

Notes on the Study of Later Kabbalah in English

THE SAFED PERIOD & LURIANIC KABBALAH

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 pp. 23-31.

THE SMALL GALILEAN TOWN of Safed (or Zfat) flourished in the sixteenth century as a center of Jewish ideals and spirituality in all of their expressions: law, ethics, philosophy, and mysticism. This community was home to great teachers and thinkers whose works and ideas have become some of the most influential in all of Judaism.

Luminaries of the great Safed period include Joseph Karo (1488-1575), the renowned legalist, whose codification of Jewish law, *Shulhan Arukh*, is authoritative to this day, and Elijah de Vidas, author of the popular kabbalistic ethical treatise, *Reshit Hokebmah*. Moses Cordovero (1522-70) was a late exponent of the classical Kabbalah; a prolific writer, Cordovero succeeded in systematizing a vast and disparate body of kabbalistic lore.

Dominant among these figures was Isaac Luria (1534-72). Though Luria wrote very little himself, his developments of the Kabbalah, primarily as recorded by his chief disciple Hayim Vital, shaped later Kabbalism and, ultimately, Hasidism. To quote Gershom Scholem,

The Lurianic Kabbalah was the last religious movement in Judaism the influence of which became preponderant among all sections of Jewish people and in every country of the Diaspora, without exception. (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd edition, London: Thames & Hudson, 1955—pages 285-6)

It should be noted at the outset that there is a woeful lack of translated material from this period. For example, we have seen but fragments of Cordovero's major works, *Elimah Rabbati* and *Pardes Rimmonim*, in English. Some Lurianic works, such as those compiled by Hayim Vital, have found their way into English in recent years, but these renderings are far from complete.

OVERVIEWS & PRE-LURIANIC

Safed

Bension, Ariel. “The Centres of Sepharadi Mysticism after Leaving Spain” = CHAPTER XIV, in *The Zohar in Moslem & Christian Spain* (New York: Hermon Press, 1974).

Biale, David. “Jewish Mysticism in the Sixteenth Century,” in *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, edited by Paul Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

Dan, Joseph. “Mystical Ethics in Sixteenth-Century Safed” = CHAPTER 4 of *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986.

Elior, Rachel. “Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Revue des Études juives*, CXLV (1-2) (janv.-juin 1986); reprinted in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, edited by David Ruderman. New York – London: New York University Press, 1992.

Faienstein, Morris M. “Safed Kabbalah and the Sephardic Heritage,” in *Sephardic & Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times*, edited by Zion Zohar. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Fine, Lawrence. *Safed Spirituality. The Rules of Mystical Piety: The Beginning of Wisdom* [THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN SPIRITUALITY]. Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1984.

Fine’s introduction gives historical and religious background to his presentation of “The Rules of Mystical Piety” as codified by Cordovero, Luria, Karo, and others, and practiced by Safed mystics.

Giller, Pinchas. “Recovering the Sanctity of the Galilee: The Veneration of Relics in Classical Kabbalah,” in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1994).

Gutwirth, Israel. *The Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1987.

Brief discussions of topics and personalities, including “The Holy City of Safed, Cradle of Kabbalah,” “Ari the Saint: A Star That Shone with a Light of Its Own,” “Rabbi Chaim Vital: The Faithful Disciple of the Ari Hakodosh,” “Rabbi Yeshayahu Halevi Horvitz: Shela the Saint” and “Rabbi Joseph Caro: Compiler of the *Shulhan Arukh*.”

Hoffman, Lawrence A. (ed.) *My People’s Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, volume 8: KABBALAT SHABBAT (WELCOMING SHABBAT IN THE SYNAGOGUE). Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005.

Idel, Moshe. “On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, Volume Three (1998), edited by Daniel Abrams and Avraham Elqayam. Los Angeles: Cherub Press.

Kaplan, Aryeh. “Safed” = CHAPTER 5, in *Meditation and Kabbalah*. York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1982.

_____. *Meditation and the Bible*. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978.

Kaplan includes quotes from Cordovero’s *Pardes Rimmonim* and Vital’s *Sha’arei Qedusha* shedding light on biblical techniques of meditation.

Pachter, Mordechai. “Kabbalistic Ethical Literature in Sixteenth-Century Safed,” in *Binah*, vol. 3: JEWISH INTELLECTUAL HISTORY IN THE MIDDLE AGES, edited by Joseph Dan (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994).

Rossoff, Dovid. *Safed – The Mystical City*. Jerusalem: Sha’ar Books, 1991.

Schechter, Solomon. “Safed in the Sixteenth Century—A City of Legalists and Mystics,” in *Studies in Judaism*, SECOND SERIES (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1908); and (*idem*) *Studies in Judaism*, A SELECTION (Cleveland: Jewish Publication Society, and The World Publishing Company, 1958).

Schechter’s article is considered a classic.

Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah* (articles from *ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA*). Jerusalem and New York: Keter Publishing House and Times Books, 1974; rpt. New York: Meridian, 1978; rpt. New York: Dorset Press, 1987.

pp. 67-79: “The Kabbalah after the Expulsion from Spain and the New Center in Safed”

Shamir, Yehudah. *The Spider and the Raven: Six Kabbalists of Sixteenth Century Safed*. Austin: I. D. A. Press, 1971.
Source material from Solomon Alkabez, Moses Cordovero, Moses Alshekh, Abraham Galante, Hayim Vital, and Israel ben Moses Najara.

Silberman, Neil Asher. “A Mystical City” = CHAPTER 5 of *Heavenly Powers: Unraveling the Secret History of the Kabbalah*. New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1998.

Silberman’s is one of the better popular books on Kabbalah.

Twersky, Isadore. “Talmudists, Philosophers, Kabbalists: The Quest for Spirituality in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Bernard Cooperman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Werblowsky, R. J. Zwi. “The Safed Revival and Its Aftermath,” in *Jewish Spirituality II: FROM THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY REVIVAL TO THE PRESENT [Volume 14: WORLD SPIRITUALITY]*, edited by Arthur Green (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987); hereafter *Jewish Spirituality II*.

NOTE: *Abraham Galante: A Biography* by Albert Kalderon (New York: Sepher Hermon Press, Inc., 1983) is frequently listed among works on kabbalists of sixteenth-century Safed. This book is not about Abraham ben Mordecai Galante (d. 1560), student of Cordovero and author of kabbalistic commentaries, but rather a more recent member of the same family, Abraham Galante (1873-1961), journalist, historian, and Turkish nationalist, who “served as a deputy in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey” and “a professor at the University of Istanbul.”

Joseph Karo

Alexander, Philip S. *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

§ 5.2 THE SHULCHAN ARUKH (pages 90-95)—translated excerpts: § 5.2.1. *Hoshen Mishpat* 26:1-6 – Prohibition against resorting to non-Jewish courts; § 5.2.2. *Yoreh De'ab* 335:1-10 – Laws regarding visiting the sick; § 5.2.3. *Qizzur Shulchan Arukh* 36:1-28 – Laws regarding the salting of meat.

Karo, Rabbi Yosef. *A Maggid [Preacher] of Righteousness*. Edited by Rabbi Yechiel Bar Lev; translated by K. Skaist. Petach Tikva: Rabbi Yechiel Bar Lev [Yedid Nefesh], n.d. [released June 2009].

