Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History

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CHAPTER 10

THE SAFED SCHOOL OF
THE KABBALAH

I

THE EXPULSION OF the Jews from Spain in 1492 changed the geography as well as the ideological attitudes of world Jewish communities. Two separate centers were formed, one in eastern Europe and one in the Ottoman Empire, of which the main communities were in North Africa, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, and Eretz Israel. The hardships that the Jews exiled from Spain underwent brought home to all Jewish centers an intense sense of exile, as the largest and oldest Jewish community in Europe was destroyed overnight by one royal decree. A feeling of uncertainty engulfed even those communities which were not directly affected by the expulsion. The sufferings of the exiled were documented in historical and literary works, which were read widely in the Jewish world. This and other reasons caused the intensification of messianic expectations which had begun in the fifteenth century. Messianism, which was quite subdued in me-
dieval Jewish culture, emerged now to become a major cultural and historical force, even a dominant one which shaped Jewish beliefs and behavior.

It was clear to Scholem that as a consequence of these historical events a dramatic change had occurred in the nature of the kabbalah itself and in its role in Jewish thought, society, and historical orientation. Scholem investigated this change in great detail, and from this point onward his studies of the kabbalah and of Jewish history merged into one. Jewish mysticism from the late fifteenth century to the nineteenth century became inextricably part of the major forces which worked within Jewish society, forces which produced some of the most vigorous and meaningful historical movements of modern Judaism.

According to Scholem, the history of Hasidism and of Sabbatianism are rooted in the Lurianic kabbalah which developed in sixteenth-century Safed. This kabbalah became the Jewish spiritual response to the historical events of the expulsion from Spain. That the kabbalah became (often in spite of the intentions of its creators), a dominant force in Jewish culture was also a result of the events connected with the expulsion. Thus, a continuous line of mystical development leads from late fifteenth-century Spain to seventeenth-century Turkey where Sabbatianism began, to the Ukraine of the eighteenth century, where Hasidism began. A complete understanding of the forces working within twentieth-century Judaism cannot be achieved without understanding Jewish messianism, its development and decline, and the emergence of Hasidism and its opponents. The spiritual processes which produced them all are rooted in the traumatic experience of
the expulsion from Spain and the appearance of the new kabbalah in sixteenth-century Safed.

Among the Spanish Jews, a significant segment of the upper classes, both materially and intellectually, chose not to be exiled but accepted conversion and remained in Spain after 1492. It seemed to the generation of the exiled that the best-educated, leading part of the community in Spain was the weakest when it came to sacrificing all its worldly possessions for the sake of adherence to Judaism. These were the people who were later persecuted most cruelly by the Spanish Inquisition for continuing to be secretly faithful to Judaism. The Jews outside Spain, while they regretted the sufferings of their brothers at the hands of the Inquisition, could not forget that these Jews would not have become victims of that institution had they not (or their parents or grandparents) accepted Christianity instead of exile. The Inquisition, after all, had jurisdiction only over Christians, being an institution intended for the abolishment of heresy within the Catholic Church. There were mixed feelings among Jews concerning the martyrs of the Inquisition trials, and there were long debates concerning the process of repentance required from marranos who had succeeded in getting out of Spain and wanted to return to Judaism in their new homes.¹

Judaism viewed the expulsion—and that so many Jews chose conversion over exile—as a major spiritual crisis, which necessitated a new evaluation of Jewish education and spiritual directives. Many of the rabbis of the generation of the expulsion, among them leaders of the exiled, blamed Jewish rationalistic philosophy for this crisis.² They compared the behavior of the leaders of Spanish Jewry to that of the leaders
of Ashkenazi Jewry during the period of the Crusades, when leaders were martyred with their communities rather than yielding to conversion to Christianity. The leaders in Spain did not follow this example, according to their contemporary critics. They chose the easy way out. The fault, according to these critics, was in the spiritualization of religious life taught by Jewish philosophy. That is, what one feels and thinks is more important than what one does, if the center of Jewish religious life is within the hearts and minds of the people and not in the synagogue, the Passover seder, the kosher diet, and all other physical deeds required of a Jew by the halakhah, then conversion is completely different than if the center of religion remains in the practical deeds. To love God, to contemplate his greatness and benevolence, can be done in a church as well as in a synagogue. If some ignorant Christian priests believe that by the ceremony of conversion they change the faith, the mind, and heart of a person—let them think so; it is not worth throwing away a lifetime’s possessions and one’s homeland. If Judaism is something one has to practice publicly and externally, then there is no middle way between exile and genuine conversion. But if Judaism is an intellectual and spiritual experience, external and pretended conversion need not interfere with the practice of it.

This, according to some leaders of the Spanish Jews in exile, was how Jewish rationalistic philosophy facilitated the conversion of so many Jews in Spain, and naturally it affected more those who did convert. The masses, the simple folk who followed the Jewish commandments because they were divine orders, could not accept this reasoning. They were expelled and suffered all the hardships of exile. But the bet-
ter-educated classes absorbed the teachings of the rationalists and spiritualists; they preferred to stay in Spain and follow Judaism in secret. They became *marranos*.

The works of Jewish antirationalists in the early sixteenth century, like Isaac Abravanel, and especially Rabbi Joseph Ya'abetz, both writing in Italy immediately after the expulsion, had great impact. The sixteenth century is a period of dramatic decline in Jewish philosophical activity. It really marks the end of Jewish philosophy for several centuries. In sixteenth-century Italy, for the first time, the kabbalah became a part of the basic intellectual world of Jews, even those who had no mystical bent whatsoever. Some knowledge of the *Zohar* became a requirement, not as a book of mysticism but as a masterpiece of Jewish literature. Quotations from the *Zohar* did not mark a writer as a mystic any more, just as a well-read intellectual. The kabbalah did not become "popular," but it was accepted by many as an integral element of Jewish culture and education.

While the kabbalah was undoubtedly free of the sins attributed to Jewish philosophy, and its antirationalistic character and neo-Platonic philosophy brought it close to the intellectual atmosphere of the day, it still did not provide answers to the acute problems of the generation of the exiled. The individualistic conception of mystical redemption presented by the kabbalah was not radically different from the contemplation of God in an Aristotelian rationalistic system. In order to be more than a refuge for people disappointed by Jewish philosophy, the kabbalah itself had to be changed. It had to be redirected toward the needs of Jews in this period of crisis and upheaval. It took two generations to achieve this.
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II

From the middle of the fifteenth century there occurred a change in the kabbalah in Spain, which Scholem studied closely. The most important aspect of this change was the intensification of the messianic element in the kabbalah, as well as the appearance of vivid mythological descriptions and a great interest in the nature and appearance of the powers of evil.

