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Jewish Mysticism

Among the Jews of Arab/Moslem Lands

In the pages below, I would like to address, succinctly, three main issues. The first is the methodological assumption that the Kabbalistic literature should be studied in more than one way, such as the need to address the emergence and development of several distinct centers of Kabbalah, each having its own history and spiritual configuration. These centers were not isolated islands; although they operated on different continents, they interacted with other centers by channels and trajectories that influenced the transmission of Kabbalistic knowledge. The second issue is more specific and historical: How did the Northern-African center of Kabbalah emerge (and develop)? Last but not least, the phenomenological question: Is there a specific spiritual configuration, or configurations, to these centers, and what are its sources and parallels? It is impossible to address the problems related to the third issue before dealing with the first two. Moreover, without admitting the methodological issue of studying centers, no one will generate a history of them, and thus no phenomenology of Kabbalah in the different centers will ever emerge. This phenomenology should be disconnected from the enchantment with the concept of innovation and originality, which created too great an emphasis in research on Safedian Kabbalah, while ignoring the importance of the Italian center or the North African one. Needless to say, such a complex project cannot be accomplished in one single paper, and it necessarily relies on earlier studies of the topic prepared by several scholars.¹

¹ See, especially, the studies of Moshe Hallamish, *The Kabbalah in Northern Africa: A Historical and Cultural Survey* (Tel Aviv, 2001), (Hebrew), where he summarized many of his earlier detailed studies on the topic; Haim Zaafrani, *Kabbale, vie mystique et magie*, (Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1986); Dan Manor, *Exile and Redemption in Moroccan Jewish Philosophy*, (Habermann Institute for Literary Research, Lod, 1988) (Hebrew); idem, "Kabbalah in the Homilies of R. Joseph Adhan," *Pe'amim*, vol. 15,(1983) pp. 67-81 (Hebrew); Rachel Elior, "The Kabbalists of Dra," *Pe'amim*, vol. 24 (1985), pp. 36-73 (Hebrew); Elie Moyal, *The Shabbatean Movement in Morocco: Its History and Sources* (Am `Oved, Tel Aviv, 1984), (Hebrew) .

1. *On Kabbalah and Its Centers*

Kabbalah, being a medieval phenomenon like Jewish philosophy, was immediately accepted and became widespread in most of the centers of Judaism within a few centuries after its emergence in late 12th century Southern France. As such, an understanding of these teachings – in fact a variety of schools – needs a panoramic appreciation that will combine analyses of its main centers and the trajectories that contributed to its dissemination and acceptance. Though all the major centers of Kabbalah depend upon the Spanish ones--the Catalonian and the Castilian--each developed in its own direction. They were influenced by a variety of factors, the most important of them being: what type of Kabbalistic material arrived from Spain, directly or indirectly; the idiosyncratic nature of the Kabbalists in a certain center, and last but not least the cultural and other circumstances characteristic of a given center. These factors contribute both to the specificity of a certain center, and also to the diversity involved in the schools or individuals active in a certain geographical area. As I shall attempt to describe below, not everything found in Spain, even less everything found in the Kabbalistic literature, arrived to Northern Africa. Even the arrival of the same material does not mean similar modes of reception and interpretation.

By emphasizing the importance and particular structure of several centers of Kabbalah, I intend to decentralize this tradition as a unified conceptual type of thought. Indeed, a vast literature, Kabbalah is constituted by a variegated conglomerate of spiritual models, types of experiences, and modes of expressions that developed over the span of almost a millennium in different countries and continents. Though stemming from Southern France and then flowering in Spain, some forms of this wisdom developed outside the perimeter of the Iberian Peninsula already before the end of the 13th century. This is ostensibly the case of the ecstatic Kabbalah of R. Abraham Abulafia, who wrote most of his writings in Italy, Sicily, and Byzantium before he disappeared around 1291. He established a Kabbalistic school that included a number of disciples who left several treatises, all of them written outside of Spain. There were many forms of theosophical Kabbalah that were known in Rome already in the eighties of the 13th century, culminating in the Kabbalistic writings of R. Menahem Recanati sometime at the beginning of the 14th century. Other forms of Kabbalah were known in Southern Germany already in the last third of the mid-13th century.

However, it seems that contemporary with those traditions of Kabbalah that reached Jewish centers outside Spain, there is evidence of the existence of some forms of Kabbalah in the writings of R. Yehudah ibn Malka in Morocco in the mid-13th century. This seems to be the earliest evidence of the existence of Kabbalah in a Jewish center within any Moslem country. In fact, this is the beginning of a wide dissemination of Kabbalah in Moslem lands, a phenomenon that was destined to impact not only Northern Africa, but also such different cultural environments as Yemen, the Ottoman Empire—including the land of Israel—and last but not least, Iraq. Let me emphasize that we do not speak here about acquaintance with Kabbalah, but about a strong shift in the religious orientation and practices in all those centers following the infiltration of Kabbalah. This knowledge moved to the elites and dramatically shaped their religious worldviews.