An English translation of *Maggid Mesharim*.

Gaster, Moses. “The Origin and Sources of the Shulchan Arukh,” in *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Medieval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha, and Samaritan Archaeology*. London: Maggs Brothers, 1928; rpt, New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971.

Jacobs, Louis. “The Communication of the Heavenly Mentor to Rabbi Joseph Karo” = CHAPTER 10 of *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*. New York: Schocken Books, 1977.

Six passages from *Maggid Mesharim*.

Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. *Joseph Karo: Lanyer and Mystic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (at the Clarendon Press), 1962 [SCRIPTA JUDAICA • IV] / Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962; rpt. JPS 1977.

Karo not only wrote *Shulchan Arukh* (THE SET TABLE) but also kept a diary of his conversations with a celestial mentor. This diary, *Maggid Mesharim*, is the focus of Werblowsky’s study.

Chapter 4 of *Joseph Karo* is a particularly good survey of ideas and practices in pre-Lurianic Safed. This chapter was printed separately as “Mystical and Magical Contemplation: The Kabbalists in Sixteenth-Century Safed,” in *History of Religions*, vol. 1, no. 1 (University of Chicago Press, Summer 1961.)

Moses Cordovero

Ben-Shlomo, J. § “Moses Cordovero” in Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* [articles from *ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA*] (Jerusalem – New York: Keter Publishing House and Times Books, 1974; rpt. New York: Meridian, 1978; rpt. New York: Dorset Press, 1987), pp. 401-4.

Bland, Kalman. “Neoplatonic and Gnostic Themes in R. Moses Cordovero’s Doctrine of Evil,” in *The Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies*, volume III (1975). London: Institute of Jewish Studies.

Bokser, Ben Zion. *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981.

Ch. 12. Moses Cordovero: selections from *Tomer Devorah* and *Or Ne’erav*

Cordovero, Moses. *Moses Cordovero’s Introduction to Kabbalah: An Annotated Translation of His OR NE’ERAV* [SOURCES AND STUDIES IN KABBALAH, HASIDISM, AND JEWISH THOUGHT, vol. III]. Translated and annotated by Ira Robinson. New York: The Michael Sharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 1994.

Or Ne’erav (THE PLEASANT LIGHT) “constituted an epitome of Cordovero’s great systematic theology of Kabbalah entitled *Pardes Rimmonim* (THE POMEGRANATE ORCHARD).” (Robinson’s Introduction, page xi)

_____. *The Palm Tree of Deborah* [*Tomer Debborah*] translated by Louis Jacobs. London: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co. Ltd., 1960; rpt. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1974.

_____. *The Palm Tree of Deborah* [A TARGUM TORAH CLASSIC] translated and annotated by Rabbi Moshe Miller. Jerusalem – Spring Valley: Targum Press/ Feldheim Publishers, 1993.

Tomer Deborah is a kabbalistic ethical treatise on the doctrine of the imitation of God as expressed in the ten *sefirot*. The edition from Targum Press/Feldheim Publishers shows the Hebrew and English on facing pages.

The Palm Tree of Deborah also appears in *An Anthology of Jewish Mysticism* by Raphael Ben Zion (New York: The Judaica Press, 1981; originally published as *The Way of the Faithful* in 1945).

_____. *Pardes Rimmonim: Orchard of Pomegranates, Parts 1-4*. Integral edition in English, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Translated by Elyakim Getz. Belize City: Providence University, 2007.

_____. *Pardes Rimmonim: Orchard of Pomegranates, Parts 5-8:5*. Integral edition in English, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Translated by Elyakim Getz. Belize City: Providence University, 2010.

_____. *Pardes Rimmonim: Orchard of Pomegranates, Parts 8:6-26*. Integral edition in English, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Translated by Elyakim Getz. Belize City: Providence University, 2010.

_____. *Pardes Rimmonim: Orchard of Pomegranates, Parts 9-12*. Integral edition in English, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Translated by Elyakim Getz. Belize City: Providence University, 2010.

Dan, Joseph. “No Evil Descends from Heaven?: Sixteenth-Century Concepts of Evil,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, edited by B. Cooperman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); and in Dan’s *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume III [THE MODERN PERIOD] (Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999).

Idel, Moshe. “R. Moses ben Jacob Cordovero’s View” = Chapter 12 of *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

Raviv, Zohar. *Decoding the Dogma within the Enigma: The Life, Works, Mystical Piety and Systematic Thought of Rabbi Moses Cordovero (aka Cordovero; Safed, Israel, 1522-1570)* Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008 [= FATHOMING

THE HEIGHTS, ASCENDING THE DEPTHS—DECODING THE DOGMA WITHIN THE ENIGMA: THE LIFE, WORKS AND SPECULATIVE PIETY OF RABBI MOSES CORDOERO (SAFED 1522-1570). PhD dissertation. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2007]

The goals of Raviv's dissertation are (1) to offer "a more precise biography of RaMaK, his family and overall community in order to shed new light on certain biographical uncertainties and to correct some erroneous data that have infiltrated modern scholarship; (2) "to broaden J. Ben-Shlomo's important analysis of RaMaK's metaphysics (1965) and to deepen our appreciation of RaMaK's highly complex theoretical edifice—especially the relations between metaphysical and theosophical concerns"; (3) "by offering a broader phenomenological canvas as the backdrop to RaMaK's intellectual command, this monograph challenges the premature tendency to underplay the intricate affinities between RaMaK's theoretical aptitude and devotional slant" building upon B. Sack's "stupendous articulation of RaMaK's devotional piety."

Chapter 3 offers a useful survey of Cordovero's writings. "The fourth chapter, which is devoted to RaMaK's *Sefer Gerushin*, examines in depth a composition to which no serious attention had hitherto been given in scholarship."

All quotes are from Raviv's PREFACE. "[Josef] Ben Shlomo... (1965)" refers to Ben-Shlomo's *Mystical Theology of Moses Cordovero* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik); "B[racha] Sack's stupendous articulation" refers to Sack's *Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero* ([Be're Sheva]: Universitat Ben-Guryon ba-Negev, 1995). Both of these works are in Hebrew, making Raviv's dissertation the only substantial discussion of Cordovero in English.

Robinson, Ira. "Moses Cordovero and Kabbalistic Education in the Sixteenth Century," in *Judaism*, vol. 39 (New York: American Jewish Congress, 1990).

Sack, Bracha. "The Influence of Cordovero on Seventeenth-Century Jewish Thought," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus [CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES HARVARD JUDAIC STUDIES, VI] (Cambridge - London: Harvard University Press, 1987).

_____. "Some Remarks on Rabbi Moses Cordovero's *Shemu'ah be-Inyan ha Gilgul*," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, edited by A. Ivry. E. Wolfson, A. Arkush (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998).

Elijah de Vidas – *Reshith Hokhmah*

Benyosef, Simhah H. (trans.) *The Beginning of Wisdom*. Unabridged Translation of the GATE OF LOVE from Rabbi Eliahu de Vidas' *RESHIT CHOCHMAH*. Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 2002.

Benyosef translates a significant portion of de Vidas' kabbalistic ethical classic and provides a full introduction.

Fine, Lawrence. *Safed Spirituality. The Rules of Mystical Piety: The Beginning of Wisdom* [THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN SPIRITUALITY]. Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1984.

