabbalah should be viewed primarily as a system of analysis (Bloom 1987:1-19), as powerful as the Cartesian, the Hegelian, the Darwinian, the Marxian, and the Freudian systems have been to shape elemental perceptions. It is a prism through which to look at the world and one’s role in it. It is “mystical” only because it is used for consciousness-raising through traditional practices. Though scholars of Kabbalah divide it into three general realms, the numerical, the meditative, and the magical (Kaplan 1997:vi),<sup>2</sup> it is Kabbalah’s perceptual dynamic that is most revolutionary.

Kabbalah was for most of its history the domain of a mature (male) elite. An ordinary person, rabbis had believed, should not be too curious about the *Ma’aseh Bere’shith* (Work of Creation) and the *Ma’aseh Merkavah* (Work of the Chariot). The *Mishnah* (c. 220 CE) forbids public discussion—and even discourages its personal study—of both (Dan 2007:13). One story from the *Mishnah* was for deterring the spiritually immature:

*Our Rabbis taught: Four entered an orchard and these are they: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher, and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to them: "When you reach the stones of pure marble, do not say 'Water! Water!' For it is said: 'He that speaks falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes.'" Ben Azzai gazed and died. Of him, scripture says: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Ben Zoma gazed and was stricken. Of him scripture says: "Hast thou found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it." Aher cut the shoots. Rabbi Akiva departed in peace (Hagigah 14b).*

Three of the four broke apart in the forbidden realms: Ben Azzai died, Ben Zoma lost his mind, and Aher became a heretic. Only Rabbi Akiva (c. 40-137 CE) returned “in peace.” The orchard (garden) they entered, called *Pardes*, is a Persian word meaning “a royal garden,” today the word for “heaven” in most Indo-European languages, but it is also used for the four levels of biblical interpretation: the *Atziluth*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Assiah*, from the highest realm (*Ein Sof*) to the lowest realm (this world).<sup>3</sup> In other words, the garden is a spiritual feast. The “Work of Creation,” “the Work of the Chariots,” and *Pardes*, all taboo realms of past normative Judaism, are central in

Kabbalah (Dan 2007:14). Kabbalah from its origins, then, had the whisper of enticement, danger, with rugged transcendence.<sup>4</sup>

Further, Kabbalah gives voice to reasons for ancient practices and so has invigorated Judaism by putting “new wine into old wineskins” (Finkelstein 1992:61). Very little is mentioned in the *Torah* about *why* the commandments should be practiced. The *Mishnah* (c. 220 CE) and *Talmud* (c. 500 CE), expositions of all the Oral Traditions regarding practices (*halakhah*) and Judaism’s foundational texts today, debate *how* to practice but not *why*. Kabbalists, on the other hand, imaginatively offered the *whys* (Fine 2003:189).

Kabbalah has endured because it is the outer reach for transcendence, where spiritual and intellectual creativity meet, and where each generation created “a novel and living experience.” Historical experience, of course, has shaped Kabbalah into what we have today. Though secure and sedentary circles rendered its first public stirrings in twelfth-century Europe, Kabbalah went through the fiery crucibles of expulsion, exile, and persecution, with some startling excesses, that tempered its teachings into a more sensible channel for spiritual yearnings. I will touch briefly on each of these major phases below and a little of what Kabbalah means today within one Orthodox movement in particular.

## 2. Zoharic Kabbalah

Kabbalah’s origins remain outside the historian’s lenses, since so much seems to have been passed on orally. Both Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) and Hans Jonas (1903-1993), the great scholars of Kabbalah and Gnosticism respectively, felt Kabbalah began as an early form of Jewish Gnosticism, perhaps dating back to very ancient times, of which the book of *Ezekiel* (c. sixth-century BCE) is one representation. Scholars in our own time still have not been able to document this (Dan 2007:24-26). The *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation or Formation), the first known work (in at least one version) to mention the Sefirot and the *Ein-Sof* (“Endless One” in Hebrew),<sup>5</sup> could have been written as early as the second-century CE. Tradition holds that the patriarch Abraham (the first Jew) whom God called (*Genesis* 12:1-3) wrote the work, showing the esteem early mystics gave it. Others say that Rabbi Akiva, a Tanna (composer of parts of the *Mishnah*)—and hero of the journey to *Pardes* I quoted above—martyred in 137 CE by the Romans after the Second Jewish-Roman War (132-136 CE)—penned it (Kaplan

1997:xvii). The *Sefer Yetzirah* is the consummate *Ma'aseh Bere'shith* ("Works of Creation," *Genesis* 1 and 2) literature.<sup>6</sup>

The first phase of Kabbalah, while keeping in mind that scholars can only work with what is quantifiable, is centered on two published works: the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of Illumination) and the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Splendor) (herein called the *Bahir* and the *Zohar* for short). Though the *Bahir* never uses the word "Kabbalah," preferring the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* "Mysteries of the Chariot" instead, it represents the congealing of what was to become "Kabbalah" as we know it today: the *Merkavah* mystical traditions, the *tsu* (magical presence), the power of the Hebrew alphabet and the names of God to create, the *Tzimtzum* (Constriction), the *gilgul* (reincarnation), the ten utterances (*ma'amarot*), later developed more fully in the *Zohar* as the ten Sefirot, each with its own unique characteristics, the identification of one as feminine (*Shekhinah*)—even a separate power from the other nine, and the inner life of the Divine seen as an inverted tree rooted above in eternity, the *Ein Sof* (Kaplan 1979:xv-xix; Dan 2007:23).

Where did these ideas come from? The absence of published texts for about one thousand years (since the *Sefer Yetzirah*) leads scholars to speculate about the ferment during this span of time, perhaps in networks of small circles from Europe to the Yemen, with the passing on of ideas orally along ancient trade routes. Were these ideas part of a more ancient mystical tradition that was even earlier than the book of *Ezekiel* (c. 580 BCE), as Scholem and Jonas speculated? Or was the *Bahir* formulated by a twelfth-century mystical genius in Provence, France, where it was first published, perhaps by Isaac the Blind (c. 1160-1235)? All kabbalistic texts are ascribed to the sages who wrote the *Mishnah* (the Tannaim), and the *Bahir* is attributed to Nehunya ben Ha-Kanah, who lived in late first-century and early second-century Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Studies on *Merkavah* mysticism (also known as *Hekhalot* "Palaces" mysticism from *Ezekiel* 1), with some documents dating back to 100 BCE, and Rhineland mysticism from the tenth-century CE show that both could be sources for the *Bahir* (Green 2004:16). The minority view is that the *Bahir* was first composed in Israel in the second century BCE (Kaplan 1979:19; 32; 186). Because the work is fragmented, others believe it was written over a couple of centuries, perhaps beginning in tenth-century Babylon and completed in the twelfth-century. Its publication in Provence, France, one of the great centers for Jewish learning during the high Middle Ages, is associated with the family of Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquieres (c. 1125-1198), an esteemed Talmudic scholar. Perhaps members from a small circle of devotees chose

to publish it, or at least parts of it in what we have today, a little after 1180 (Green 2004:18) for reasons that remain obscure (since Kabbalah was carefully kept secret).<sup>8</sup>

Whatever its origins, the *Bahir* represents the beginning of a more “public” role for Kabbalah and no doubt speaks for small kabbalistic circles in the region. Its symbolic language that de-centers traditional teachings shows how mystics communicated among themselves.<sup>9</sup> The passages are dizzying and though the *Bahir* purports to “illuminate” according to its title, it is the opposite of rational illumination (Green 2004:17).<sup>10</sup> Though virtually incomprehensible to the untrained reader, the *Bahir* uses the symbolic language of those steeped in kabbalistic practices and meditations. As a pioneering work, its publication may have been to spread its mystical message to a wider audience, but perhaps also as a rebuttal to Maimodines’ (Moshe ben Maimon c. 1135-1204) more rational approach to reading scripture (Green 2004:19).<sup>11</sup> The *Bahir* did pave the way for the crown jewel of Kabbalah: the *Zohar*.