In this period Rabbi Joseph dela Reina attempted to bring about the redemption by kabbalistic and magical means. The unusual kabbalistic work Kaf ha-Ketoret, which explains the Psalms as messianic poems, was written in this period, as was the Sefer ha-Meshiv, which attributes to God himself its mystical revelations. The eschatological Nevuat ha-Yeled (Prophecy of the Child), was probably written, with a messianic commentary, in Italy in this period. Several other similar though unrelated phenomena signified the turn of such kabbalists to intensive messianic speculation.

One of the most important writers of the first generation after the expulsion from Spain was Rabbi Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi. He went to Eretz Israel and wrote some of his works there. Scholem dedicated detailed studies to the analysis and publication of parts from his kabbalistic works, which dealt exclusively with messianic mythology and speculation concerning the time and nature of the forthcoming redemption. Another important messianic work is the Galya Raza (The Revealer of Secrets), which was probably written in the second half of the sixteenth century.

These works and others similar to them indicate that a
change was occurring in the attitude of many kabbalists to the messianic element in their mystical systems, but these writers were still the exception rather than the rule. The dominant stream in sixteenth-century kabbalah still was the one formulated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which drew back from the mythology of the Zohar and presented a mystical system which could be expressed in semirationalistic terms. The best example of this school was Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbay, the author of the Avodat ha-Kodesh (Holy Worship) and other works, which became very popular. He described the kabbalistic attitude toward worship and the performance of the commandments with strong emphasis on the theurgic side and the impact of Man's deeds on the divine realm. Though he followed the Zohar closely, he minimized the elements of sexual symbolism and dualistic mythology, and the struggle between good and evil. In this he reflected the attitude of many kabbalists of the time.

Groups of kabbalists, most of them exiled from Spain, wandered east from the Iberian peninsula. Many of them settled in Turkey, then the striving center of the Ottoman Empire, but some continued to Syria and Eretz Israel. One of the most important leaders of such groups was Rabbi Joseph Taitazak. Many of his disciples settled in Safed. Rabbi Joseph was a homilist, and his followers, the most important being Rabbi Moses Alsheich, founded the great center of kabbalistic homiletics and mystical ethics in Safed.

From this group also came the first inclinations of the desire to participate actively in the process of redemption. Among the halachists in Safed a great enterprise was begun—the reinstitution of the Jewish semichah, rabbinic ordination. Ac-
cording to Jewish tradition, the power to judge according to the halakhah was given to Moses by God, and Moses transferred it not only by teaching, but by the ceremony of ordination. This was continuous, a rabbi ordaining his disciple from generation to generation, until the chain was broken in the Middle Ages. Because of that, the rabbis since then did not have the full legal-religious power to judge their fellow Jews. Maimonides, in his great code, discussed the problem of how the semichab should be reinstated in messianic times. He concluded that the messiah would not reinstitute full ordination (for he did not believe that the messiah would be greater than, or even equal to, Moses). Rather, an assembly of all the rabbis in Israel should choose one man from among themselves unanimously, who would be fully ordained and should ordain others.\(^{11}\)

The halachists and kabbalists in Safed decided not to wait till the appearance of the messiah (which they believed to be imminent), to carry out Maimonides' scheme. The rabbis of Safed, under the leadership of Rabbi Jacob Berav, one of the greatest halachic authorities of the time, duly elected him to be the first ordained rabbi with the power to ordain others.\(^{12}\)

There was one flaw in the scheme: Safed was not the only halachic center in Eretz Israel. There was another, greater, center—Jerusalem. In order to carry out Maimonides' scheme faithfully the rabbis of Jerusalem had to join their Safed colleagues, for all elections had to be unanimous. Rabbi Jacob Berav immediately sent a letter of ordination to the greatest halachic authority in Jerusalem and asked him and others to join them. The rabbis of Jerusalem categorically refused.

A controversy ensued, garbed completely in halachic ter-
minology and pretending to concentrate on the proper exegesis of Maimonides. The real argument, however, was whether the rabbis should actively participate in the process of the redemption or wait for the actual appearance of the messiah. This was a clash between active and passive messianic attitudes, when Safed represented the active one, supported by kabbalistic notions. It seemed that the great Safed project had failed when the Jerusalem rabbis refused to join, but Rabbi Jacob Berav continued to ordain rabbis in Safed, including Rabbi Moses Alsheich, the great preacher, and his disciple in the halakah, Rabbi Joseph Karo. The ordinations in Safed continued for four generations; for these rabbis the refusal of the rabbis of Jerusalem was not sufficient reason to desist from their messianic enterprise.

Two other scholars shaped the center in Safed in the first half and middle of the sixteenth century. Rabbi Joseph Karo was undoubtedly the greatest halahist of the century, whose legal code, the Shulhan Aruch (based on a commentary on the halachic code the Turim, which in its turn was based on the code of Maimonides), serves to this day as the most prestigious codification of Jewish religious law. But besides being a sharp, commonsense lawyer, Karo was a devout kabbalist who wrote a major work, of which only a part has survived—The Book of the Maggid (Sefer ha-Maggid, euphemistically called Maggid Mesharim, using the double-meaning Hebrew term, maggid, which can be just a preacher, but also means, especially in this period, a divine power revealed to a mystic). Rabbi Joseph, like many others in this period (as Scholem has shown), believed that a divine power, the shekhinah, was revealed to him in the form of the Mishnah. His ideal
was to be favored to receive the fate allotted by God to the messianic martyr Rabbi Shlomo Molcho, who was burnt at the stake by the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{17} This work is not innovative or original, but it reflects the dominance of kabbalistic terminology and mystical attitudes in sixteenth-century Safed.

Rabbi Moses Cordovero, one of the greatest kabbalistic writers of all, was one of a group of five or six people who shaped the kabbalah for centuries.\textsuperscript{18} His great project was to rewrite the Zoharic kabbalah in a new form, or, to be precise, in two different forms. One was a continuous, extensive commentary on every page of the Zohar entitled \textit{Or Yaqar (Precious Light)}.\textsuperscript{19} This commentary is an enormous treasury of kabbalistic ideas.

His better-known and more influential work is \textit{Pardes Rimonim (The Promenades Orchard)}, which is a detailed presentation of the kabbalistic world. Again, this work is based on the Zohar. Cordovero attempted in it to present the ideas of the Zohar in a systematic way. Every chapter is dedicated to one subject, leading the reader step by step and elucidating in a precise language the world which the Zohar presented in using enthusiastic language and the homiletical method. Cordovero began with the Godhead itself. Then he discussed the divine attributes of the upper and lower sefirot, analyzing systematically the structure of these divine attributes, and using a wealth of material from various ancient kabbalistic sources in combination with the Zoharic descriptions. Cordovero goes on to describe the various aspects of the \textit{merkabah} and angelic worlds and the divine order in the physical world, Man, his soul, the demonic powers, and every other subject central to the Zohar and the early kabbalah.
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Cordovero's work can be regarded both as a systematization and a summary of the kabbalah that preceded him, and an original and profound contribution to the development of the kabbalah. He presented his work as based on the Zohar, and even included in the Pardes a dictionary of the kabbalistic symbols of the Zohar. He was also a profound mystic who was especially interested in the Godhead and its relationship with the emanated attributes. Some describe his attitude as pantheistic, since he found the light of the Godhead itself within everything in existence.