Safed Spirituality includes a translation of a condensed version of Elijah de Vidas' popular *Reshith Hokhmah* (THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM).

LURIANIC KABBALAH*

On pages 143-4 of *Kabbalah*, Gershom Scholem lists notable works in which “the basic tenets of Lurianic Kabbalah are systematically and originally presented”:

- Joseph Solomon Delmedigo’s *Novelot Hokhmah* (Basle, actually Hanau: 1631)
- *Ma’amar Adam de-Azilat*, included in Moses Pareger’s *Va-Yakbel Moshe* (Dessau: 1699)
- Moses Hayim Luzzatto’s *Keleb Pitbei Hokhmah* (Koretz: 1785)
- Jacob Meir Spielmann’s *Tal Orot* (Lvov: 1876-83)
- Isaac Eisik Haver’s *Pithei She’arim* (1888)
- Solomon Eliashov’s *LeShem Shevo ve-Ablamah* (1912-48)
- Yehudah Lev Ashlag’s *Talmud Eser Sefirot* (1955-67)

The word “originally” in the quote should evoke caution; Scholem gives no indication here of the variations and layers upon Lurianic Kabbalah which these works represent.**

Scholem adds (*Kabbalah*, page 144), “Well-known expositions of Lurianic Kabbalah by Abraham Herrera and Joseph Ergas were greatly influenced by their tendency to reconcile or at least correlate the Lurianic system with the teachings of Cordovero, as can be seen in Ergas’ allegorization of the Lurianic doctrine of *tzimtzum*.” Scholem allows that Luria was mixed with Cordovero but does not mention the many other stresses and influences on Ergas and, especially, Herrera.†

WHICH LURIANIC KABBALAH?

Defining Lurianic Kabbalah presents several problems, not the least of which is that Luria wrote very little and did not leave a systematic exposition of his own teachings. Among the first—and certainly the most important—to do so was Luria’s student in Safed, Hayim Vital (1542-1620), a kabbalist and occultist of some experience and reputation before becoming Luria’s pupil.‡

Vital based his major work, *Etz Hayim* (TREE OF LIFE), largely on the notes he took during his direct contact with Luria. These teachings were later arranged into *Shemonah She’arim* (EIGHT GATES), which were eventually re-edited and expanded after Hayim’s death by his son Shmuel. These works remained in the possession of Shmuel Vital and were not copied or distributed to any extent before 1660. No part was printed until 1850.‡

* My sincere thanks to David Solomon (University College London), whose helpful comments prompted this summary.

** Of these, only Luzzatto’s and Ashlag’s have been translated into English. For complete information on books and articles in English mentioned in this section, refer to the bibliography which follows below.

† Herrera’s “well-known exposition,” *Puerto del Cielo*, has been translated into English; see below.

‡ The abstract to Orna Triguboff’s paper, “Who Contributed More to Lurianic Cosmology: Isaac Luria or Hayim Vital?” (proposed for, but not delivered at, the 36th Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Studies, Chicago, 2004), begins: “It is generally opined amongst Kabbalistic scholars that Isaac Luria was the main fountain-head of the ideas of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Lurianic Kabbalah. Scholem makes regular reference to Luria and Lurianic Kabbalah even though the works quoted were actually mainly written by Vital. Examination of the writings of Luria and the work of his disciples suggests that in fact the greatest contribution came from Hayim Vital who was not ‘restricted to a post mortem revelation of Luria’s teachings’ but contributed mightily with his own ideas. The extent of Vital’s contribution is not yet fully established but it appears that it might be more substantial than Luria’s.”

The paper which Triguboff actually delivered at the AJS Conference in 2004 was “The Kings of Edom and the *Parzufim* in Hayim Vital’s *Sba’ar ba-Hakdamot*.”

‡ For details of the organization of *Etz Hayim* and *Shemonah She’arim*, see Fine, *Physician of the Soul...*, pages 391-392, note 3.

Hayim Vital did not intend to spread—let alone print—Luria’s teachings, but rather to preserve them for a small *elite*. The story goes, however, that while Vital lay seriously ill and unconscious, members of his family were bribed into allowing his manuscripts—which he kept under his bed—to be copied. These copies were, purportedly, hurried off to Europe (perhaps *via* Palestine) as *Etz Hayim* to become the basis of the *European* stream of Lurianic Kabbalah—as opposed to the *Safed*, or Eastern, stream of Vital and Luria’s other actual disciples.*

Even among first-hand students of Luria in Safed, accounts of Lurianic Kabbalah differed on some critical points. Joseph ibn Tabul, “whose writings arguably reflect a closer summary of Luria’s activity [than Vital’s],”** discusses aspects of *tzimtzum*, such as the “doctrine of infinity,” which Vital does not. In contrast, another of Luria’s pupils, Moses Yonah, rejected the idea of *tzimtzum* altogether and, hence, left it out of his summary of Luria’s teachings, *Kanfei Yonah WINGS OF THE DOVE*, 1582), which reached Europe in manuscript much earlier than Vital’s works did.

Israel Sarug (*or* Saruq, *fl.* 1590-1610) claimed to have been a pupil of Luria’s, though there is some debate as to whether he ever met Luria in person. During the 1590s, he spread his version of Lurianic Kabbalah (based on the pirated copies *or* on what Luria had taught him) in Palestine (which school eventually expanded along the Eastern Mediterranean—called by Ronit Meroz “the Eastern branch”) and Italy (beginning what Scholem refers to as “the Italian tradition”). Sarug’s version of Luria’s *mythic* Kabbalah was blended with Cordovero’s more *speculative* Kabbalah. Indeed, Sarug’s pupil, Menahem Azarya of Fano (1548-1620), considered himself a student of Cordovero before his encounter with Sarug.

The differences between Vital and Sarug are numerous. Vital taught that *Adam Qadmon* was the highest level which could be comprehended; thus, his version of Lurianic Kabbalah develops from *Adam Qadmon* down through the worlds below him. Sarug dealt with realms above *Adam Qadmon* and so covered topics (*e.g.*, the concept of the *malbush*, the GARMENT found between *eyn sof* and *azilul*) and techniques which do not appear in Vital’s works.

Sarug, whether yielding to the influence of Cordovero or to the atmosphere of Neoplatonism in Europe, added qualifying expressions (*e.g.*, “as it were”) into his accounts of such fundamental Lurianic concepts as *tzimtzum* and the “death of the kings,” suggesting a non-literal reading. Ronit Meroz states (in “Contrasting Opinions among the Founders of R. Israel Saruq’s School,” page 197),

We therefore see that already in the first generation of Luria’s disciples there were those who had reservations concerning the literal understanding of Luria’s ideas about *simsum* [= *tzimtzum*]. These were disciples of Luria who joined the school of Saruq. This is particularly true of members of the Eastern branch which seem, for all we know—to have had some predilection for arguing philosophical points, although it cannot be argued that they presented their Qabbalah philosophically, as Scholem thought.†

Some European Kabbalists, while generally accepting Lurianic teachings, continued older traditions not taken up by Luria, such as the doctrine of the *shemittot*.†† Many, including Sarug and his followers, made far greater use of *gematria* than did Vital (and for that matter Cordovero), possibly influenced by trends in Christian Cabala.