The *Zohar* is a sprawling work, virtually an encyclopedia of poetic metaphors and kabbalistic symbolism. Daniel Matt's English translation (the Pritzker edition 2011) is in eleven volumes. The *Zohar*'s central genius lies in its short but stunning homilies that reinterpret all previous interpretations. Written in Aramaic and like the *Bahir* attributed to a Tanna, here to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai (c. 100-160), the *Zohar* remains the great aesthetic achievement of mystical writing. Kabbalists, I should interject, never placed their names on the texts they wrote, since self-attribution was considered unworthy of a devout Jew, who submerged his own identity with that of the kabbalistic circle. Further, since Kabbalah is always a “rediscovery” of the Oral Tradition given to Moses, no kabbalist felt he was the originator of any of the ideas, only a re-discoverer of what the Israelites in the Wilderness knew well on their journey to the Promised Land.

Gershom Scholem has shown that Moses de Leon (1240-1305) wrote the *Zohar*, first published in fragments in Spain around 1280 (de Leon lived near Castile), basing his conclusions on the *Zohar*'s odd Aramaic grammatical constructions (which de Leon largely reinvented for his purposes)—de Leon was not completely fluent in Aramaic—the use of medieval Spanish and Portuguese words and phrases transliterated into Aramaic throughout the work, with the writer's complete ignorance of the Galilee's landscape (Scholem 1974:222; 225-28), where the stories take place (Rabbi Yohai, according to legend, wrote the *Zohar* while hiding from the Romans, living in a Galilean cave near Peki'in).<sup>12</sup> While de Leon borrowed heavily from the *Sefer Yetzirah* and the *Bahir*, his original spins continue to awe auditors worldwide.

Scholars have pieced together small bits and pieces of Moses de Leon's life: he belonged to kabbalistic circles around Castile and is associated with another great kabbalistic writer, Joseph Gikatilla (1248-1305), himself a student of Abraham Abulafia (1240-1291), the virtual founder of meditative Kabbalah. Also, de Leon wrote other works in Hebrew that show the *Zohar's* unmistakable style: *Sefer ha-Rimon* (1287), *Ha-Nefesh ha-Hakhamah* (1290), and *Shekel ha-Kodesh* (1292). He had sold fragments of the *Zohar* to help support his family, claiming it was from an original manuscript by Rabbi Yohai. After his death, some visited his home hoping to buy the "original," but de Leon's widow said there was no original, that all of it had come "out of his own head." De Leon told his wife that he could not take credit for it, which she had urged him to do, since the words "were put into his mouth by a miracle" (de Leon believed he was a channel for Rabbi Yohai himself) (Dan 2007:32).

The *Zohar* crystalized kabbalistic ideas in its fresh, stunningly poetic voice, which continued to germinate for hundreds of years, spawning thousands and thousands of treatises, which spread these ideas among select initiates far and wide. The *Zohar* gave "speculation" legitimacy in a culture steeped in tradition, rattling the shutters open for a remarkable spiritual and intellectual frenzy. Without the *Zohar*, would there be Kabbalah, as we know it today? The *Zohar* is so sublime a work that it indeed reinvented mystical tradition.<sup>13</sup> Isaac Luria (1534-1572) may have memorized all the *Zohar*, which he masticated before transforming the Kabbalah he inherited, making it a birthright of all Jews.

### 3. Lurianic Kabbalah

The next phase of Kabbalah began in 1492 (the *Alhambra Decree*), the brutal expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula where most kabbalistic texts had been written (this expulsion was the culmination of smaller ones over the previous one hundred years, ending with the Portuguese expulsion of 1498). Though they could take few of their possessions with them, the refugees took their sacred writings, if only in their hearts and minds (Eban 1984:177-187). Up to seven hundred thousand of them were flung to the far corners of the known world: North Africa, the Yemen, Northern and Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire (Silberman 1998:109-110).<sup>14</sup> Some of the more mystically inclined settled in Safed, Israel (then part of the Ottoman Empire) where the grave of Rabbi Yohai had been a pilgrimage site and where famous kabbalists led mystical communities.<sup>15</sup>

Still, Safed remained relatively small, with only about a thousand families at its zenith and it thrived for a little less than a century.<sup>16</sup> Kabbalistic circles there, perhaps numbering only several dozen in each circle, saw themselves with a special role in redemption, but this role did not extend to ordinary people (Dan 1987:259; 277). Luria himself wrote little, saying, "... because all things are interrelated. I can hardly open my mouth to speak without feeling as though the sea burst its dams and overflowed. How can I express what my soul has received, and how can I put it down in a book" (as quoted in Scholem 1941:254)?<sup>17</sup> Hayyim Vital (1542-1620) and Joseph Ibn T'bul (b. 1545), two of Luria's closest pupils, recorded his teachings but they differed on crucial points, especially on the origins of evil (Scholem 1973:35).<sup>18</sup> Vital, the most prolific, refused to publish Luria's teachings, though he wanted to preserve them for the spiritually mature (Scholem 1973:24),<sup>19</sup> but his writings were stolen and published, against his will, toward the end of his life (Levine 2003:92).<sup>20</sup> Though Luria seems to have become a legend after his death, no records extant mention his teachings until about 1620, when they began to spread like wildfire.

Luria was born in Jerusalem—his father was Ashkenazi (who had earlier immigrated from Germany) and his mother Sephardic (who may have been from Egypt)—where he lived until his father died when he was eight years old. After, his mother moved the family to Cairo, where her brother was a tax-farmer. Records show that as a young man Luria worked as an investor in agricultural trade around the Mediterranean (Scholem 1978:420-421), but he retreated from everyday life at about age twenty-one, after marrying his uncle's daughter, to study the *Zohar* in a cottage near the Nile River. There, he spent between six and seven years in intense meditation, visiting his family only on the Sabbath and speaking only in Hebrew during his visits (Scholem 1978:421). Later he became associated with rabbinic councils in Cairo (Fine 2003:38).

Luria moved to Safed when he was about thirty-five years old, presumably to study under one of the most famous kabbalists of the time, Moses Cordovero (1522-1570), the great systematizer of Kabbalah and who himself was a descendent of Portuguese refugees from the Iberian expulsions of the 1490s. A year later, after Cordovero died, Luria succeeded him as leader of a kabbalistic circle, which according to diaries from devotees revolved around four layers, with a smaller, inner circle of eleven deemed most worthy of Luria's extraordinary teachings.<sup>21</sup>

Luria's Kabbalah, breathtakingly original, is against the grain of normative religious sensibilities on multiple levels. "Exile" is one of his greatest originalities.

Exile is not simply a burden Jews have borne but a universal reality, beginning with the Divine Himself.<sup>22</sup> This borders on the heretical, especially in his articulation of the less than All-Powerful Creator, who needed to create in order to heal Himself (Bloom 1987:16).<sup>23</sup>

Existence does not begin with a perfect Creator bringing into being an imperfect universe; rather, the existence of the universe is the result of an inherent flaw or crisis within the infinite Godhead, and the purpose of creation is to correct it (Dan 2007:75).

Yet, as Lurianic Kabbalah spread early in the seventeenth-century, religious authorities everywhere accepted it because it elevated traditional practices as supremely important. Hans Jonas, who authored the classic study *The Gnostic Religion* (1958), described Syrian-Egyptian Gnosticism, one of four gnostic expressions, in ways that are remarkably similar to Lurianic Kabbalah (Jonas 1958:112-146); most scholars, however, feel that Luria developed his Kabbalah independently of gnostic influences (Scholem 1941:175-177; 260). The idea of Exile, first of the Divine from Himself in the first phases of creation, the *Tzimtzum* (Contraction) and the *Shivera* (Breaking), has deep gnostic leanings: Creation spirals out of control after the Divine created an empty space, inadvertently spawning opposing forces and evil personages bent on thwarting creation in all its manifestations (Evil as an independent metaphysical reality is another of Luria's great originalities). Luria differs with Gnosticism, though, in that the Divine remained "interactive" with creation, though bound by forces not always within His control, especially in creation's last phase when He gave humanity the immense responsibility both for the redemption of the universe and of His Own Personhood:

The focus of the Kabbalistic theurgy is God, not man; the latter is given unimaginable powers, to be used in order to repair the Divine glory or the Divine image; only his initiative can improve divinity... The theurgical Kabbalah articulates a basic feature of Jewish religion in general: ...the Jew is responsible for everything, including God, since his activity is crucial for the welfare of the cosmos in general (Moshe Idel as quoted by Bloom 1992:105).