Though Cordovero was undoubtedly an original thinker and mystic, his basic attitude toward kabbalistic mythology did not differ from the prevailing one in the previous centuries after the Zohar. We do not find in his work a reflection of the new attitudes present in the works of some of the kabbalists who wrote after the expulsion from Spain. For instance, the messianic element does not occupy a central place in his system, nor does he follow the mythologies of evil which were reevolved in the kabbalah of the late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. For Cordovero, "no evil descends from heaven." The evil phenomena in the physical world are the results of developments in lower regions of the celestial world and the results of Man's sins. The Zoharic myth of the "death of the kings of Edom" is interpreted by Cordovero in complete contradiction to the myth as clearly stated in the Zohar. Cordovero did not avoid the sexual symbolism of the Zohar, but he did not develop it and to some extent minimized its role. Cordovero was the spokesman and the systematic formulator of the kabbalah of the pre-expulsion period, which continued to a very large extent to shape the sixteenth-
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century kabbalah as well. In Safed, however, many did not follow his footsteps, even though he belonged to the most exalted school of Safed kabbalists, the one which began with Rabbi Joseph Taitazak and was continued by Rabbi Moses Cordovero’s great teacher, Rabbi Joseph Alkabetz.²⁴

Besides the two works discussed above, Cordovero wrote a dozen or more commentaries and systematic discussions of kabbalistic problems. A small book of his had an enormous impact both in Safed and in the kabbalah of the following centuries. Entitled *Tomer Devorah (The Palm Tree of Deborah)*, this brief treatise is dedicated to the ethical consequences of kabbalistic belief.²⁵ Its chapters follow the order of the *sefirot*, and the author guides the reader to become united with each of the divine powers. The ethical ideas included are to some extent commonplace ones; they receive new meaning and impact by their mystical meaning. According to Cordovero, each ethical deed has a direct consequence in the divine world, and these are presented in detail in the treatise. Cordovero presents both a system of *imitatio dei*, in the full mystical meaning of the term, demanding that man imitate the behavior of the *sefirot*, and a profound theurgic system, according to which Man’s deeds (and misdeeds) affect the divine powers. *Tomer Devorah* was influential in the creation of the great school of kabbalists in Safed who wrote ethical works based on the kabbalah. The most important writer was Cordovero’s disciple, Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas, the author of the basic and most influential work of ethics, *Reshit Hochmah (The Beginning of Wisdom)*. A later author of a major work on ethics was Rabbi Isaiah ha-Levi Horowitz. He incorporated *Tomer Devorah* completely in his *Shnei Luhot ha-Berit*. Other
great kabbalists in Safed followed Cordovero in writing ethical treatises, among them Rabbi Hayyim Vital, the great disciple of Luria, who wrote the brief but unusual and profound ethical work *Shaarey Kedushah* (*The Gates of Holiness*).  

During his lifetime and several decades after his death Cordovero was regarded as the greatest kabbalist in Safed, and mystics from other countries, especially Italy, studied his works as the last word in the field of kabbalah. His *Pardes* was written at the request of kabbalists from Italy. But he was still alive when a new kabbalah, very different from his, emerged in Safed, the kabbalah of Rabbi Isaac Luria.

### III

Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi influenced the kabbalah in a dramatic and most profound way; it is even possible to describe him as a revolutionary within the kabbalah. He became the inspiration for a vast body of literature, written by his disciples and their disciples, and he is the first modern figure to be a hero of a hagiography in Hebrew literature.  

Our knowledge of his life is very scant. Only the last two of his 38 years are documented. He came to Safed from Egypt in 1570 and revolutionized Jewish thought without ever writing one book of his own.

Luria explained the fact that he did not write his teachings in a book because he expressed himself in visions and enormous pictures. He was unable to convey them in written pages. Fortunately, his disciples succeeded in conveying some of his visions.
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The best known of Luria’s disciples was Rabbi Hayyim Vital Clippers. He was the author of the most important presentations of the teachings of Luria, entitled *Etz Hayyim* (*The Tree of Life*), and *Sefer ha-She'arim* (*The Book of Gates*), a series of monographs on the subjects that Luria dealt with, each of which is called “a gate” of that subject. This work includes a commentary on several sections of the *Zohar*, presented by Rabbi Hayyim Vital from the teachings of Luria. Though Rabbi Hayyim was very faithful to Luria, he did not present his teachings without some editing and even some censorship. When compared to the brief description of Luria’s teachings recorded by another disciple, Rabbi Joseph ibn Tabul it is evident that some of the more mythical teachings of Luria were deleted or minimized by Rabbi Hayyim.

Luria had no known teacher in kabbalah. His teachings therefore did not rely upon the sanctity of a chain of tradition. His disciples claimed that Luria went to heaven to participate in the deliberations of the celestial academy concerning mystical matters, heard Zoharic passages interpreted there, and revealed to his disciples what he had heard when he returned—that is, when he woke up. They believed that the prophet Elijah was his direct teacher. Luria was the first great charismatic teacher of kabbalah. He did not claim to be a prophet and did not claim to have a *maggid* dictating secrets to him. Those who believed in his personality became his disciples. He was a great visionary, around whom were collected a handful of believers. His ideas captivated people who had never seen or heard him.

Luria’s untimely death presented his disciples with a problem. Early death was regarded in Judaism as a divine punish-
ment for a sin, a death of karet. Thus, Luria's death at the age of 38 had to be explained theologically, lest the great mystic be regarded as a common sinner. One explanation presented by Rabbi Hayyim was that Luria was punished for revealing divine secrets to his disciples. This, of course, meant that Luria indeed knew such secrets and that the new kabbalah presented by the disciples was indeed of divine origin.