* There are a few versions of this story. Another names Hayim Vital’s main pupil, Rabbi Yehoshua, as the one who paid Hayim’s younger brother Moshe 500 gold coins to borrow the MSS while Hayim lay ill. R. Yehoshua then purportedly hired one hundred scribes to work for three days, resulting in over six hundred pages being copied.

For biographical sketches of both Luria and Hayim Vital, see Morris M. Faierstein, “Charisma and Anti-Charisma in Safed: Isaac Luria and Hayyim Vital,” in *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, Volume 1, Issue 2 (October-November 2007), edited by Zion Zohar, on-line at <http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/>.

** Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, page 25 [my brackets—DK].

† The odd grammar and punctuation appear in Meroz’ article.

In his PhD dissertation, *THE THEURGY OF PRAYER IN LURIANIC KABBALAH* (Hebrew University, 2002), Menachem Kallus presents texts (cited in his CHAPTER 2, § C) which “argue strongly for a non-literal understanding of Lurianic Kabbalah as a whole” (page 24). If Kallus’ conclusions prove correct, using attitude toward *tzimtzum* (*i.e.*, literal or non-literal) as a convenient way to categorize the earliest Lurianic kabbalists (as Meroz and many others do) must be reconsidered. Would *mystical* vs *philosophical* be better?

†† “... [Cordovero and Luria rejected it [*i.e.*, the doctrine of the *shemittot*] as a mistaken or unnecessary hypothesis, at least in the version found in the *Sefer ha-Temunah*...” —Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, page 122 [my brackets—DK].

Complicating matters even more, in the mid-seventeenth century, through the spread of Vital's more "purely" Lurianic manuscripts, the Safed school met up with the more eclectic European school. Representative of this merger is *Emek ha-Melekh* (THE VALLEY OF THE KING, 1648) by Naphtali Bacharach of Amsterdam. While this work leans more toward Sarug than toward Vital, it retains the literal view of *tzimtzum* from which Sarug seemed to back away.* It is interesting to note that selections from *Emek ha-Melekh* appeared in Latin translation in Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata* (TOME I, 1677, and TOME II, 1684).

There is yet another chain which leads from Safed to Europe, *via* Jerusalem. *Marrano* physician Jacob Zemech, a pupil of Vital's, codified Lurianic observances in *Shulhan Arukh ha-Ari* (1660). Zemach's student, Meir Poppers (d. 1662), not only arranged a major edition of Vital's *Etz Hayim* (called *Peri Etz Hayim*) but also redacted *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, which was printed in Frankfort, 1684—the same place and year that Latin translations from it were printed in TOME II of Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*. The first half of *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* is similar in content to Vital's *Sha'ar ha Gilgulim* (*i.e.*, the eighth gate of *Shemonah She'arim*); the second half includes material which is not Lurianic. Poppers also composed a series of diagrams depicting the unfolding of creation according to Lurianic doctrine, titled *Ilan ha-Gadol* [TREE OF GREATNESS] (printed Warsaw: 1893); these diagrams, for the most part, match those in *Pars quarta* of *Kabbala denudata*, TOME I, though they are set in a somewhat different order.**

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It is beyond the scope of this paper and the resources of its author to detail all of the paths which Lurianic Kabbalah took from the sixteenth century to the twentieth. Offered here are brief descriptions of a handful of exemplars; the selection is biased toward representative sources in English.

ISAIAH HOROWITZ (157?-1626—probably born in Prague) served as the rabbi of several important communities (among them Dubno, Frankfort-on-Main, and Prague), eventually ascending to the position of Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi of Jerusalem. His major work, *Shney Luchot Habrit* (TWO TABLETS OF THE COVENANT, 1620-30) is a classic of Eastern European kabbalistic ethical literature. Horowitz mixed traditional rabbinic sources with the *Zohar*, Karo, de Vidas, Cordovero, and Luria, though he only occasionally put Lurianic teachings into writing, considering them too esoteric and powerful to be directly revealed. Horowitz incorporated Kabbalah into every-day practice.

ABRAHAM HERRERA (157?-1639) was born in Florence to Spanish, likely *Marrano*, parents. Herrera merged, or attempted to reconcile, the Lurianic Kabbalah of Israel Sarug with Neoplatonic philosophy in his major work, *Puerto del Cielo*.† This work became best known through Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*, which included a Latin version of *Puerto del Cielo* from its Hebrew version, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim* (the original having been in Spanish). Rosenroth's rendition is far from a fair representation of Herrera's original work, for "[Isaac] Aboab [da Fonseca, who executed the Hebrew translation,] did not just translate [Herrera's works] but also radically altered the texts according to his own interpretation."‡ Rosenroth further condensed the work in the process of putting it into Latin, emphasizing its philosophical passages.

Messianic sparks within the Lurianic complex ignited into the movement behind SHABBATAI ZEVI (1626-1676). The Shabbatean dogma and myth were shaped by Nathan of Gaza (164?-1680) and Abraham Miguel Cardozo (1626-1706), both of whom drew on Lurianic doctrine and terminology. Some kabbalists, influenced by Shabbateanism but wishing to hide the fact, held traditional Lurianic Kabbalah separate from the "new

* In *Kabbalah* (page 394), Scholem states, "While Delmedigo's interest lay in the abstract philosophical aspect of Kabbalah ... Bacharach appears as an enthusiastic and fanatical kabbalist with a special flair for the mystical and non-philosophical traits of Kabbalah..." Does "mystical and non-philosophical" imply "literal"? Menachem Kallus writes (in a note to me, June 30, 2006), "Bacharach, being a scion of that [Sarug's] school, did not slip into literalism" [my brackets—DK].

** Refer to my *Christian Kabbalah*... ADDENDUM C page 94 [36], at <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/ccineb.pdf>, for an outline comparison of Poppers' "great tree" and *Kabbala denudata*'s.

† Eisig Silberschlag's formula goes, "One of them [*i.e.*, one of the followers of Luria], Hayyim Vital, systematized Luria's oral flashes in a massive work *The Tree of Life*; another, Joseph Ibn Tabul, propagandized them; a third, Israel Sarug, transmitted them to Italian Jewry especially; a fourth, Abraham Cohen Hererra of Florence, invented an eclectic mysticism which was a combination of Neoplatonism and pseudo-Lurianism." —*From Renaissance to Renaissance: Hebrew Literature from 1492-1970* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973): page 50.

‡ Krabbenhoft, *The Mystic Tradition*, page 21, noted below. See *The Mystic Tradition*, page 23, for a comparison of Aboab's Hebrew version and Herrera's Spanish original.

revelation”—as if the two were distinct from each other. Jacob Koppel Lifschuetz was one such “secret Shabbatean”; his *Sha’arei Gan Eden* (GATES OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN), written in the early 1700s, gives a full summary of Shabbatean theology while denouncing it as heresy in the preface.

In the early 1700s, more debate emerged over the doctrine of *tzimtzum*. Should it be taken literally or symbolically (allegorically, philosophically)? Bacharach’s *Emek ha-Melekh* took *tzimtzum* literally, as the Safed school did; this view was taken up by Shabbateans.* On the other side was Joseph Ergas (*Shomer Emunim*, 1736), who, like Abraham Herrera, held that *tzimtzum* was to be understood non-literally (metaphorically, philosophically); this latter view was taken up by three figures given notice here: Moses Hayim Luzzatto (RaMHaL), Elijah ben Solomon (the Gaon of Vilna), and Shneur Zalman of Lyady.