Luria had taught that universal redemption was at hand: only two hundred eighty-eight sparks remained trapped in the *qelippoth*, the waste material from early in creation animated by the Other Side (*Sidra Ahra*).<sup>24</sup> These alienated sparks, themselves sources of sacred powers, are the reason the universe is incomplete.<sup>25</sup> Their redemption (by raising them out of the *qelippoth*) through obedience to traditional practices will bring immediate *Tikkun Olam* (Universal Restoration) (Bloom 1992:105):

It is these sparks (*netzutzot*) that now shine even in those spheres over which evil gains control. Their activity is strangely ambivalent: on the one hand, these sparks animate evil, guaranteeing its existence and its power of action; on the other, they are like captives, awaiting their own redemption from evil (Scholem 1991:77).

As Lurianic Kabbalah spread, it inspired people with its enormous possibilities. The ideas are humanistic, in the sense that human beings have the complete and absolute responsibility for universal salvation. Not only did it give the *reasons for* the ancient practices, it gave everyone a vital role in the cosmic drama (the world today views Kabbalah through the prism of Lurianic Kabbalah).

Luria's teachings were originally intended for a small and ritually purified elite (Fine 2003:354), who together would perform *Tikkun Olam*, but as these ideas spread the general population felt the pinch. Could they merit such exalted responsibilities? Had God expected too much of them (Dan 2007:79, 80)? As these questions simmered for a generation or so, another movement arose to answer them: A special Messianic figure was necessary to complete *Tikkun Olam*. This led to Kabbalah's third phase, arguably its most negatively dynamic expression.

#### **4. Sabbatian Kabbalah**

Ironically, Lurianic Kabbalah, though firmly grounded in Jewish orthodoxy, led to one of the great mystical heresies in world history: Sabbatianism. Luria indeed brought renewal within Judaism by showing that one had a part in ushering in the Messianic age. Messianic fever was in the air, despite the fact that Lurianic Kabbalah was adamant that no single person could accomplish the ultimate redemption—this was distributed over the entire people of Israel (Scholem 1978:245).<sup>26</sup> As tragedies continued to befall them,

most recently in the Ukraine (1648-49),<sup>27</sup> people began to see signs everywhere that the Messianic age was fast approaching:

The spread of Lurianic Kabbalism with its doctrine of *Tikkun*, of the restitution of cosmic harmony through the earthly medium of a mystically elevated Judaism, this doctrine could not but lead to an explosive manifestation of all those forces to which it owed its rise and its success (Scholem 1941:287).<sup>28</sup>

Nathan of Gaza (1643-1680) seemed to intuit the Jewish collective unconscious when he declared in 1665 that the Messiah had appeared in Israel.<sup>29</sup> He did this by showing that their *Mitzvot* (Good Works) were powerless to perform *Tikkun* in the seven lower Sefirot where the *qelippoth* was strongest. Calling this fortified area “the heel of evil” (Scholem 1973:300), Nathan declared that only the Messiah could crush it.<sup>30</sup> He was clear about the dates: The Messianic age would begin in 1667, with the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem set to start in 1672 (Scholem 1973:287).

Thus Nathan of Gaza launched a mass hysteria that scholars today are still trying to unravel. Since the Messiah in Judaism would actually reign on the earth, as Maimonides had written (Kraemer 2008:356),<sup>31</sup> with Jerusalem as his capital, many began to sell their property to be among the first returnees to the Holy Land. Others engaged in extreme acts of repentance to prepare for the Messianic age, concentrating all their prayers on the Messiah to strengthen him so he could lift the last remaining sparks (Scholem 1973:473-75). Nathan had even speculated that the Sultan himself might transfer the crown to the Messiah (Scholem 1971:145).

Nathan gave the title of Messiah (“Our Lord and King, His Majesty to be Exalted” *Adoneinu Malkeinu Yarum Hodo* or the acronym AMIRAH) (Scholem 1973:263) to one of the most unlikely of people: Sabbatai Tzvi (1626-1676), an itinerate rabbi from Smyrna, who from time to time had declared himself a Messiah, but with hardly anyone taking him seriously (Rabow 2002:94-95). Sabbatai no doubt suffered from manic-depression.<sup>32</sup> Nathan gave Sabbatai’s mood swings—usually in three-month intervals—kabbalistic meanings (Scholem 1941:290). When Sabbatai was in his depressed state, he was descending into the realms of *qelippoth* to free captive sparks. When in his hyper or normal state, he was returning the sacred sparks to the Divine (Scholem 1973:302-308). Over half the Jewish population from Europe to the Yemen was caught up in the Messianic fervor (Rabow 2002:101).<sup>33</sup> The flames of Messianism reached

such a fevered pitch that Jews began to neglect their businesses. This alarmed the Ottoman authorities, which arrested Sabbatai on February 6, 1666 as he made his way in a Messianic procession to Constantinople (Istanbul) (Scholem 1978:248).

The Ottomans treated Sabbatai with a remarkable degree of tolerance. When he was finally brought before a formal hearing on September 15, 1666, even the Sultan Mehmed IV (1642-1693) attended, concealed behind a lattice. The Sultan's chief preacher Mehemed Vani Effendi (d. 1689) also attended, showing that the Ottomans saw the proceedings more as a religious rather than a criminal matter (Scholem 1973:675). They may have believed that Sabbatai could deliver the Jewish world to Islam. They gave him three choices—the first two were options of dying by execution—but Sabbatai chose the third: to convert to Islam.<sup>34</sup>

When Sabbatai formally accepted the Muslim turban, the Jewish world was shattered. Since the First Crusade (1096-1099), as crusaders sharpened their killing skills on their march to the Holy Land, Jews in Europe had chosen death rather than convert to Christianity or to defile their sacred books (Eban 1984:158-160). They called this *Kiddush Ha-Shem* or the “Sanctification of the Divine Name” (Maciejko 2011:133-134). Now the purported Messiah had committed the worst sacrilege possible. Yet, Nathan of Gaza, unwavering in his support of Sabbatai's messianic mission, declared that the Messiah must apostatize to assume the “cloak of evil” to destroy it from within (Scholem 1973:802). Scholem has said that this attempt to find a meaning in such a nihilistic act constitutes one of the great acts of devotion in religious history (Scholem 1973:799).

The Sabbatian movement began the modernization of the Jewish world (Dan 2007:92), much as the Reformation (1517) had done for the Christian world (Russell 1945:481-483). Sabbatianism made every single Jew an Abraham to God, meaning that one could follow the Divine's voice or one's conscience outside mediating authorities. Sabbatianism led to at least a dozen heretical spinoffs, generally divided among those who believed in Sabbatai's divinity (Scholem 1973:835) and those who did not (Scholem 1971:124). Further, the concept of “descending” into evil to destroy it ignited imitators far and wide, especially for the believers in Sabbatai's divinity. The *Dönme*<sup>35</sup> (meaning “to turn” or “to convert” in Turkish) and the Frankists,<sup>36</sup> apostates to Islam and Roman Catholic Christianity respectively, are the two most famous Sabbatian groups. Surprisingly, over the generations these groups spawned scores of secular and religious reformers who influenced the European Enlightenment, religious reform movements, and even the modernization of Turkey (Scholem 1941:299-304).<sup>37</sup>

Sabbatianism spread like a great scythe across Europe, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, cutting away traditional life and opening the ghettos everywhere to new possibilities. Yet, not all Jews affected by Sabbatianism wanted to secularize (or apostatize). Some absorbed Sabbatian ideas to bring renewal within Jewish orthodoxy. This led to an especially vigorous movement: Hasidism.

## 5. Hasidic Kabbalah

Israel ben Eleazar (c. 1698-1760), called the “Ba’al Shem Tov” (Master of the Good Name), founded Hasidism (*Hasid* meaning “Pious” in Hebrew), setting Kabbalah’s final phase in motion. Born in Kamieniec, in today’s Western Ukraine, he worked as a clay peddler until he was about forty-years old, when he began drifting about teaching the *Zohar* and Lurianic Kabbalah to the less educated (he himself was uneducated). He grew famous as a healer and magician, seen in the fact that he used Divine “names” for healing purposes: hence the meaning of his name (Schatz 1994:97).<sup>38</sup> Scholars today know very little about him apart from the legends that have been passed down.<sup>39</sup>

The Ba’al Shem Tov (hereafter called the “Besht,” an acronym of his initials), though writing very little that we know of (Wiesel 1972:8-9), showed that Luria’s teachings, such as “Raising the Sparks,” have redemptive power even in the most mundane of daily activities. His message was of the Divine’s immanence. He also claimed that “man must desire the things of this world,” meaning that one must engage in everyday life as part of religious devotion (Schatz 1994:98). While an intellectual class had traditionally guided Judaism, itinerates with little formal education were the Hasidic “missionaries,” preaching their homilies only for free lodging and meals (Dan 1983:6). As Hasidism grew in popularity, it alarmed the educated class because it resembled Sabbatianism, known in this region through the Frankist movement (Nadler 1997:75-77). The Besht first began preaching in Podolia and Volhynia (Dan 1987:15), places where Frankism was strongest (Buxbaum 2005:12), where Jacob Frank was in fact born (Please see footnote 36).