Another explanation, which indicates the atmosphere in which Luria's teachings were presented, was that Luria had to die because he was the messiah son of Joseph, who, according to the ancient apocalyptic prophecy of the Book of Zerubavel and other sources, was destined to die in battle against the powers of evil before the final victory to be achieved by the messiah son of David. Rabbi Hayyim himself believed that he was destined to play the role of the messiah son of David. 31 We have a detailed diary written by Rabbi Hayyim, Sefer ha-Hezyonot (The Book of Visions), 32 which he began to write before his meeting with Luria in 1570, and continued until his death four decades after Luria. In this book he assembled, from a variety of sources, proofs that he himself was going to be the redeemer of Israel. These sources include dreams (his own and others') and revelations made by Arab sorcerers and diviners. About half the book is dedicated to what Luria had told him concerning the source and mission of his messianic soul. There is no doubt that the circle around Luria was intensely messianic, even if various members formulated their messianic hopes in different forms. (They expected the redemption to occur in the year 1575, based on a phrase in Jacob's blessing to Judah.) 33

Although Rabbi Hayyim and other members of the circle
believed in their messianic role, they did not act out any of their beliefs. Vital lived to an old age (in Damascus, where he lived the second half of his life after the center in Safed began to decline), but besides writing his secret diary he did not take upon himself any messianic or leadership role. He just wrote and rewrote the teachings he had received from Luria during those brief two years in his youth in Safed. He intended these books to be completely secret, unknown to anyone but the original circle of Luria's disciples. When Luria died, Rabbi Hayyim assembled from his fellow disciples all their written material concerning the teachings of Luria, and made them sign an agreement, the text of which has reached us in the original, according to which they promised under oath never to reveal anything of Luria's teachings to any outsider, and not to study this kabbalah except in their own circle when Rabbi Hayyim was present. Rabbi Hayyim undoubtedly intended to keep Luria's revolutionary visions a complete secret from the world.

Rabbi Shlomo Shlumil of Dreznitz, who came to Safed a generation later, in the early seventeenth century, wrote several letters to Poland, telling stories about the greatness of Luria. Lurianic kabbalah spread in spite of the wishes of Luria's disciples. By the second or third decade of the seventeenth century it had become a major force in Jewish thought, replacing Cordoverian kabbalah almost completely. By the middle of the seventeenth century it was the dominant Jewish theology (except for a few writers in Italy and Holland). For the first time in many centuries the Jewish world was united under one theological system, one set of symbols,
common terminology, and an intense mystical atmosphere. Almost all the popular works at this time were written under the influence of Lurianic mythology and symbolism.

IV

How could the ideas of an unknown pilgrim, who arrived unheralded in Safed in the previous century, who taught a small circle of students and died two years later, become such a dominant and profound force in all the scores of countries that Jews were scattered in? The three stages of the Lurianic mythology emphasized three key terms: the tzimtzum, the "contraction of the Godhead," the shevirah, the "breaking of the divine vessels," and the tikkun, the "correction of the broken vessels and the work toward the redemption." The mythological story unfolds from the beginnings of the creation and will end with the end of the world. It is impossible to find in Jewish thought and literature a parallel to this huge myth.

According to Luria, the first act of the creation was not the positive one of the emanation of the divine powers, but a negative one, in which the Godhead withdrew from a certain part of its own existence.

Actually, Luria was answering a seemingly rationalistic question: How could creation begin when there was nowhere in which it could begin? How could the Godhead emanate anything outside of Itself when there was no "space" outside of Itself, when the Godhead was both everything and nothing, filling up all existence when there was no existence? In
order for the creation to proceed, “space” had to be created, where the Godhead would not be the same as It had been (or had not been; at this stage, which even symbolism cannot describe, all opposites were united).

The process of the tzimtzum is the Lurianic answer. Before everything else could be emanated or created, the Godhead withdrew its divine light and contracted away from a certain space, leaving behind the withdrawing Godhead “empty” space, which Luria called the tebiru, meaning “empty” in Aramaic, in which the process of creation could proceed. The term “tzimtzum” is used in rabbinic literature to describe the contraction of the shekhinah into the space between the two cherubs on the holy ark in the holy of holies, in the temple in Jerusalem. In the rabbinic usage, the tzimtzum is a divine flow into a certain place; in the Lurianic system it is contraction away from a certain space.

Into the tebiru then flowed the divine lights from the Godhead, in a straight line, the kav ba-yashar, to begin the creation of the divine world, the sefirot. The place in which the divine light entered the spherical empty space decided the existence of “up,” and the opposite direction was now “down,” for before that event no directions existed in any way. Now the flow of this divine light from the Godhead began to circle around the empty space, giving shape to the emanated sefirot.

The shape that the emanated divine attributes assumed was the one of Primordial Man, the adam kadmon, the various divine powers constituting its spiritual limbs, following in a radical gnostic way the early symbolism of Jewish mysticism which began with the Shiur Komah and was developed in the Zohar and other kabbalistic works in the Middle Ages.
From this point onward the Lurianic myth could have continued and unfolded in a way similar to that of the early kabbalah, having only answered the question “where” concerning the process of divine emanation. However, at this point Luria introduced his most drastic departure from previous kabbalistic descriptions of the creation as well as his most profound gnostic symbol: the shevirah. According to Luria, this attempt of the Godhead to create the divine world by the emanation of the “straight line” of divine light into the empty space was not successful and resulted in a mythological catastrophe. The “vessels” broke, and the Godhead failed in its endeavor to complete the formation of the Primordial Man.

The concept of the “vessels” has its roots in early kabbalah, but was systematized and developed by Moses Cordovero. This symbol was intended to answer the question: How can it be that divine powers differ from each other in some way? If they are completely divine, they should be identical. Cordovero answered that the sefirot were the combination of two elements: divine light itself, and the “vessels” into which this light is poured which impose some difference on the essentially identical divine attributes. The content is the same among the divine powers, only the vessels differ, giving each sefirah its specific characteristics of justice or righteousness, masculinity or femininity, and all the other symbolic differences that the sefirot display.

It is easy to discern in Luria’s conception the old Aristotelian distinction between matter and form; the first is identical everywhere while the form gives it its specific characteristics. The difference is, however, that in the Aristotelian
system the "form" was the more divine element, while "matter" was further from spirituality. In the Cordoverian system it was the vessel, the "form," the specific, which was further from pure, perfect divinity, while the "content" was divine light itself, identical and supreme.

Luria used the Cordoverian symbolism of content and vessels to describe the catastrophe of the "breaking of the vessels." The vessels broke because they could not hold the divine lights flowing into them. When the vessels broke, the divine lights in them returned upward, toward the Godhead, and the fragments of the broken vessels fell down to constitute a special realm opposite to the Godhead. According to Luria, this process happened to the lower seven sefirot. The higher three, though affected by the catastrophe, were not broken.

While such a myth of a disaster within the divine realm is familiar from old gnostic mythologies, especially the Manichean ones, its appearance in this sixteenth-century Hebrew work is most surprising. Why did Luria describe the Godhead as incapable of creating vessels powerful enough to hold the divine lights which were intended to be stored in them? There can be no doubt that this complicated and radical symbolism was used by Luria to answer basic religious and mystical problems and needs.

The main symbol which explains the Lurianic myth of the shevirah is that of the reshimu, the "impression" or "residue"
of the divine light. This concept was not clearly described in Rabbi Hayyim Vital’s voluminous presentation of the Lurianic teachings; the few paragraphs of Rabbi Joseph ibn Tabul on the subject are our main source for the elucidation of this perplexing problem. According to Luria, it seems, when the tzimtzum occurred, not all the divine lights withdrew from the empty space. A “residue,” the reshimu, remained behind. The metaphor used was that of a bucket of water, which when emptied remains wet; there is a residue of the water on its walls.