Padua-born poet, ethicist, and mystic, MOSES HAYIM LUZZATTO, or RaMHaL (1707-1747) is of special importance: He combined a knowledge of Luria (*via* the European stream, Herrera in particular), the influence of Shabbatean doctrines (though he publicly deemed them heretical**), and revelations from a personal *maggid*. RaMHaL’s aim was to codify Kabbalah and incorporate it into every-day thought and practice. However, in most of his writings—at the insistence of the leading rabbis of his day—Kabbalah is not discussed overtly. His purely kabbalistic works, *Kelalut ha-Ilan* (ESSENTIALS OF THE TREE) and *Kelal Pithei Hokhmah* (138 GATES OF WISDOM), condense and systematize his “hermeneutical/visionary” interpretation of Lurianic teachings.†

EZEKIEL LANDAU (1713-1793 was the chief rabbi of Prague, a position he held for nearly forty years. He was head of the Jewish court; his hundreds of *responsa* remain an authoritative source of Jewish law, collected and published as *Nado biyehudab*. Known for both his vast knowledge of rabbinic literature and his skill as a community leader, he was referred to as the “rabbi of the Diaspora” (—Flatto, *Kabbalistic Culture of Eighteenth Century Prague*, pages 9-10). Despite his frequent denials of being involved with *kabbalah*, Landau drew upon a mix of *Zohar*, Cordovero, and Luria (by way of *Derekh etz hayim* and *Peri ets hayim*, both compiled and edited by Meir Poppers) for his writings and sermons. Despite his kabbalistic interests, Landau saw the rise of the “new Hasidism” as a threat to the “traditional rabbinic hierarchy of values” (—Flatto, *Kabbalistic Culture...*, page 89).

Another esteemed figure, Lithuanian ELIJAH BEN SOLOMON, the Gaon of Vilna, known as the GRA (1720-1797), while a kabbalist, also rejected the emerging Hasidic movement as a pantheistic heresy. His vehement call for the ex-communication of Hasidic proselytizers, in particular those from the school of Shneur Zalman of Lyady, seems to contradict his otherwise humble and withdrawn existence. The GRA’s kabbalistic commentaries are characterized by their comparative academic approach, or, put another way, eclectic allegorical approach, which draws on the entire kabbalistic compass from the *Sefer Yesirah* to RaMHaL’s rendition of Lurianic Kabbalah.

A full analysis of the paths of Luria’s teachings through various Hasidic movements cannot be dealt with here, save to quote Rachel Elior on the relationship between Kabbalah and Hasidism (*The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, pages 5-6):

One must not be misled by the common terminology and mistake it for identity in meaning or conceptual unity. The Hasidic movement made extensive use of the framework of the Kabbalistic tradition as a basis for the legitimization of its freedom to innovate in religious thought and as grounds for permission to formulate new spiritual priorities. ... The deep change in patterns of mystical thought in the light of the charismatic re-

* Upon considering his dissertation and statements *via* email (see notes: † on page 6, * on page 7), I asked Menachem Kallus, “Can we conclude that the first Lurianic literalists were the Shabbateans?” His response (in the note of June 30, 2006): “It may well be that the Sabateans were the first ... it served their mythical/antinomian agenda” (Kallus’ ellipsis).

The more conventional view is indicated in the first note in Shaul Magid’s article “Origin and Overcoming the Beginning: *Zimzum* as a Trope of Reading in Post-Lurianic Kabbala” (in *Beginning/Again: Toward a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts*, ed. A. Cohen and S. Magid, New York: Seven Bridges, 2002), which states, “The metaphorical rather than literal understandings of *zimzum* began in the Renaissance with such Kabbalists as R. Menahem Azaria da Fano and later R. Abraham Ha-Kohen Herrera,” adding, “The three Kabbalists discussed in this study, R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto, R. Yizhak Isik Haver Waldman, and R. Dov Baer Schneerson, are all influenced by this metaphorical rendering of *zimzum*” (pages 195-6)

** “[I]t is clear from what Luzzatto says that Nathan of Gaza’s activity and innovations occupied his mind and that their inner meaning was disclosed to him by the *magid*.” “[A]lthough his [Luzzatto’s] writings avoid direct mention of Shabbateanism, they conceal evidence of a certain positive evaluation of the Shabbatean system.” —Isaiah Tishby, *Messianic Mysticism...*, pages 227 and 256 (see bibliographic details below).

† The term “hermeneutical/visionary” is derived from Zvia Rubin’s article, “The Mystical Vision and its Interpretation: R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto’s Qabbalistic Hermeneutics.” See the full listing in the bibliography below.

awakening gave rise to new religious creativity occasionally disguised in the language of older prevailing Kabbalistic concepts. The connection of Hasidism with Kabbalistic sources is not one of simple continuity or merely of shared terminology. Their complex relationship includes changes in principle with regard to the Kabbalistic tradition and the power of a new religious interest.

SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LYADY (1745-1813), a descendant of Rabbi Yehuda Loew (The *Maharal* of Prague), was the founder of HABAD Hasidism (for *Hokhmah-Binah-Da'at*, also called Lubavitch Hasidism after the Lithuanian town where the movement flourished for some years in the nineteenth century). Shneur Zalman was a pupil of Dov Baer, the *Maggid* of Mezritch (1704-1772), who, in turn, was a disciple of Israel ben Eliezer, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (1700-1760), founder of the Hasidic movement. As mentioned, Shneur Zalman was a prime target of the anti-hasidic objections of the Gaon of Vilna.* Shneur Zalman's most influential writings are gathered in the five sections of *Likkutei Amarim* (COLLECTED DISCOURSES, 1796), called *Tanya* (for the first word of the text). *Tanya* condenses Lurianic Kabbalah and the Hasidic interpretations of it into a systematic theosophy and ethics "that we must teach...to the many" (Shneur Zalman, cited by Rachel Elior in *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, page 21).

Yemenite SHALOM MIZRAHI SHARABI, called the RaShaSh (1720-1777), and his school, *Bet El*, stuck closely to Vital's *Shemonah She'arim*. Building on this, Sharabi composed *Sidur Rebovot ha-Nahar*, a kabbalistic prayer book nicknamed "Etz Hayim 3," which emphasizes *kavvanot* and mystical contemplation. Unlike the Hasidic movement and RaMHaL, *Bet El* withdrew into pietistic practice separated from the community.**

* In his review of Immanuel Etkes' book, *The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image* (noted in detail in the bibliography below), "The Posthumous Gaon of Vilna and the History of Ideas" (in *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2, December 2005; pages 253-9), David Katz writes

A careful study of the life's work of the founder of Habad, Shneur-Zalman of Lyadi (Shnéyer-Zálmen Lyáder), reveals his conscious and unrelenting demolition of the more extreme tendencies within Hasidism. He developed his brand of Hasidism partly in response to what he regarded as the justified attacks by the Gaon (and the Misnagdim) on those more extreme tendencies, while arguing that the Gaon's application of sanctions against the Hasidic movement generally was in his view wholly unjustified. In short: the Misnagdic movement played a major role in shaping moderate (Lithuanian) Hasidism, and it is that kind of Hasidism that comes into focus in Etkes's book. (—page 255)

** In "Doctrinal Distinctions in Late Lurianic Prayer," presented at the 36th Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Studies (Chicago: December 2004), Pinchas Giller makes the following points in a discussion of mystical prayer in the school of Shalom Sharabi (or Shara'abi):

For the Ba'al ha-Leshem [R. Shlomo Eliashev, or Solomon Eliashov, 1841-1924, author of *LeShem Shevo ve-Ablamab*—which is on Scholem's list at the beginning of this section, above, page 5], the names were a more appropriate object of prayer than the images of the myth, and when contemplating the names the Ba'al ha-Leshem warned that the only appropriate version of *kavvanot*, then, was the version of Shalom Shara'abi because of his erudition in the use of the letters. For study, one could use the anthropomorphic images, and this view was echoed by the Hasidic scholastic R. Zevi Hirsch of Zhidachov [1763-1831], who permitted people to learn in terms of countenances [*parzufim*] for, and I quote, "Everything that a man imagines is corporeal."