Hasidic groups have tended to take the name of the city where they were founded: Lubavitch (Lubavitchers or Chabad, an acronym for the upper three Sefirot: *Keter*, *Binah*, and *Da’at*), Bratslav, Bobowa (Bobov), Satu Mare (Satmar), as just a few examples, each with its own distinctive clothing, practices, and nuances of beliefs. They are survivors. The Nazis obliterated about one hundred Hasidic groups (about forty groups remain today) but they have bounced back repeatedly in their history,

restoring their communities and way of life. Hasidism has also produced an astonishing literature, perhaps among the finest in the Hebrew language:

To our shame we must admit that if today we want to find even a shadow of original Hebrew literature, we must turn to the literature of Hasidism; there, rather than in the literature of the Haskalah (Enlightenment), one occasionally encounters, in addition to much that is purely fanciful, true profundity of thought which bears the mark of the original Jewish genius (Ahad Haam quoted by Gershom Scholem 1941:326).

Hasidism put new spins on Kabbalah: It “personalized” Lurianic Kabbalah in general, making Lurianic cosmic redemption a personal, internal salvation of the soul through *devekuth* (seeking the “Divine within” is always safer than seeking the “Divine without,” as in Messianism) and it “localized” Sabbatian Messianism in particular through the *Zaddiq*.

### 5.1 Devekuth

First, Hasidism diverged from Luria that the Divine created the universe from the desire to heal Himself. Rather, the Divine was motivated by love, and so the *Tzimtzum* (the Divine’s withdrawal to create an empty space) was an act of love. While classic Lurianism saw the unfolding of the Sefirot, resulting in the *Shevirah ha-Kelim* “Breaking of the Vessels,” aided by the *Sitra Ahra* (Other Side), as a cosmic catastrophe outside the Divine’s control, Hasidism taught that this was no mishap but a gift to humanity for its enlightenment (Zeitlin 2012:88-89). The *Tzimtzum*, from Lurianism, is only from the Divine’s perspective (the Divine experienced the great emptiness for humanity to have the fullness of love). In short, Lurianism stressed the Divine’s redemption of Himself, while Hasidism stresses the Divine’s love for humanity.

Hasidic groups, then, do not accept Luria’s primal catastrophe, the Breaking of the Vessels, the opposing forces of the *Sitra Ahra*, where evil is a separate metaphysical force, and the Divine losing control during creation (Dan 1983:22). How, then, did the sparks become trapped within the *qelippoth* in the first place, if no primal catastrophe took place? Hasidism answered this by returning to the *Zohar* and other pre-Lurianic expositions, including Moses Cordovero’s, which showed that sparks were trapped because of a lack of love within the Sefirot.<sup>40</sup>

Sabbatians had believed that one must engage evil directly by transgressing the commandments to destroy it from within. Since the new age of *Atziluth* (the Messianic age) had arrived with Sabbatai Tzvi, evil was merely an illusion.<sup>41</sup> Sabbatai and his followers had performed “strange acts” (*ma’asim zarim*), deliberate violations of the *Torah* (Scholem 1973:390).<sup>42</sup> By transgressing, one deflates the old age and the new age automatically bursts forth.<sup>43</sup>

But there were more radical possibilities to be explored [than just taking the cloak of evil]: only the complete transformation of good into evil would exhaust the full potential of the latter and thereby explode it, as it were, from within. This dialectical liquidation of evil requires not only the disguise of good in the form of evil but total identification with it (Jacob Frank as quoted by Scholem 1973:801).

Sabbatian ideas indeed hovered around Hasidism in its formative years. In part because of official Judaism’s deep terror of Sabbatianism (which may have acted as a restraint on early Hasidism), the Hasidic movement stopped short of its nihilistic abyss and remained absolutely committed to traditional norms. For the Hasidim the Divine expressed evil *temporarily* to slow time down for *Tikkun Olam* to take place. In place of a missionary zeal to destroy evil (by entering it) that had characterized Sabbatianism, Hasidism offered *deveikut* (communion/dedication/clinging). Oddly, *deveikut* implied no Lurianic redemptive functions, only personal, experiential salvation (Scholem 1971:180):<sup>44</sup>

Following the Sabbatian and Frankist debacles, the circle around the Ba’al Shem Tov and especially the Maggid chose a path of inner illumination, one which would effect the individual transformation of the worshiper without raising the dangerous Messianism implicit in the striving for *tiqqun*. As preached by the Kabbalist, *tiqqun* was a process of restoring wholeness to a world still suffering the effects of primal cataclysm; this restoration would culminate in the advent of messiah, symbolizing the completion of man’s theurgic task. *Deveikut*, on the other hand, implied no such restoration, but was merely the ascent of the soul, through devout prayer and contemplation, to a state of union or near-union with the divine (Green 1992:184).

*Devekuth* remains Hasidism's central ethic. Though centuries earlier other movements had taught its importance, *devekuth* was only for an elite, the few worthy souls who had the capacity for it. The Hasidic movement, typically, democratized it: All Jews can engage in *devekuth* while eating, sleeping, walking, and chatting with friends (Dan 1983:24). As Hasidic thinking developed, God's presence in every aspect of life became known as *avodah be-gashmiut* (physical worship), where every moment is a redemptive moment (Wiesel 1973:25):

The true worshipper, in short, exercises a tremendous power over the inner worlds, just as he bears a correspondingly great responsibility for fulfillment of his Messianic task. The life of every world and every sphere is in continuous movement; every moment is a new stage in its development. At every moment it strives to find the natural form which will lift it out of confusion (Scholem 1941:276-277).

## 5.2 The Zaddiq

Hasidism's second most important concept has obvious Sabbatian roots: the *Zaddiq* (Righteous Leader): "This idea, itself deeply rooted in Sabbatian thinking, generally referred to in Hasidism to the work of the *zaddiq* in redeeming the souls of others" (Green 1992:67). Other Orthodox groups, as well as all branches of Conservative and Reform Judaism, see this concept as abnormal, even heretical. The *Zaddiq's* redemptive responsibilities are not universal, however; he ensures experiential salvation for his group of followers alone (Scholem 1941:344-345).

A *Zaddiq* at death passes his authority and spiritual powers on to his son, seen in the characteristic Hasidic statement: "There is no *Zaddiq* but the son of a *Zaddiq*" (quoted by Dan 2007:97). Only the founders' direct male descendants lead the Hasidic dynasty (usually the eldest son). Hasidism was bitterly attacked for its similarity to Sabbatianism in this regard. Extolling communion (*devekuth*) above *Torah* study was not so uncommon, since Jews had over the millennium challenged dogmatic *Torah* study alone when it superseded "mercy" (*Micah* 6:8). Trusting the *Zaddiq's* redemptive powers, however, has been hard for most to swallow.<sup>45</sup>

Dov Ber ben Abraham (1704-1772), better known as the Maggid (Preacher) of Mezheritch, the great architect of Hasidism after the Besht's passing, was first to articulate the *Zaddiq's* role (but this idea must have been implicit from the Besht). The Maggid had envisioned a league of leaders better equipped for special *Tikkun* duties on

behalf of the community (Dan 1987:27). Hasidism, therefore, spread Sabbatian Messianism across all its groups collectively, like jam on separate slices of bread:

Hasidism, it might be said, fragmented the superhuman messianic hero of Sabbatianism and distributed the pieces across time and space into every generation and every community. This fragmentation, however, did not alter the basic idea, previously absent from Judaism although it flourished in Christianity, of an intermediary role in the redemptive process (Dan 1987:27).