This residue of the divine lights was not accidental; indeed, the purpose of the whole process of the tzimtzum was to separate between the divine lights and this specific, and somewhat different, element within the Godhead. Here we find Luria presenting the radical view that before everything began, when only the Godhead filled up everything, the Godhead was not completely united and identical. This difference could not be observed then because nothing actually existed; yet the Godhead itself knew that there were within it some powers which, if given a chance, would assume different characteristics than the rest of the Godhead. The first aim of the tzimtzum was to seclude these potentially different divine lights in the empty tehiru, thus cleansing the Godhead of those reshimu elements. This aim was successfully achieved when the Godhead contracted and the reshimu remained behind in the empty space.

When the straight line of divine light began to create the figure of Primordial Man in the empty space, it was in order to achieve a more ambitious aim than the separation achieved by the tzimtzum: to correct these potential differences, to unite,
for the first time, the two elements within the Godhead all at once. The *reshimu* elements served to create, together with divine lights, the vessels, and thus helped to create differentiation between the various divine attributes. In this way, the different character of these elements was used in order to achieve the common purpose of the creation of the divine emanated world. By participating in a common endeavor, the *reshimu* and the divine lights would become one.

The breaking of the vessels demonstrated the refusal of the *reshimu* elements to take part in the creative process devised by the Godhead: They rebelled against the role assigned them as contributors to the creation of the sefirot. The vessels broke because the *reshimu* elements did not want to uphold them, and preferred their own freedom. They fell down and created their own realm, which, when it became actual, could be called by its proper human symbol: the realm of evil.

Lurianic myth is a gnostic story of the fight between good and evil within the divine world long before Man was created. The roots of evil, separated from the Godhead by the process of the *tzimtzum*, were originally embedded in the eternal Godhead in a potential form. Lurianic dualism is therefore extremely radical, much more so than that of the Zohar and Rabbi Isaac ha-Cohen, for evil was not a product of the creative process. It existed eternally within the Godhead, and therefore was as divine as He was.

Most theological and mystical systems see the redemption as a return to ancient perfection. The beginning, according to them, was closest to the completely good and pure divine power. Only subsequent developments destroyed this original perfection. Thus it is the role of redemption to restore that
early harmony. Luria drastically deviated from this belief. According to his mythical symbolism there was never a perfect situation. The divine world was never united and perfect in the past. Within the Godhead evil lurked in a potential form, and the attempt to correct it and abolish it from the Godhead itself resulted in the dramatic upheaval of the shevirah, bringing forth an independent evil realm in the lower part of the “empty space,” the tebiru.

Lurianic myth, which seems so remote and bizarre to modern ears, is actually one of the very few theological systems which gives an answer—obviously, not a logical one—to the basic question which haunts human thought and is usually left not only unanswered but also untouched: What is the purpose of the creation? Why did God bring forth the earth, the heavens, beasts, and human beings? Luria’s answer is clear. Existence is the result of an internal struggle inside the Godhead, the roots of which are eternal. Existence assumed a specific form by the process of creation. Man is not the purpose of creation, but one more battleground between good and evil. The world was created to serve as the arena of the mythical struggle between these two ancient, opposing divine powers.

It should be noted that both the process of the contraction and the process of the breaking of the vessels include in them the symbol of divine exile from a place in which God was before, thus putting the idea of exile into the essence of the divine world before the creation. There is no doubt that in this way Luria’s teachings conformed to the spiritual needs of the period.

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Luria's myth continues with the Godhead's second attempt at creation, this time successful, though much more moderate. It did not attempt to abolish evil in its separate kingdom in the lower part of the tehiru. The sefirot were emanated, the worlds of the angels, the Throne of Glory, the celestial bodies, the heavens were all created, and then Man himself was created in the image of the Primordial Man. Man's function was to reflect the dualism which ruled the cosmos as well as the Godhead. He included elements of good and evil together, a divine soul and a material body which struggled against each other. Man is a symbolic creature. The victories of the good in him represent victories of the good divine powers, whereas his sins represent victories of the evil powers. God entrusted the continuing struggle against evil to this symbolic creature. Its duty was to overcome the evil inside him, and in this way to bring forth the cosmic, mythic victory of good over evil. History from then onward is the story of Man's attempts to fulfill this mythological role, for which he was created.

The basic difference between this second process of emanation and the traditional kabbalistic picture of the same process is, that when it developed, the Godhead was already in exile. Actually, It had been exiled twice before Man was created. First, when It willingly contracted into Itself, a process which can be described as God's self-imposed exile from the "empty space" where creation was to proceed; second, when the vessels broke and the divine lights were driven back into the upper part of the divine world, while some divine sparks remained in the captivity of the emerging evil powers. Exile,
therefore, is neither a human experience nor a Jewish one. Long before either Man or Jew existed, exile was present as a most profound experience of the Godhead itself.

VI

All cosmic and human events since the breaking of the vessels are oriented, according to the Lurianic myth, toward the tikkun, the correction of the initial catastrophe with which history began. The world was created as a means for achieving this aim, and Man was created for the same purpose. The divine need for the mending of the broken vessels is the supreme reason for all occurrences, large and small, in worldly and human affairs.

When the shevirah occurred, not only the shards of the vessels, which were dominated by the reshimu, evil elements, fell down; with them were many sparks (nitzotzot) of pure divine light, which became prisoners in the realm of the evil powers in the lower half of the tehiru. These sparks are crucial for the process of the tikkun, both because they are missing in the divine, good world, which needs them for the correction of the sefirot, and because they give strength and sustenance to the evil powers. According to Luria, evil cannot exist by its own power. Its nature is nonexistence. It is opposed to existence. Some element of medieval philosophy, especially neo-Platonic philosophy, was retained here by the mystics of Safed. The medieval philosophers described evil as a negative essence, something which does not really exist, like darkness, which is only the absence of light; so evil is
not a real substance but the absence of goodness. In the Lu-rianic kabbalah, evil certainly exists as a real power, but it cannot exist independently; it has to be supported and sustained by the elements of goodness. If such support is absent, evil immediately becomes nonexistent.

The fallen sparks of divine light which are imprisoned in the evil realm are the source of the power of the evil elements. From them all the opposing powers of the Godhead receive their sustenance. The strength of these evil powers is dependent on the amount of such imprisoned divine lights in their midst. When more sparks fall and are captured in the Satanic realm, cosmic evil becomes stronger. When such sparks are liberated and uplifted, evil is weakened. If a complete separation can be achieved, and all the sparks liberated and returned to the realm of divine light, than evil will cease to exist for lack of support and sustenance. The uplifting of the sparks becomes, therefore, the main aim of the divine powers. When this process is completed, redemption will arrive, and the *tikkun* will be achieved.