The Ba'al ha-Leshem and R. Zevi Hirsch of Zhidachov may have been influenced by a similar discussion about the very nature of the uses of kabbalistic symbolism in the generations preceding them, namely the distinction between literal and figurative theorists. The figurative theorists tended to view the processes described in the Lurianic system as metaphors for processes too ineffable to explain; a few such theorists would include R. Avram Herrera's *Puerto del cielo*, R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto, and the Gaon of Vilna. On the other side were absolutists who believed in the empirical existence of the characters of the Lurianic myth, including the divine countenances; among such thinkers were Emanuel Hai Ricci, Shneur Zalman, and Shneur Zalman of Lyadi. Now, this topic has been addressed so far by Rachel Elior, Elliot Wolfson, and Nisim Yosha, but certainly the idea of absolutism *vs* figurativism in the study of Kabbalah in general, I think, has some overlap into the realm of names *vs* countenances in *Beth El*. Now, Shara'abi may be viewed as standing between the two schools. He was a figurativist, on the one hand; on the other hand, he was also the recipient of *gilney Eliyahu*, a vision from the prophet Elijah, and so he was a participant in the kabbalistic mythos. He concluded that both names and the mythos were substitutions for processes too ineffable to recount, opining as follows—and this is in his work *Nabar Shalom*: "May God forgive me, for these things are not as they simply seem, for I have used the language of the Rav (Luria) but the reality of the matter is not as it seems. But of the essential thing do we not know that no thought can attach itself to it? And were it possible to even understand, there would be not room to even ask the question."

[my brackets—DK]

That Shneur Zalman of Lyady "believed in the empirical existence of the characters of the Lurianic myth" is not the impression one gets from other sources cited in the present article. Hasidic and late kabbalistic approaches (i.e., literal *vs* metaphorical) to the *parzufim* are discussed far less than those to *tzimtzum*; one would expect these to run parallel. See, for example, CHAPTER 16, "The Doctrine of *Tzimtzum*," in Rachel Elior's *Paradoxical Ascent to God*: Following Joseph Ergas (or Yosef Irgas), "Rabbi Shneur Zalman completely denied the possibility of understanding *tzimtzum* literally..." (page 82).

The most important figure of *Bet El* in the nineteenth century was YOSEF HAYIM B. ELIJAH of Baghdad (1832-1909), known as *Ben Ish Hai*, which is the title of his best known work. *Ben Ish Hai*, which remains an authoritative reference among the Sephardim, combines *halakha* with *kabbalah*, drawing on a range of authorities, including doctrines and practices of the Safed followers of Luria.

Earlier in the nineteenth century flourished the Lithuanian kabbalist YITSHAK AYZIK HAVER, AKA Yizhak Isaac Haver Wildmann, sometimes Waldman (1789-1853). Shaul Magid writes that Haver was “trained in the tradition of the GRA, writing an extensive commentary to Luria’s *Etz Hayyim* entitled *Pithei Shearim* [which is on Scholem’s list, shown above on page 5], one of the most comprehensive and systematic kabbalistic texts in Lithuanian Kabbala” [my brackets—DK].* “As a student of the GRA (*via* R. Mendel of Sklov) Haver’s Kabbala is largely drawn from the Ramhal’s writings.”** Haver’s *Pithei Shearim* was first published in 1888 and more recently republished (in Hebrew), Jerusalem: 2006. Magid notes, however, “Almost no scholarly work has been done on Haver.”†

The teachings of Polish-born YEHUDA LEV ASHLAG (1886-1955) are generally considered Lurianic, but they contain numerous variations and themes not from Luria (*e.g.*, “the will to bestow/receive,” “the bread of shame”). Ashlag is notable for having been the first to translate the entire Zohar into Hebrew, embedding into it his Luria-based commentary: *Ha Sulam* (THE LADDER). His other major work, *Talmud Eser Sefirot* (STUDY OF THE TEN SEFIROT, 1955), is an extensive commentary on Vital’s *Etz Hayim* (TREE OF LIFE).

Several schools which are active today base their teachings on the writings of Ashlag. The two most prominent are (1) BNEI BARUCH WORLD CENTER FOR KABBALAH STUDIES headed by Michael Laitman, who was a pupil of and assistant to Rabbi Baruch Ashlag (1907-1991), son of Yehuda, and (2) THE KABBALAH CENTRE founded by Phillip S. Berg, who was a student of Yehuda Brandwein (1903-1969), thought of as Yehuda Ashlag’s “successor.” Both groups have published Ashlag’s writings along with numerous topical and explanatory works by their current leaders. Both have extensive, multilingual websites: www.kabbalah.info and www.kabbalah.com††.

This all lands us in the last half of the twentieth century, with its flood of books on Kabbalah and *Chassidus*, Ashlag’s, Laitman’s and Berg’s among them. Two books at the end of this chain of developments, layers, and schisms are heartily recommended by contemporary *Haredi* teachers for their summaries of “Lurianic Kabbalah”:

- Kaplan, R. Aryeh. *Inner Space: Introduction to Kabbalah, Meditation and Prophecy*. Brooklyn: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1990.
- Bar-Lev, R. Yechiel. *Song of the Soul: Introduction to Kabbalah* [Hebrew original: *Yedid Nefesh* (1988)]; English translation, Petach Tikva: Petach Tikva (distributed by Moznaim), 1994

American-born ARYEH KAPLAN (1934-1983) is one of the most popular writers on Jewish spirituality in English; he is known for urging a return to Jewish observance. His many books cover a range of subjects. Any well-stocked Jewish bookstore carries as many as two dozen titles by Kaplan, the best-known being *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation* (Kaplan bases his commentary on the “GRA version,” *i.e.*, the version set by the Gaon of Vilna), *Meditation and the Bible*, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, and *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*.

YECHIEL ABRAHAM BAR-LEV (b. 1943, Tel Aviv) has written commentaries on the Zohar and the Jerusalem Talmud, and he has translated and edited Karo’s *Maggid Mesharim*. Despite being something of an anti-academic, Bar-Lev’s works are inspired by Cordovero, Luria, Luzzatto, the Gaon of Vilna, and Shneur Zalman. See the YEDID NEFESH website, which is devoted to Rav Yechiel Bar-Lev: www.yedidnefesh.com. The site offers excerpts of *Song of the Soul*, which is based on Luzzatto’s *Kelab Pithei Hokhmah*.