*Zaddiq* is also the ninth Sefirah, also called *Yesod* (Foundation), an intermediary Sefirah between the upper Sefirot and the created universe (please see Appendix). The *Zaddiq*, the community leader, himself in a continual state of *devekuth*, protects his community from the forces of evil, heals its sicknesses, blesses it with fertility, and lifts up its evil inclinations (and lack of faith) for *Tikkun* (Green 1992:309). The Hasidim, unlike the Sabbatians who gave this role to everyone, believe the *Zaddiq* alone had the spiritual capacities for entering evil to destroy it. Purged of his own selfish leanings, he internalizes his community's evil inclinations to raise them for redemption. Yet the *Zaddiq*'s role differs depending on the Hasidic dynasty:

The *zaddiq*, as he appears in the literature of early Hasidism, is a leader with many faces. He is also portrayed...as parent, teacher, spiritual guide, intercessor in prayer, healer, and protector from sin. Hasidic masters and communities varied insofar as they chose to emphasize one aspect of *zaddiqut* above another, though this emphasis seldom resulted in the total exclusion of other elements. Thus in HaBaD (or Chabad) circles the emphasis was upon the *zaddiq* as guide, while in Lezajsk (and later Galician dynasties) the *zaddiq*'s intercessory function in prayer was more important, and in Przysucha (including later Polish Hasidism) it was the aspect of *zaddiq* as teacher that gained prominence (Green 1992:182).

What it means to be "a Hasid" is tied to the *Zaddiq* (Dan 1987:30). To become a Hasid, one must petition to enter a Hasidic court, commit oneself to that group, accept the *Zaddiq*, believe in his teachings, and trust him in his role as limited redeemer over the



community. There are close to half a million Hasids today, all deeply committed to their particular *Zaddiq*.

These high standards inherent in *devekuth* as a personal ethic and the *Zaddiq* as intercessor have given all Hasidic groups a powerful internal cohesion that continues to stretch Kabbalah into the modern world. Hasidism is Kabbalah's last line of defense.

## 6. Conclusion

Kabbalah has been a powerful force in the life of a people, a source of transcendence and struggle, of creativity and excess, of intellectual and spiritual fervency. As the "people's poetry" its four distinct phases have invigorated spiritual life for nearly nine hundred years: 1) The *Sefer ha-Bahir*, twelfth-century Provence, France and the *Sefer ha-Zohar*, thirteenth-century Castile, Spain; 2) Lurianic Kabbalah, sixteenth-century Safed, Israel; 3) Sabbatianism, seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire and Frankism, eighteenth-century Poland; 4) and Hasidism, eighteenth-century Eastern Europe and Western Russia, Kabbalah's modern phase. Some may point to New Age developments as a final stage. Here I have touched on Kabbalah within Jewish culture, but I also acknowledge that many espouse New Age expressions of Kabbalah, shaped into new forms, and these are growing. Perhaps only in the next generation will a more international and multi-ethnic phase become manifest.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) paradigm of "immediate-mediate-concrete" (later expounded by others as thesis-antithesis-synthesis) in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) makes one wonder if another development of Kabbalah within Judaism is possible, for Hasidism seems to have balanced all previous phases. Has Hasidism purged Kabbalah of its own "inner contradictions" (*Aufhebung*), to create a kabbalistic "end of history," to use a Hegelian term? The Hasidim, by turning away from Messianic expectations on earth, have focused on inner landscapes, the inner Sefirot, where redemption must first take place. For by redeeming oneself, one redeems the whole world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Mystical" or "mystic" is a term created by Roman Catholic theologies, with a goal of wordless oneness with the Divine. In Jewish mysticism, however, language and words—the sacred language of Hebrew, both spoken and written—are always of primary importance and where oneness with the Divine is not thought possible (please see Scholem 1971:203, 204).

<sup>2</sup> The first is the “numerical.” Since each Hebrew letter has a numerical value it can suggest meanings and associations with other words that have the same value. Numerical kabbalists pore over the Hebrew Bible with this in mind, searching out associations that may have redemptive power. Since the Divine created the universe with words, the right combinations, repeated in the proper sequence, may bring the Messianic age. Needless to say, those who spend their lives studying, chanting, and comparing texts are relatively few in number. Meditative or ecstatic Kabbalah has been popularized in New Age teachings internationally, founded by Abraham Abulafia (c. 1240-1291) who created meditations that include repeating consonants of the Divine name—deconstructing the sacred name of the Divine to recombine it in new ways—with tones and head movements and these are widely practiced today (Idel 1988:101). The final is the magical, similar to the numerical, except that its focus is to project change into the three-dimensional world of time and space. The *Sefer Yetzirah*, perhaps written between the third and fourth centuries (Dan 2007:18), expresses something of this magical orientation, creating by chanting Hebrew words or letters. The Aramaic word, *Abracadabra* (which may mean “I create as I speak”), perhaps originating from the *Sefer Yetzirah*, and still used by magicians today, is just one example of a kabbalistic “theurgy” (a directing of the Divine).

<sup>3</sup> In other words, each verse has four fundamental levels of spiritual consciousness, but each with six hundred thousand interpretations. This was the number of men present when the Law was given, each hearing the message in a different way.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Fine (2003) *Isaac Luria, Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos*, p. 356: “The revelation of the Torah’s ultimate mysteries is fraught with danger; yet their unfolding is a requisite, intrinsic feature of the processes of *tiqqun*. Under the wrong circumstances, such revelation brings death, while under propitious circumstances it constitutes an erotically charged act of life-giving nourishment.”

<sup>5</sup> Four different manuscripts of the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation or Formation) have come down to modern times: from thirteen hundred words to twenty-five hundred words. Scholars, who have created very clear lines on what constitutes Kabbalah, say the *Sefer Yetzirah* is actually not a kabbalistic work, mainly because it mentions nothing about Jewish practices that Kabbalah is based on.

<sup>6</sup> *Ten sefirot belimah* (“numeral entities”)--numerals of nothingness, entities of emptiness--and twenty-two elemental letters. *Ten sefirot belimah*, corresponding to the ten fingers, five opposite five, with the covenant of oneness precisely in the middle, in the word of the tongue and in circumcisions (as translated by Daniel Matt 1995:76).

<sup>7</sup> Sacred literature can *only* be written in Israel, according to the *Mishnah* (Scholem 1973:464). In the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*), only Ezekiel (c. 622-570 BCE) had written his work outside of Israel while a Babylonian exile. The *Talmud* states, however, that Ezekiel received his prophecies in Israel *before* he was taken into Exile (Dan 2007:87).

<sup>8</sup> I offer one example of how the *Bahir* expounded on the lower Sefirot (please see Appendix) by reinterpreting *First Chronicles* 29:11: “You, O God, are the Greatness, the Strength, the Beauty, All (Foundation) that is in heaven and earth. Yours, O God, is the Kingdom.” The *Bahir* inverts the order of the bottom four Sefirot to combine ideas of the Sefirot with traditional Jewish numerology: *Kingship* (7), *Foundation* (8), *Victory* (9), and *Kingdom* (10). *Foundation*, further developed in the *Zohar*, here more implicit, represents male sexuality, seen in the interaction of *Foundation* (male) with *Kingdom* (female) (Idel 2005:143-144). Jewish males are circumcised on the eight-day and so *Foundation* (*Yesod* or *Zaddiq*) is the Sefirotic phallus. Ten represents completion (ten fingers of the hand); “*Kingdom*,” *Malchut* in Hebrew, also known as *Shekhinah*, is a separate (feminine) entity within the Sefirot (Kaplan 1979:xix): *Shekhinah* wanders in exile, longing for union with *Yesod* or *Te’feret*, the sixth Sefirah.

<sup>9</sup> When discussing mystical systems such as Lurianic Kabbalah scholars are not dealing with “linear” or “empirical” information but with symbols. A symbol is a “marker” that defies rational explanation (Dan 1987:162). Indeed, symbols are used precisely because they cannot be explained. Kabbalists have written intensely of these symbols, to each other and not to a general audience, which could not understand them. It remains very difficult to understand kabbalistic works (though scholars such as Gershom Scholem, among the most gifted, have done a superb job—yet Scholem himself admitted he could only “catalogue” these symbols and show their connections). Symbols further the journey of mystical life. Luria taught about the Divine’s inner life just before and after creation as the Sefirot unfolded, from the viewpoint of the Divine Himself. For the mystic, then, the Ten Sefirot is the One God; it is looking through the prism of the Divine’s perspective (Dan 1987:167). Yes, in mysticism ten is one or visa versa. Please see Joseph Dan’s excellent essay “Gershom Scholem’s Reconstruction of Early Kabbalah” in *Gershom Scholem* (1987), edited by Harold Bloom.