When Man was first created in the Garden of Eden, his duty was to complete the process of redemption. As his structure symbolically represented the cosmic dualism of good and evil, he had the power, in a symbolic way, to bring about the complete victory of good over evil, had goodness prevailed and directed all his actions. When Adam sinned, the process of the *shevirah* was repeated, strengthening evil instead of restoring the sparks of goodness to their rightful place. The "original sin" was, therefore, a mythical event, in which divine sparks from Adam's soul fell into captivity in the Satanic realm, instead of serving to uplift the previously
captured divine lights of the original breaking of the vessels. This was the first attempt of the Godhead to correct the shevirah after the creation, and it failed completely when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden.

Since that original sin, evil was intensified and strengthened throughout the cosmos, and the Godhead repeatedly tried to overcome it. The greatest attempt, which was almost successful, was the Mount Sinai theophany. When the Israelites announced “na’aseh ve-nishma,” expressing their unconditional acceptance of the Torah and their readiness to yield to it completely, the process of the tikkun was completed, all the sparks uplifted by this profound religious devotion to the Godhead, and the cosmos was about to be redeemed. Then came the enormous sin of the worshippers of the Golden Calf, another shevirah occurred, countless new sparks were captured by the evil powers, and evil was again strengthened and en- vigorated, making the next attempts to achieve the tikkun more difficult.

History, therefore, according to Lurianic mythology, is the story of the repeated attempts of the divine powers to achieve the separation between good and evil, to uplift the fallen sparks and correct divine existence, and then bring forth the redemption. The means for achieving this are the Torah and the Commandments. The various mitsvot, the religious and ethical demands made of every Jew, were devised by the divine powers in a way that every good deed or thought helps to redeem one divine spark which is in Satan’s captivity. When a Jew follows the way of the Torah, his life is dedicated to this mythical struggle of good against evil, and everything
he does contributes to the enhancement of the process of the *tikkun* and the weakening of the evil powers.

However, every sin, every misdeed, every unethical act or thought, makes another divine spark in the Jew's soul fall and be captured by the evil powers. Sins are thus the source from which these evil powers receive their daily sustenance and vigor.

An act of repentance means that the sparks which fell down because of the previous sin can rise up and serve to strengthen goodness instead of evil. There is an automatic element in this process, for a man does not have to be aware of the cosmic significance of his deeds and misdeeds; the impact on the mythological process of the enhancement or obstruction of the *tikkun* happens anyway, though, according to Luria, the knowledge of the divine significance of such deeds helps to increase their impact. The Lurianic *kavvanot*, the "intentions" which he added to the performance of the various commandments and the prayers, are intended to strengthen this impact, though they do not form a condition for a mystical meaning of everyday actions.

This is why the disciples of Luria could demand that his teachings remain esoteric. If the knowledge of Lurianic kabbalah was conditional for the effectiveness of the process of the *tikkun*, it could not be kept a secret, for it concerned the behavior of every Jew every moment of his life. But as, according to them, the process can proceed even when its full meaning is not known to the participants, it was not the duty of the disciples to publish it and preach it. As stated above, Lurianic kabbalah spread in spite of the attempts of
the disciples, and especially of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, to keep it a secret. The history of the spread of Rabbi Hayyim's books is the proof of the correctness of Rabbi Isaac the Blind's ancient warning: "A book which is written cannot be hidden in the cupboard." 41

The major transformation which Lurianic kabbalah brought into Jewish mysticism, an element which Scholem emphasized repeatedly, is the dramatic change that it brought into the Jewish mystic's attitude toward history and historical activity.

Early kabbalah, including Zoharic kabbalah, tried to show the way toward the Godhead through the ladder of the sefirot. The ascension of the mystic on this ladder was a repetition, only in the opposite direction, of the process of the emanation of the sefirot. Therefore, the ancient story of the "secret of the creation," the way that the various divine powers were separated and emanated from the Godhead, was the main interest of the mystics. These were their directions concerning the mystical ascension back toward the ancient divine unity which no longer existed in the world of the enormous plurality after the creation. They turned their backs toward the future, toward current, unfolding history, and concentrated on the mystical return to the unity of the process of genesis.

In the Lurianic kabbalah there is no ancient unity toward which the mystic can ascend. The early history of the deity and of the cosmos is one of dualism, struggle, and catastrophe. From its very beginning the world, including the divine world, was the stage for the drama of the conflict between the eternal elements of good and evil within the Godhead.
True unity, complete harmony, divine perfection—all these can be found only in the future, after the tikkun is completed and redemption achieved. The mystic can achieve his personal, individual fulfillment only in the future, together with the correction of the world, of the cosmos, and of the divine sefirot themselves. Therefore, his mystical endeavors become united with the historical needs of the earthly community, of the nation, and of the divine sparks now in exile within the realm of the evil powers seeking redemption. Jews who are in exile share the fate of these divine lights in exile, and together they must strive for their own deliverance from their oppressors. Mystical fulfillment and historical messianic redemption become one and the same, and nothing separates the religious efforts of the mystic from those of the common worshipper. Though the disciples of Luria tried to keep his teachings esoteric, the barrier fell, and the separation between Jewish mysticism and Jewish everyday religious practice vanished. The gates toward the active participation of the mystics in the formulation of Jewish history were opened, and nothing could close them again. Lurianic kabbalah thus became the power which transformed Jewish mysticism from the realm of the few mystics who seek individually their soul's salvation, to a historical force which has direct and meaningful impact on the lives of the common people. It showed the direction of development toward communal and national redemption.

In Lurianic theology, the difference between the individual and the community is minimized. Religion cannot be relied upon to achieve individual perfection. The meaning of worship becomes the concern of the whole community, the whole
nation, for the process of *tikkun* is carried on by all of them together. When a person performs a *mitsvah*, the freed spark strengthens everybody, and all profit from the weakening of the powers of evil. When a person commits a sin, the fallen spark hinders the redemption for everybody, delaying or preventing the redemption of the nation as a whole, as well as the salvation of divinity itself. An individual cannot withdraw from the community and seek his own religious perfection while disregarding his fellow men; their sins, as well as their good deeds, have a direct impact on him, and vice versa.

The religious organization of the community is, therefore, described very much like a fighting unit on the battlefield. Individual salvation is impossible; everybody is dependent on all the others and all the others depend on each individual. Communal effort is needed in order to achieve the *tikkun*, and therefore the community should help each individual and strengthen him in his struggle against the evil inside him. Whether an individual observes the Sabbath or not is no longer a personal matter between the worshipper and God; all the community cares and is dependent on the individual’s behavior concerning every commandment. All the nation is hurt when an individual does not conform to the religious commandments. We have evidence that in Safed, even before the appearance of Luria, there were tendencies toward communal pressure on individuals to preserve to perfection all the commandments and ethical demands. Lurianic theology was probably the result of these tendencies, and strengthened them by giving them a cosmic, mythological justification.