* “Origin and Overcoming the Beginning: *Zimzum* as a Trope of Reading in Post-Lurianic Kabbala,” in *Beginning/ Again: Toward a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts*, ed. A. Cohen and S. Magid, New York: Seven Bridges, 2002—page 187.

** Magid, page 211, note 137.

† Magid, page 211, note 136.

†† See Boaz Huss, “The New Age of Kabbalah,” in *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, volume 6, number 2 (Basingstoke, Hants. : Carfax Publishing / Taylor & Francis, 2007); and Jody Myers, *Kabbalah and the Spiritual Quest: The Kabbalah Centre in America* [RELIGION, HEALTH, AND HEALING series] (Westport – London: Praeger, 2007).

Online, see David Rowan’s articles from the Evening Standard: “The Kabbalah Centre Exposed: Investigation” (2002) <http://www.davidrowan.com/2002/10/evening-standard-kabbalah-centre.html>, and from The Times: “Strings Attached – The Kabbalah Centre Exposed” (2004) <http://www.davidrowan.com/2004/04/times-strings-attached-kabbalah-centre.html>

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“The corpus of Lurianic literature is highly complex and disorganized. Luria himself wrote almost nothing during his brief time in Safed. Most of what exists from the Safed circle is the product of various students, the most prolific and prominent being R. Hayyim Vital and R. Hayyim Ya’akov Zemah. The foundational texts in the Lurianic corpus are *Etz Hayyim* and the *Shemonah She’arim*, written by R. Hayyim Vital and edited by his son R. Shmuel Vital in Damascus. Most of Lurianic literature bearing the word *Sha’ar* in the title comes from the Vitalian school. Other texts, some of which bear the title *Sefer*, come from other members of the circle, the most prominent being R. Meir Poppers, R. Ya’akov Hayyim Zemah, R. Nathan Shapira, R. Joseph Ibn Tabul, R. Moshe Zakuto, and R. Israel Sarug. The texts presented here come from three collections, *Sha’ar Ha-Pesukim*, *Sefer Ha-Likkutim*, and *Likkutei Torah*, all of which are running commentaries to the Torah. *Sha’ar Ha-Pesukim* is one of the Vitalian *Shemonah She’arim*. R. Meir Poppers, in his *Derekh Etz Hayyim*, called *Sefer Ha-Likkutim* (and *Sefer Derushim*) part of the “early edition” the Lurianic corpus. This would make it part of the Vitalian school as well. We know that the first edition of *Sefer Ha-Likkutim* (published under that title) was edited by R. Benjamin Ha-Levi, a student of Vital. *Likkutei Torah*, first printed in Zolkeiw in 1775 appears to be a mosaic of various earlier material consisting largely of the second section of R. Meir Poppers’ *Nof Etz Hayyim* combined with portions of R. Ya’akov Zemah’s *Ozrot Hayyim*, *Adam Yasbar*, and *Sefer Derushim*.” (¶7)

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Moses Hayim Luzzatto

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Elijah ben Solomon, Gaon of Vilna

Bakst, Joel David. *The Secret Doctrine of the Gaon of Vilna*, Volume I: *Global Transformation and the Messianic Role of Torah, Kabbalah and Science*. Manitou Springs: City of Luz Publications, 2008.

The Secret Doctrine... is an extended commentary on *Kol haTor*, especially *Kol haTor*'s CHAPTER 5, PART II: *Sha'ar Be'er Sheva*. Bakst refers to *Kol haTor* as “possibly the most extraordinary and revolutionary book in modern Jewish history” and “certainly Judaism’s best-kept secret” (—PREFACE, page 1). Bakst notes (page 13 and note 3 on page 17) that the 1994 English version (listed below under “Shklober”) omits the *Kol haTor*'s CHAPTER 5, PART II, as well as the final page of CHAPTER 5, PART I and some other material. Bakst provides all of this missing material—translated and annotated in English—in *The Secret Doctrine*, CHAPTER 4 (page 133-170).

For more information, go to www.cityofluz.com.

_____. *The Secret Doctrine of the Gaon of Vilna*, Volume II: *The Josephic Messiah, Leviathan, Metatron & the Sacred Serpent*. Manitou Springs: City of Luz Publications, 2009.

“According to the Gaon, the four phenomena that are axiomatic in his Kabbalah cosmology are but one trunk of the same tree, the actual higher-dimensional Tree of (Dualistic) Knowledge, and its infinite branches and twigs woven together. All are fractals of one singular underlying cosmic structure... The Gaon’s unique interdisciplinarian Torah cosmology and futuristic messianic vision presented in these four chapters can also be viewed as corresponding to the four alphanumeric digits of the sacred formula *Y-H-V-H* – the name formula of the God of the Torah. These are 1) the reunion of the Twin Messiahs, 2) the resurrection of the Sacred Serpent, 3) the Feast of Leviathanic consciousness, and 4) the revelation and glory of Metatron.” (—from the PREFACE, pages 7-8)

For more information, go to www.cityofluz.com.

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“In this paper, I will present three aspects of the Vilna Gaon’s own unique mystical path to God, that will evidence the need for the Gra’s writings to be addressed in scholarship. I will start with his innovation within the theory of Lurianic Kabbalah that pertain to his mysticism, then I will examine the nature of his mysticism, and finally, I will conclude with his relationship to the world of Hasidic spirituality.” (—pages 131-132)

Elijah ben Solomon. “Journey of the Soul,” an allegorical commentary adapted from the Vilna Gaon’s *Aderes Eliyahu*, in *The Book of Yonah* (SEFER YONAH) by Moshe Schapiro. Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1997.

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“He viewed the knowledge of the Torah that he acquired by force of hard intellectual work as the most exalted expression of divine revelation...” (page 3)

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“An exciting expansion of the Vilna Gaon’s powerful ideas on the purpose of Creation, the Jewish People and its history and destiny, and the coming of Mashiach.”—Feldheim’s description.

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Rabbi Hillel Shklober (1758-1838) was a grand-nephew and student of Rabbi Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon, upon whose teachings *The Voice of the Turtledove* is based.

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Wolfson discusses the Gaon of Vilna's commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah*.

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Elior, Rachel. "HaBaD: The Contemplative Ascent to God," in *Jewish Spirituality [II]: From the Seventeenth-Century Revival to the Present*, edited by Arthur Green. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989.

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Yehuda Lev Ashlag

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"This book is a study guide to a key text in Kabbalah, *the Introduction to the Zohar* by Rabi Yehudah Ashlag, as published in English in *In the Shadow of the Ladder*." –PREFACE, page ix. See the description of *In the Shadow of the Ladder*, below.

_____. *Entrance to the Tree of Life* (HAKDAMOT, Part 2). Jerusalem: Research Centre of Kabbalah, 1977.

A preface and introduction to *Etz Hayim*.

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_____. *In the Shadow of the Ladder: Introductions to the Kabbalah*. Translated from the Hebrew with additional explanatory chapters by Mark Cohen and Yedidah Cohen. Safed: Nehora Press, 2002.