<sup>10</sup> *Whence do we know that Abraham had a daughter? From the verse "And Y-H-W-H blessed Abraham with all" (Genesis 24:1). And it is written: "All is called by My Name; I created, formed, and made it for My Glory" (Isaiah 43:7). Was this blessing his daughter, or was it perhaps his mother? It was his daughter. To what may this be compared? To a king who had a faithful and perfect servant. He tested him in various ways, and the servant passed all the tests. Said the king: "What shall I do for this servant, or what can I give him? I can only hand him over to my older brother, who may advise him, guard him, and honor him." The servant went to the brother and learned his ways. The elder brother loved him greatly and called him 'beloved': "The seed of Abraham My beloved" (Isaiah 41:8). He too said: "What can I give him? What can I do for him? I have a beautiful vessel that I have fashioned, containing the most precious pearls, the treasures of kings. I shall give it to him, and he shall attain his place." This is the meaning of "God blessed Abraham with all" (as translated by Green 2004:17).*

As poetry this passage de-centers previous understandings with loose associations of multiple *Midrashim* (Teachings). The teaching that Abraham had a daughter (alluded to as the *Shekhinah* here) is connected with a king and with Abraham's elder brother. We see here Kabbalah’s essential characteristic: the wildly imaginative spins on ancient interpretations, yet all kabbalistic speculation is within the framework of traditional Judaism.

<sup>11</sup> Associates from this small circle may have published the *Sefer ha-Bahir* a little after 1180 (Green 2004:18) as a defense against Maimodines' (Moshe ben Maimon—c. 1135-1204) *Mishneh Torah* (1170-1180), where he articulated a more rational approach to understanding *Torah* that indirectly challenged Kabbalah and mysticism in general (Green 2004:19). The *Mishneh Torah* purges Judaism of anthropomorphism, taming the God of Israel to become more like the God of Aristotle, whose philosophy Maimodines brilliantly adapted.

<sup>12</sup> As a young scholar Gershom Scholem had believed the *Zohar* was written much earlier, perhaps by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai in second-century Galilee. Attempting to disprove Heinrich Graetz’ (1817-1891) studies (Graetz was among the first Jewish scholars to present Judaism, since Jews had been forbidden to study religion in European universities until after the Second World War) that Moses de Leon wrote the *Zohar*, Scholem in fact found that Graetz’ studies were true (Scholem 1941:159).

<sup>13</sup> I offer just a few verses from a recent translation of the *Zohar* of how creation began, in its powerfully poetic voice:

*Zohar, concealed of the concealed, struck its aura.  
The aura touched and did not touch this point.  
Then Beginning emanated, building itself a glorious palace.  
There it sowed the seed of holiness*

*To give birth for the benefit of the universe.*

*Zohar, sowing a seed of glory*

*Like a seed of fine purple silk.*

*The silkworm wraps itself within, weaving itself a palace.*

*This palace is its praise, a benefit to all.*

*With Beginning, the unknown concealed one created the  
Palace,*

*A palace called God.*

*The secret is: "With Beginning, \_\_\_\_\_ created God."*

(as translated by Matt 2002:52, 53)

<sup>14</sup> Scholars disagree on how many Jews were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula: from one hundred thirty thousand to seven hundred thousand (Silberman 1997:109-110).

<sup>15</sup> The census of 1555 (Silberman 1997:145-146) showed that Iberian immigrants made up sixty-percent of the population, up from single digits in the previous census of 1535.

<sup>16</sup> See Lawrence Fine's (2003:377n13) statistics (which were not so reliable in those times) that are from Joseph Hacker, "The Payment of *Djizya* by Scholars in Palestine in the Sixteenth Century" who based his analysis on tax records of 1567-68, remembering, however, that usually scholars were exempt from paying taxes. The records show there were 945 households and 12 bachelors in Safed at the time.

<sup>17</sup> Yet, as I mention below, Vital claimed that he copied a manuscript word for word that Luria himself had penned: the first book in his "Eight Gates." Finally, Vital's son incorporated this work, along with his father's memories and what his father had heard from fellow disciples, into what became the final version of the *Shemoneh She'arim* "Eight Gates."

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah Tishby (1908-1992), who did one of the first studies comparing Hayyim Vital and Joseph ibn Tabul's writings, claimed that on such topics at the *Tzimtzum* and the *Reshimu*, the origins of evil in Lurianic Kabbalah, there were great differences (Scholem based some sections his 1973 *Magnus Opus, Sabbatai Sevi*, on some of Tishby's studies). Tishby felt that Ibn Tabul's writing more accurately reflected Luria's own teachings. More recent studies have tended to show that the two were closer than Tishby had believed (Fine 2003:393n5).

<sup>19</sup> Vital's main work is known as *Shemoneh She'arim*, "Eight Gates" also found under the title *Etz ha-Chaim*, "Tree of Life." The "Eight Gates" is divided into eight sections or books. Vital claimed that he copied the first gate (book) from Luria's own writings (as mentioned above), while the seven others were records of what Vital learned from Luria (and what other disciples had told him). Scholars debate whether Luria actually wrote the first book. Vital's son, Shmuel Vital (1598-1677), redid the work, editing the material according to themes, mixing it all up, as it were. This work was not published in its entirety until 1850-98. The "Eight Gates" we have today, then, is usually from Shmuel Vital, rather than the original work compiled by his father. Please see Fine (2003:392).

<sup>20</sup> Morris M. Faienstein, in "Traces of Lurianic Kabbalah: Texts and their Histories," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 103, no. 1 (Winter 2013) 101-106, wrote that Hayyim Vital kept all his manuscripts locked in a chest, and had allowed access from time to time to only a few scholars, who attempted to memorize as much as they could before running home to copy them down. Once, when Vital fell sick, Joshua ben Nun bribed Vital's brother to get the manuscripts and hired scholars to copy them, returning them a few days later.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Fine (2003), *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*, pp. 80-81: "Vital provides us with the names of thirty-eight individuals who made up Luria's discipleship... The fellowship was divided into four hierarchically ordered

groups. The first and most important was composed of eleven men, listed in this order: Hayyim Vital, Jonathan Sagis, Joseph Arzin, Isaac Kohen, Gedaliah ha-Levi, Samuel Uceda, Judah Mishan, Abraham Gavriel, Shabbatai Menashe, Joseph ibn Tabul, and Elijah Falko (or Falkon). It is largely accepted that within a year Hayyim Vital emerged as the leading student, so that when the Arizal (Luria) died in 1572, at the age of 38, Vital succeeded him. Since the Arizal (Luria) had left almost none of his teachings in writing, Vital began to write down everything he had learned from his master.”

<sup>22</sup> Please see Harold Bloom (1996) *Omens of Millennium*, p. 212: “Everything in Luria’s thought moves in great triple rhythm. God contracts or withdraws himself; this absence brings about the cosmological catastrophe that Luria called the ‘breaking of the vessels’; human prayer, study, and ecstatic contemplation bring about a mending that yet may restore a shattered world.”

<sup>23</sup> Please see Neil Asher Silberman (1998) *Heavenly Powers*, p. 172: “How did Luria’s mystical insights so profoundly alter the nature of all subsequent kabbalistic technique and philosophy? It had to do with a stunning new—even heretical—understanding of the nature of evil as a deep-seated element of history and reality.... Some kabbalistic tradition had understood evil as the result of a flawed, primitive emanation. Others had described it as a manifestation of divine judgment destructively ripped loose from its balanced connection with divine mercy. But Luria rejected these ideas of evil, suffering, and misfortune as merely externals to the essence of God.... And while earlier Kabbalists had envisioned the act of creation as one of conscious, creative emanation, Luria suddenly recognized creation as a process of purification—primarily aimed at destroying the principle of evil from within.”