The meaning of repentance also changed completely following the impact of Lurianic kabbalah. Repentance no longer
could be regarded as the personal return of the sinner to his God, and the absolution of his personal misdeeds so that he could receive his reward from God. All sins had to be repented in order that the *tikkun* be achieved and all the sparks delivered from captivity. One person can, and even must, perform the ritual of repentance over the sins of others, whether they are his fellows in the community or sinners long dead and buried. The responsibility cannot be divided, and cannot be regarded as personal. The weight of all worldly evil lies on the shoulders of every individual, and he has to do everything he can in order to include in his repentance all the sins of previous and present generations. Repentance thus becomes a never-ending process. The *ba' al teshuvah*, the "repentant," is not a sinner returning to God after his personal misdeed, but one who dedicates all his religious powers to the correction of all sins, his own and others. This attitude toward the process of repentance was known in Safed before Luria. Lurianic theology only explained to the Safed mystics why they were doing what they were doing independently of this theology.

VII

One of the most profound characteristics of Lurianic kabbalah which had great impact on Jewish thought and history is that it served as an enormous conservative force. Although the radical symbolism, the dramatic mythology seemed new and revolutionary, and though the close parallels between Lurianism and ancient gnostic ideas may indicate that this the-
ology was foreign to traditional Judaism, in fact it brought few changes in old Jewish beliefs and practices.

Lurianic theology not only did not change anything in the old, accepted Jewish way of worship, but strengthened it. This is because the main thrust of Lurianic theology is one of explanation and not of change. It deals with the reasons one should perform the Jewish commandments, and not whether there is another way to practice religion. The enormous process of the *tikkun* and the redemption is dependent on the simplest, most commonplace demands of Jewish tradition. The blessing that a Jew is required to say before almost every deed, every bite of food, the “hundred benedictions to be said every day”—these are the forces which are destined to deliver the divine sparks from captivity. Indeed, Luria and his disciples added several customs and demands to the accepted Jewish traditional worship, some of them recognizable by their name—*tikkunim*. His main contribution was the explanation why all these seemingly mundane and material deeds are so important. They are needed not only for assisting the individual Jew to achieve personal religious perfection; they are necessary for the salvation of the nation, the community, the world, the cosmos, and even the divine powers themselves. The individual performing the *mitsvot* is by his deeds shaping the fate of divinity itself. One can never be certain what the cosmic balance is at a specific moment. Every human deed or misdeed may change the whole universal balance between good and evil and be decisive concerning the fate of the earth and the heavens together. It is always possible that redemption is just minutes away, and that the redemption of the one spark that one may free by one’s next prayer may bring forth mes-
sianic, cosmic salvation. It may also be that the world is at any one moment just one step away from the complete redemption, and a minute sin performed at that very moment by some individual would prevent and delay the redemption. The observance of the commandments thus achieves a level of importance never dreamed of before, and religious life suddenly acquires a new meaning, a much stronger relevance, in mythological dimensions.

The practical outcome of the acceptance of the Lurianic kabbalah can therefore only result in stronger adherence to even the most minute details of religious commandments, ethical behavior, and Jewish ritual, for these carry the world onward in the process of tikkun. New vigor can be found in the way Jews performed the millennia-old commandments following the spread of this new mythology.

Besides its contribution to the renewed adherence to the performance of the commandments, there were other conservative elements in Lurianism. One of the most important was its treatment of all worshippers as equal. Luria did not see himself as a religious leader, and his disciples also did not seek positions of leadership because of their mystical knowledge. The actual performance of the religious deeds is decisive concerning the cosmic struggle between good and evil; who performs them is of secondary importance. Every Jew, be he educated or not, with knowledge of the mystical meaning of his deeds or not, has a role in the universal process of the tikkun. The instructions for successfully accomplishing one's role in redeeming the divine powers are found in the simplest and most commonplace Jewish books of halakhah and ethical instruction. Knowledge of the Lurianic kavvanot is helpful,
but does not constitute a condition to the performance of the mystical goal. Every Jew is, in this sense, a mystic, even if he does not know it himself. This lack of the spirit of mystical or intellectual aristocracy, and the enhancement of the role of the common people in the enormous mythological process, contributed to the acceptance of Lurianic theology as a conservative, constructive force within Judaism.

This element is also apparent in the messianic message of the Lurianic kabbalah. This mythology is intensely messianic or redemptive, for it concentrates all the powers, deeds, and thoughts of every worshipper toward the achievement of the messianic goal. It does not strive for the restoration of an ancient past, but toward the creation of a new world, a redeemed and perfect one. Never before did Judaism produce such an intense theology, which concentrated all Jewish practice in the one direction of messianic redemption. With Lurianic theology, a new chapter in the history of Jewish messianism was opened, a most powerful and intense one.

But what about the role of the messiah himself? According to Lurianic theology, redemption is not achieved by the deeds of a man, be he even the messiah himself. It is the communal, or national, effort of generations of worshipping Jews which uplifts and frees the fallen sparks and thus deprives the evil powers of their source of sustenance. The coming of the messiah is not the cause of the redemption but its outcome. The appearance of the messiah is the result of the countless good deeds of the whole people, and this appearance signifies the successful completion of the process of the tikkun. This is why it was possible for Rabbi Hayyim Vital to believe for five decades in his own messianic role as the messiah son of
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David without doing anything to fulfill that role. The messiah does not have any special duties before the redemption; after its achievement by the nation as a whole, he becomes its crowned leader.⁴⁵

That Luria and his disciples never demanded any special role for themselves or their beliefs in the affairs of the community, and did not suggest any institutional or devotional changes besides stricter adherence to accepted norms, made them a conservative and unthreatening power within the history of seventeenth-century Jewish communities, and facilitated the rapid spread of this doctrine and its acceptance by Jewish communities all over the world.

Among all the elements of Lurianic mysticism, none was more potent and profound than the image of exile as the plight of the divine powers themselves. When a Jew experienced the hardships of exile he could now remember that God had been in exile long before him; even more, that God's redemption was dependent upon the actions of every individual Jew. Exile was a cosmic phenomenon after the “breaking of the vessels,” and redemption involved the restoration of the divine powers to their rightful place. By placing the Jewish experience of exile in the heart of the divine world itself, Lurianic theology acquired power and impact unseen before in the history of Jewish thought.