This collection's CHAPTER 3, "Introduction to the Zohar," is a new translation of the text which appears as PART ONE of *Entrance to the Zohar*, "A Preface to the Zohar." CHAPTER 4 is another substantial piece by Ashlag, "Introduction to the Study of the Ten Sefirot." "The Ladder" in the title refers to Ashlag's Hebrew translation (with embedded commentary) of the Zohar, *Ha Sulam*, which has been translated into English and published by The Kabbalah Centre.

_____. (Laitman, Rav Michael, comm.) *Introduction to the Book of Zohar: Original Texts of Rav Yehuda Ashlag* in Hebrew and English. Toronto: Laitman Kabbalah Publishers, 2005.

- Vol. I, *The Science of Kabbalah (Pticha)* includes "The Preamble to the Wisdom of Kabbalah," and "Preface to the Commentary of 'The Sulam.'"

- *Vol. II, Introduction to the Book Zohar* includes “Preface to the Book of Zohar,” which is the same text as *An Entrance to the Zohar, Part Two*; AND “Introduction to the Book of Zohar,” which is the same text as *In the Shadow of the Ladder, Chapter 3*, and *An Entrance to the Zohar, Part One*. Laitman presents both with extensive commentary.

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A collection of essays covering a wide range of subjects.

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_____. *Ten Luminous Emanations*. Volume 1: TEN LUMINOUS EMANATIONS, CONTRACTION AND LINE OF LIGHT (1969); Volume 2: CIRCLES AND STRAIGHTNESS (1973). Jerusalem: Research Centre of Kabbalah.

These volumes represent the first two parts of *Talmud Eser Sefirot*: TZIMTZUM AND KAV and IGULIM AND YOSHER.

_____. *The Wisdom of Truth: 12 Essays by the Holy Kabbalist Rav Yehuda Ashlag*, edited by Michael Berg. Los Angeles: The Kabbalah Centre International, Inc., 2008.

Wisdom of Truth contains all the same essays as *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (noted above); *Wisdom...* includes the Hebrew on facing pages.

Ashlag, Rav Yehuda; Ashlag, Rav Baruch; and Laitman, Michael. *Kabbalah for the Student*. Toronto – Brooklyn: Laitman Kabbalah Publishers, 2008.

Kabbalah for the Student is a vast collection of articles (some quite lengthy), prefaces, excerpts, and explanations from R. Yehuda Ashlag, with additional material from Yehuda’s son Baruch, and Baruch’s personal assistant, Michael Laitman. Many of the writings presented in *Kabbalah for the Student* have been published elsewhere before. Some examples:

- “Disclosing a Portion, Covering Two” ≈ “Revealing a Handbreadth and Concealing Two” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)
- “Hallan” (12 diagrams) = “Sefer Ha-Ilan” in Laitman’s *Introduction to the Book of Zohar* (2005)
- “Introduction to the Book of Zohar” ≈ “Preface to the Zohar” which is PART ONE of *An Entrance to the Zohar* (1974); the same text is given piece by piece, surrounded by commentary as “Introduction to the Book of Zohar” in Laitman’s *Introduction to the Book of Zohar* (2005)
- “Introduction to the Study of the Ten Sefirot” is also Chapter 4 of *In the Shadow of the Ladder* (2002)
- “Matan Torah” ≈ “The Giving of the Torah” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)
- “Matter and Form in the Wisdom of Kabbalah” ≈ “Substance and Form in Kabbalah” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)
- “Preface to the Book of Zohar” ≈ “An Introduction to the Zohar” which is PART TWO of *An Entrance to the Zohar* (1974); the same text is given piece by piece, surrounded by commentary as “Preface to the Book of Zohar” in Laitman’s *Introduction to the Book of Zohar* (2005)
- “Preface to the Sulam Commentary” = “The Preface to the Commentary of ‘The Sulam’” in Laitman’s *Introduction to the Book of Zohar* (2005)
- “Preface to the Wisdom of Kabbalah” = “The Preamble to the Wisdom of Kabbalah” in Laitman’s *Introduction to the Book of Zohar* (2005), surrounded by Laitman’s commentary
- “The Arvut” = “Mutual Responsibility” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)
- “The Essence of Religion and Its Purpose” ≈ “The Quality and Goal of Religion” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)
- “The Essence of the Wisdom of the Kabbalah” ≈ “The Essence of Kabbalistic Wisdom” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)
- “The Peace” ≈ “Peace” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)
- “This is for Judah” ≈ “This is for Yehuda” in *Kabbalah: A Gift of the Bible* (1984)—also in *The Wisdom of Truth* (2008)

- Appendix C. “Diagrams of the Spiritual Worlds” ≈ “Album of Drawings” in Laitman’s *Introduction to the Book of Zohar* (2005), except all of the drawings are in reverse and *Kabbalah for the Student* adds nine diagrams

Berg, Rabbi Michael (ed/comp). *The Zohar by Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai with THE SULAM Commentary of Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag, THE FIRST EVER UNABRIDGED ENGLISH TRANSLATION WITH COMMENTARY*. Tel Aviv – New York – Los Angeles: Yeshivat Kol Yehudah, The Kabbalah Centre International, [22 volumes + index: 1 volume, 1993; completed, 2001; index, 2003]; see Kabbalah Centre’s website: www.kabbalah.com

The Zohar, paragraph by paragraph, is presented in the original Aramaic and in English. The English is a translation of Rabbi Ashlag’s *Ha Sulam* (THE LADDER), *i.e.*, Ashlag’s Hebrew translation of the Zohar containing his “embedded commentary,” which, in the Kabbalah Centre’s edition, is shown in a different typeface from the Zohar text. (*Ha Sulam* was published in Jerusalem, 1945-55.) Most chapters are introduced by short summaries, which, starting at volume 3, are headlined “A Synopsis.” Some chapters are further set up by additional paragraphs headlined “The Relevance of the Passage.” Each volume contains a glossary of Hebrew words, including biblical names and kabbalistic terms.

Ashlag’s commentary appositively identifies many of the Zohar’s widely (wildly) ranging referents with *sefirot*, *parzufim*, and other features fundamental to Lurianic developments. Elsewhere the commentary fleshes out the Zohar’s apparent shorthand (often by simply identifying the antecedents of potentially ambiguous pronouns). In some paragraphs, the commentary overwhelms the text; in others, no commentary at all appears. Of the *Sulam* commentary, Isaiah Tishby (*Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 105) says, “The explanations follow the Lurianic system and are of little help in clarifying the literal meaning of the text.”

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“This book offers a semantic translation of *The Zohar* itself, Rabbi Ashlag’s *The Sulam* commentary, and my own explanations. The book also contains the first part of *The Book of Zohar—Hakdamat Sefer Sefer HaZohar* (*Introduction of The Book of Zohar*).” —*The Zohar*, page 18.

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Krakovsky, Rabbi Levi Isaac. *Kabbalah: The Light of Redemption*. Brooklyn: The Kabbalah Foundation, 1950; rpt. Jerusalem/New York: Research Centre of Kabbalah (Yeshivat Kol Yehuda), 1970.

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See, in particular, “The Mantuan Kabbalistic Workshop,” § 5. EZRA AND MENACHEM AZARYAH FANO: THE DISCOVERY OF THE LURIANIC KABBALAH, and “The Visual Kabbalah,” § 3. THE MANTUAN MYSTICAL DIAGRAMS.

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