<sup>24</sup> Luria’s system—in contrast to the *Zohar* and many other kabbalistic writings that only implied dualistic tendencies—was strongly dualistic. One could say that in Luria the *Ein-Sof* and the *Sitra Ahra* (Other Side) are two rival (and equal) divinities, with the creation as a way for the Divine (what we think of as all that is positive) to purge Himself of the *Sitra Ahra* (Bloom 1987:16). In Sabbatianism, from Nathan of Gaza’s *Treatise on Dragons* (1665), the “Other Side” is further developed and makes up fully one half of the *Ein-Sof* (Scholem 1973:300-303). Hasidism from the eighteenth-century takes the Zoharic view and sees the Other Side as a more impersonal, weaker force but one that still retains the power to animate one’s Evil Inclinations.

<sup>25</sup> Astonishingly the *Sefer Temunah* (Book of the Figure), attributed to two Tannaim: Rabbi Nehunya ben ha-Kanah (to whom the *Bahir* is also attributed) and Rabbi Israel (but probably written in the thirteenth or fourteenth-century) speaks of a missing letter to the Hebrew alphabet, a consonant that is yet to be revealed and this is why the creation cannot be complete or whole until the missing letter is in place.

<sup>26</sup> Gershom Scholem (1978) *Kabbalah: A Definitive History of the Evolution, Ideas, Leading Figures and Extraordinary Influence of Jewish Mysticism*, p. 245: “This final redemption, however, cannot be achieved by one single messianic act, but will be effected through a long chain of activities that prepare the way...which is the essential task of the Jewish people—and the final result, the state of redemption announced by the appearance of the Messiah, who marks the last stage.”

<sup>27</sup> The Cossacks, led by Bogdan Chmielnicki (c. 1595-1657), as they rebelled against Polish rule, tried to establish an independent Ukraine and the Jewish population became their target. They killed between one hundred to three hundred thousand Jews and destroyed about three hundred Jewish villages. The Cossacks saw Jews as loyal to the Polish crown or either as the unwanted of their new kingdom.

<sup>28</sup> Moshe Idel (1988) *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 259 disagrees with Scholem that Sabbatianism is based on Lurianic Kabbalah or that Sabbatianism spread so quickly because of the widespread acceptance of Luria’s teachings among the Jewish population (despite fact that Nathan of Gaza used Lurianic terms to proclaim the Messiah). Idel also opposes Scholem’s

thesis that Hasidism is based on Lurianism and Sabbatianism. I follow Scholem's positions in this article because they have withstood intense scholarly scrutiny over the last five decades. Please see Fine (2003:363).

<sup>29</sup> Nathan of Gaza was prolific. In addition to countless letters, some extant, Nathan wrote four essays before Sabbatai's apostasy: "The Prophecy of Jonah's Ship," "The Short Exegesis," "The Long Exegesis," and "The Treatise on Dragons" (*Derush ha-Tanninim*), the latter becoming the foundational Sabbatian theological statement. Nathan also wrote several manuals on repentance, compiled in "The Penitential Devotions." After the apostasy Nathan wrote "The Mystery of the Messiah King," "The Book of Zemir 'Arisim," "The Book of Creation" (*Hadrat Kodesh*), and "The Treatise of Principles" (*Tiqqun Qeri'ah*). Please see website: <http://jec2.chez.com/abstheslqayam1.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Nathan of Gaza's metaphysics for the Messiah stressed that Lurianic Kabbalah's injunctions for Jews to follow *Mitzvot* for *Tikkun Olam* applied only to the upper three Sefirot (Crown, Wisdom, and Knowledge). Jews had no redemptive power among the lower seven Sefirot: a nightmare vision of a diseased divinity. Nathan explained that only the Messiah could destroy the *qelippoth* and dissolve the dark forces and free the captive sparks to heal the Divine realms (Dan 1987:292).

<sup>31</sup> Maimonides in his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (1173/4), Sanhedrin 10:1: "The Messianic age is when the Jews will regain their independence and all return to the land of Israel. The Messiah will be a very great king, he will achieve great fame, and his reputation among the gentile nations will be even greater than that of King Solomon. Nothing will change in the Messianic age, however, except that Jews will regain their independence.... The Messiah, a righteous and honest king, outstanding in wisdom, and close to God, will rule it.... All nations will return to the true religion and will no longer steal or oppress" (quoted by Kraemer 2008:356).

<sup>32</sup> Nathan of Gaza—to draw a parallel with Christianity—was both John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul in one person (Scholem 1941:295). Nathan not only announced the Messiah's appearance but prolifically created an overpowering literature about why the Messiah was necessary and why this particular person, Sabbatai Tzvi, was the Messiah. Nathan, then, created Sabbatianism rather than Sabbatai Tzvi, who tended to be passive in his depressed states and lacking in confidence in his Messianic mission (Scholem 1978:250). Without Nathan of Gaza, Sabbatai Tzvi would no doubt have remained unknown to history (Scholem 1941:289).

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Dan (2007) *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 87: "There was nothing unusual in a person pretending to be a Messiah, but the claim to prophecy (by Nathan of Gaza), coming from the Holy Land, was a new experience for Jews. Because the Talmud states that there is no prophecy but in the land of Israel, they tended to listen and believe. Nathan's message was expressed in Lurianic, orthodox terms."

<sup>34</sup> The Sultan was overjoyed with Sabbatai's conversion and gave him a Muslim name (Mehemed Effendi or Aziz Mehemed Effendi), with a special office "Kapici Bashi" *Keeper of the Palace*. In addition to the honorarium from this office, the Sultan added a pension of one hundred fifty silver coins a day (Scholem 1973:681). Few in history have profited so abundantly from apostasy.

<sup>35</sup> They called themselves the *Ma'aminim* (the Faithful or Believers), but the Turkish authorities named the group the "Dönme," meaning "to turn" or "to convert," to distinguish them from the "Dhimmi," People of the Book—Jews and Christians—protected religious minorities who paid special taxes (*jizya*). The Turkish authorities were ecstatic over the conversions and hoped the entire Jewish population would follow, even giving them special grants of land. At least one Sabbatian synagogue/mosque in Thessaloniki, Greece remains today (Mazower 2004:76). Yet, these converts stayed away from Muslims, married only among themselves, kept in close contact with other Jewish communities, and secretly practiced their version of Sabbatian

Judaism, yet some Dönme groups entered fellowships with Islamic Sufi groups (Mazower 2004:74).

<sup>36</sup> Jacob ben Judah Leib (1726-1791), who later changed his surname to “Frank,” a reformer of Sabbatianism, is infamous today as Judaism’s most nihilistic vitalist ever. Frank followed the Dönme’s Baruchya Russo branch and declared himself a third reincarnation of Sabbatai Tzvi (after Baruchya), the incarnation to finish the work that Sabbatai had begun. Frank declared: “to violate the *Torah* is to honor it” and expanded Sabbatian sexual rituals to include his twelve concubines who represented the twelve tribes of Israel.

<sup>37</sup> Three Dönme groups developed over time and these would eventually contribute to the modernization of Turkey (Scholem 1971:159), among the ranks of what historians term “The Young Turks” (1906-1908)—officially known as Committee of Union and Progress—to create a constitutional monarchy in a secular Turkish state, reforms from Turkey’s first president (1923-1938) Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938). Nazim Bey (1870-1926), Mehmet Cavit Bey (1875-1926), and Munis Tekinalp (1883-1961) are a few of the more famous Dönme. The Dönme continue today in small pockets (Scholem 1971:166).

<sup>38</sup> Three differing views of Hasidism have come down to us today. The first, expounded by Ben Zion Dinur (1884-1973), was that Messianism (or Sabbatianism) was kept alive as a central ethic (Liebes 1993:94). Sabbatian messianic ideas pervade one important feature of Hasidism: the *Zaddiq*. In the second, Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) asserted that the *Zaddiq* (also called the Rebbe), a hereditary leader, actually neutralized Messianism. Further, the “homily” or “sermon” is the main channel for instruction (Scholem 1941:343-344). These homilies, as they were later written down, also became a “mystical psychology” or a “practical mysticism” rather than a theology (Scholem 1941:340-341). Martin Buber (1878-1965), offering the third view, wrote that the Hasidic “stories” are the source of ethics and theology (Buber 1947:xvii-xxiv). Buber presented this in *Tales of Hasidim* (1947), a widely popular work, in which he showed Hasidic stories were similar to Zen Buddhism’s koan (Dan 1987:318). Buber created the mainstream image of Hasidism that remains most compelling today. Buber also identified something essential about Hasidism in his statement: “Hasidism is Kabbalism turned Ethos.” Buber was challenged for his declaration that Hasidism constituted a new expression of European Existentialism, based on such writers as Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Existentialism’s philosophy focuses on individual choice in a world devoid of a deity: this certainly is not a Hasidic belief.