For the first time in the history of the Jews in the diaspora, Judaism as a whole was united in the belief in one theology, one set of symbols, and one basic terminology. The few who did not accept the mythology presented by Luria still acquiesced to the current spirit of their world and expressed their admiration to Luria as a unique personality, as pre-
sented in the hagiography around him, and used the terminology of the Lurianic kabbalah even if they did not share the mystical implications. This common basis, fresh and vigorous, revolutionary in thoughts, pictures, and symbols while extremely conservative in deeds and social institutions, shaped the history of Jewish thought for centuries to come.

NOTES


2. The most important work of the period expressing these sentiments is R. Joseph Ya’abertz’s Or ha-Hayyim. See J. Dan, Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature, pp. 180–89.


7. For references, see above ch. 1, n. 21.


9. See G. Scholem, Kabbalah (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 69, 73. (For a detailed study of this kabbalist, see Roland Goetschel, Meir Ibn Gabbay: Le Discours de la Kabbale Espagnole [Leuven: Peeters, 1981].)


11. See Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Sanhedrin 4:11.

12. This historical controversy was studied in detail by J. Katz, “The Controversy on the Semikha (Ordination) between R. Jacob Bei-Rav and the Ralbah” (Hebrew), Zion, 16 (1951), pp. 28–45.


14. For a study of Alsheich’s homiletical writings, see S. Shalem, Rabbi Mosheh Alshekh, edited by M. Benayahu (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, Hebrew University, 1966).


16. The phenomenon of the maggid was central to the kabbalah of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See above, no. 5 for reference to Scholem’s article on the subject. See also I. Tishby, “R. Moses Hayyim Luzzato’s Relationship to Sabbatianism” (Hebrew), in I. Tishby, Netivei ’Emunah u-Minhut (Ramat Gan, 1964), pp. 169–85; M. Benayahu, “The Maggid of R. Moses Hayyim Luzzato” (Hebrew), Sefunot, 5 (1961), pp. 299–336. (See also L. Fine, “Techniques of Mystical Meditation for Achieving Prophecy and the Holy Spirit in the Teachings of Isaac Luria


18. The thought of Cordovero was studied in detail by J. Ben-Shlomo, *The Mystical Theology of R. Moses Cordovero* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1965).

19. To date 12 volumes of Cordovero’s *Or Yaqar* on the Zohar (Genesis to parts of Leviticus) have been published together with three volumes on *Tiqqunei ha-Zohar*. (The kabbalistic thought of Cordovero in his commentary *Or Yaqar* has been the subject of several articles by B. Sack. See, for instance, “The Exile of Israel and the Exile of the Shekhinah in *Or Yaqar* of R. Moses Cordovero” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 4 (1982), 157–78; “Ha-Qelipah Zorekh ha-Qedushah,” *Studies in Jewish Mysticism Presented to Isaiah Tishby on his Seventy-fifth Birthday, Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 3 (1983–84), pp. 191–206.)


21. See the detailed analyses in J. Ben Shlomo, *The Mystical Theology of R. Moses Cordovero*.


23. Tishby analyzed this element in Cordovero’s thought. See his “Paths of Mythologization and Systematization in the Kabbalah” (Hebrew), *Nesivei 'Emunah u-Minhut*, pp. 26–27.


26. The fascinating subject of the ethical literature of Safed has received increased attention in the last decade. See M. Pachter, "Ethical and Homiletical Literature in Safed" (Ph.D. thesis, Hebrew University, 1975); J. Dan, *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature*, pp. 202–29. See
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27. The intricate process of the Lurianic kabbalah’s replacing that of Cordovero has been the subject of several studies by Tishby. See his Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 131-267.


30. M. Pachter published a homily given on Luria’s grave. From this source we can gather what his image was among his contemporaries. It appears that when he died Luria was not regarded as an outstanding figure in Safed.

31. On the messianism in Luria’s circle, see D. Tamar, “An Epistle from Safed, Dated 1525 or 1625, dealing with the Ten Tribes” (Hebrew), Sefunot, 6 (1962), pp. 305-10.


33. Genesis 49:10 (“until Shilo comes and nations will adhere to him;” in Hebrew the equivalent of 335, the year 1575).


35. Shlumil’s three letters were published in the book Ta’alumot Hokhmah by Y. S. Delmedigo of Crete in a chapter entitled “Letters of Praise to the Greatness of Luria.” Later they were published as a separate book entitled Shivhei ha-2Ari. A fourth letter was published by S. Asaf in Qovez al Yad, 13, pp. 118-31.

36. This process of the gradual replacement of Cordoverian kabbalah by that of Luria was felt especially in Italy. See references to Tishby’s studies in n. 27, above.

37. The most important opponent to kabbalah in seventeenth-century Italy was R. Judah Aryeh of Modena whose polemic against the kabbalah
was entitled 'Ari Nobem (1648). Only a few of Modena's contemporaries supported him, although some, like Y. S. Delmedigo of Crete, may have secretly sympathized with his position. Modena mainly attacked the Zohar, although he knew of Luria. A more representative attitude can be found in the works of Manasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, especially in his Nishmat Hayyim, a work on psychology and demonology. The author praised the Zohar and Luria, but presented a theology in complete disregard of their teachings. See J. Dan, "The Concept of Evil and Demonology in Rabbi Mannaseh ben Israel's Nishmat Hayyim" (Hebrew), Dov Noy Jubilee Volume (1983), pp. 263-74.

38. Scholem's main discussions of Lurianic kabbalah are to be found in Major Trends, pp. 260-86; see also "Kabbala und Mythos," Eranos Jahrbuch, 17 (1949), pp. 287-334 [English translation in On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, translated by Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1965), pp. 87-117.] A detailed presentation of the processes of tzimtzum, shevirah, and tikkun in Lurianic theology is to be found in I. Tishby, The Doctrine of Evil and the "Kelippah" in Lurianic Kabbalism.


40. On the myth of shevirah, see G. Scholem, Major Trends, pp. 266-68; I. Tishby, The Doctrine of Evil, pp. 21-51.

41. See reference above, ch. 6, p. 173.

42. Customs like the public announcement of the approaching Sabbath, and even a check of homes to see if all fires had been put out and all cooking ceased, were practiced in Safed before Luria, giving expression to the idea of mutual dependence of the members of the community, and probably denoting the ambition of Safed's righteous rabbis to create a perfect community (qebilat qodesh) in order to enhance the redemption. See S. Assaf, Qovez 'al Yad, 13, pp. 122-24; J. Dan, Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature, pp. 207-11. See also R. J. Z. Werblowsky, Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic, pp. 38-56.

43. Safed kabbalists organized groups of righteous people to assist each other in redemptive processes before Luria as is attested by books like Sefer Haredim by Eleazar Azikiri who discussed a group dusat shalom in his introduction. Hayyi m Vital in his Sefer ha-Hezyonot likewise tells of such an experiment. Some of the Safed repentants practised self-torture for the sake of repentance. See S. Assaf, op. cit., p. 13; cf. J. Dan, Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature, pp. 208-09.