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, when Gershom Scholem began researching Hasidism he first had to determine if the Besht were a “real” person. When he found that the Mithnagdim (translated as “Opposition”) had vociferously attacked him, Scholem was satisfied with the Besht’s historicity, since only real people are personally attacked (Schatz 1994:97).

<sup>40</sup> Arthur Green (2004) *A Guide to the Zohar*, p. 44: “The Zohar speaks of a discontent that arises on this ‘left’ side of God. Gevurah becomes impatient with Hesed, unwilling to see judgment set aside in the name of love. Rather than permitting love to flow in measured ways, Gevurah seeks some cosmic moment in which to rule alone, to hold back the flow of love. In this “moment” divine power turns to rage or fury; out of it all the forces of evil are born, darkness emerging from the light of God, a shadow of the divine universe that continues to exist throughout history, sustained by the evil wrought by humans below.... The force of evil is often referred to by the Zohar as *sitra ahra*, the ‘other side,’ indicating that it represents a parallel emanation to that of the *sefirot*. But the origin of the demonic reality that both parallels and mocks the divine is not in some ‘other’ distant force. The demonic is born of an imbalance within the divine, flowing ultimately from the same source as all else, the single source of being.”

<sup>41</sup> Redemption is in the various ages, according to levels of consciousness, which themselves are ages in civilization. Now that the age of *Atziluth* is here, according to Sabbatians, the previous

*Torah of Beriah*, the Law given to Moses, no longer applied (Dan 2007:91): the Messiah now determines the *Torah* (Scholem 1973:390). Sabbatians would internalize the new age of *Atziluth* as central to their vision. The Messiah, then, is the catalyst from the age of *Beriah* to the age of *Atziluth*.

*A"K (Adam Kadmon)*  
*Atziluth (World of Emanation)*  
*Beriah (World of Creation)*  
*Yetzirah (World of Formation)*  
*Assiah (World of Action)*

<sup>42</sup> Sabbatian violations were shocking and scandalized Jews everywhere, who attempted to suppress the movement and to destroy its literature. The violations centered on three areas: 1) violations of holy days and dietary laws, 2) violations of the theology of the divine, particularly the Ten Commandments that forbade idolatry. Here Sabbatians tended to have four deities (all human beings), with one female, similar in some ways to the Christian Trinity, and 3) sexual violations (violating *Leviticus* 7:25; 18:1-26). Perhaps the most famous is a ceremony in which Sabbatians danced around a naked woman, who represented the *Torah Atziluth* (Maciejko 2011:200).

<sup>43</sup> Please see Harris Lenowitz' translation the *Words of the Lord* by Jacob Frank online: <https://archive.org/stream/TheCollectionOfTheWordsOfTheLordJacobFrank#page/n0/mode/2up>

<sup>44</sup> Again, for the Hasidim Lurianic symbols addressed personal interiors: the emptiness, the breaking of the vessels, and the necessity of raising sparks were inner psychic realities. Further, Hasidism completely internalized Luria's scheme of the Messianic age: When the *Shekhinah* (female), the tenth Sefirah, rises in union with *Te'feret* (male), the sixth Sefirah, universal *Tikkun* is accomplished. All Kabbalah since the *Zohar* affirmed this (Geller 2001:65).

<sup>45</sup> Today, two Hasidic groups are without a hereditary *Zaddiq*, the Chabad Hasidism, whose dynastic line in 1994 ended with its seventh *Zaddiq* Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (1902-1994) (he had no children and it was prophesied the seventh *Zaddiq* would be the last), and the Bratslav Hasidism, whose founder, Nahman Bratslav (1772-1810), great-grandson of the Besht, disagreeing with *Zaddiq* formulations, claimed there could be only one *Zaddiq* for each generation (Green 1992:182) and he was that *Zaddiq*. Both Chabad and Bratslav Hasidism believe the presence of their *Zaddiqs* remain with the community, who still perform redemptive actions for the community and who may return one day (Telushkin 2016:421-425; Green 1992:4).

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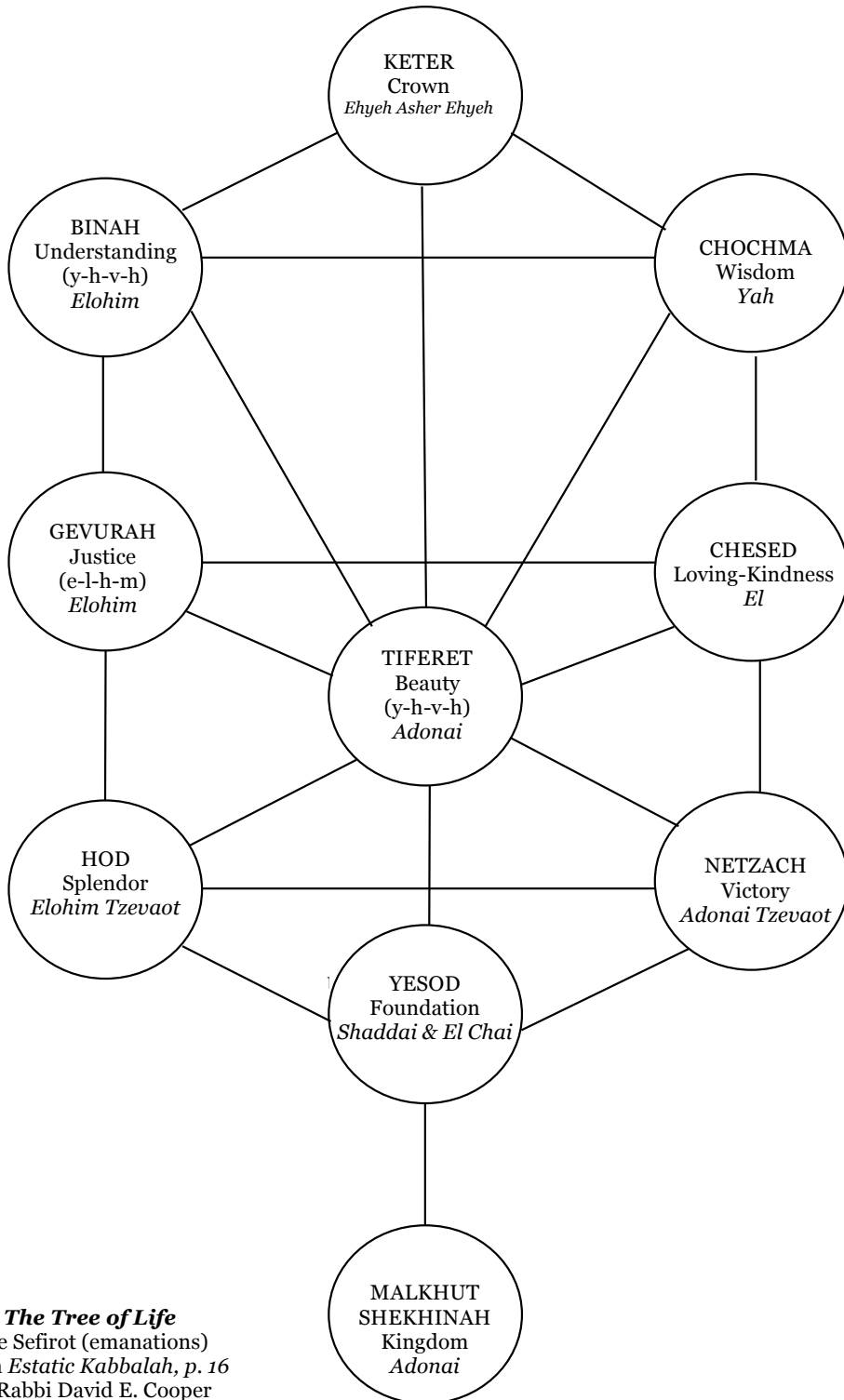
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Received on November 27, 2016.

**Appendix**

**Ein Sof**  
(Beyond Infinity)



**The Tree of Life**  
The Sefirot (emanations)  
From *Estatic Kabbalah*, p. 16  
by Rabbi David E. Cooper