The above expansions of Kabbalah were not mere ramifications that expanded concepts stemming from the Spanish centers of Catalonia or Castile. New centers imported forms of thought from Spain, but created new syntheses that would have been less possible to emerge from Spain itself. One prominent example is the development of Abraham Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah, which was banned by R. Solomon b. Abraham ibn Adret of Spain, and thus, its impact on Spanish Kabbalah is negligible. In this case, the controversy between the two Kabbalists created a schism in the history of Kabbalah.² An independent approach is discernible also in the influential Kabbalistic writings of R. Menahem Recanati.³ Similarly, from the mid-14th century a complex type of literature emerged in Byzantium that led to the emergence of a rich Kabbalistic literature, which had a great impact on the subsequent history of Kabbalah, but not on the Kabbalah in Spain.⁴ This applies also to the relationship of Ashkenazi mystical lore and its synthesis with Kabbalah. Although there are significant traces of Ashkenazi esoteric theology in Spanish Kabbalah, the synthesis carried out in Ashkenaz between Kabbalistic theosophy and the perspective of Hasidei Ashkenaz did not affect Spanish Kabbalah. With the exception of Abraham Abulafia, whose influence on the Kabbalah in Spain was quite small, the teachings of Hasidei Ashkenaz did not shape the theosophy of Spanish Kabbalists in a dramatic manner.⁵ The fact that each center of

² M. Idel, "R. Solomon ibn Aderet and Abraham Abulafia: For the History of a Neglected Polemic," in eds. D. Boyarin, & alia, *Atara L'Haim: Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2000), 235-251 (Hebrew).

³ Idem, *R. Menahem Recanati: The Kabbalist* (Schocken, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, 1998) (Hebrew).

⁴ See my "The Kabbalah in the Byzantine Region: First Inquiries" (Hebrew) (Forthcoming).

⁵ Idem, "Gazing at the Head in Ashkenazi Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 6, 2 (1997), pp. 298-299 and my forthcoming "Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona," *Hispania Judaica*, vol. 5 (2007).

Kabbalah had its own history, that each started from different cultural and phenomenological premises, and that each influenced the history of Kabbalah in a specific manner—this as a methodological approach has not yet attracted the attention of Kabbalah scholars. Immersed in what can be called monochromatic visions of the phenomenology of Kabbalah and the acceptance of its unilinear history, scholars in the field must start investigating the specificities of each center in order to understand the wider spectrum of Kabbalistic literature as it represents different approaches, sometimes even reflecting interactions with local cultures.

This less centralized vision of the history and nature of Kabbalah will allow for a better understanding of specific phenomena and particular centers as well as of the truly heterogeneous picture of this literature as a whole. In the following discussion, the main point that I shall attempt to make is that Northern Africa, especially Morocco, was a center not only in the sense that it hosted a long series of Kabbalists, but also because it produced some books that had influence outside of its boundaries. In lieu of the more conceptual and elite-oriented scholarship that characterizes the modern study of Kabbalah, I will also insist on the need to address sociological aspects of this tradition, which will emphasize matters of reception, dissemination, and appropriations in larger audiences as equally important.

Last but not least, an understanding of the history of Kabbalah should take into consideration not only the specific sources and the inner development of each of these centers, but also the common denominators and sources of those similarities. This requirement is even more urgent when we deal with Sephardi centers of Kabbalah, which share the Spanish Kabbalistic heritage.

2. *R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka*

In the mid-13th century, R. Yehudah b. Nissim ibn Malka, a thinker with some Kabbalistic knowledge, becomes known to us. He was probably an inhabitant of Fez, a city which was destined to host more Kabbalists than any other city in the world except Jerusalem and Safed. His discovered writings, some of which were printed and analyzed by Georges Vajda in a number of seminal studies,⁶ point to an interesting combination of medieval philosophy,

⁶ See Georges Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka, philosophe juif Marocain* (Hesperis, Paris, 1954); idem, "La Doctrine Astrologique de Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka," *Homenaje a Millas Vallicrosa* (Barcelona, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 483-500; *R. Yehudah ibn Malka, Kitab Uns we-Tafsir*, ed. Georges Vajda (Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan,

astrology and a few elements of Kabbalah. Although there are some indications that his father, R. Nissim, was also a Kabbalist, it seems that the sources are unreliable, as they depend on R. Moses Botarel's *Commentary on Sefer Yetsirah*, a book replete with false quotes. Ibn Malka authored three small books composed in Arabic and a short astrological treatise extant in Hebrew.⁷ This astrological-messianic document determines his floruit at the middle of the 13th century,⁸ not in the 14th century as earlier scholars had thought.

Yehudah ibn Malka displays an interesting theory of strict astrological determinism, which is unusual in medieval Jewish writings. Combining Neoaristotelian theories of the metaphysical realm with the belief in the impact of the astral bodies on mundane events, he proposes a hierarchy of knowledge that puts philosophy on top, the natural sciences after, and astro-magic at the bottom. The combination of these theories has a special impact on his theory of revelation, which may be conceived of as one of the most important contributions to Kabbalistic theories of prophecy and which had a lasting impact on Jewish theories of revelation. According to his *Commentary to Sefer Yetsirah*, he testifies that:

I have seen with my own eyes a man who saw a power in the form of an angel while he was awake, and he spoke with him and told him future things. The sage said: "Know that he sees nothing other than himself, for he sees himself front and back, as one who sees himself in a mirror, who sees nothing other than himself, and it appears as if it were something separate from your body, like you. In the same manner, he sees that power which guards his body and guides his soul, and then his soul sings and rejoices, distinguishes and sees."⁹

The astral aspect of the revelation, which reflects the impact of Muslim astro-magical sources, is not the only explanation ibn Malka offers for the experience of self-revelation. Immediately after the above citation, ibn Malka describes the process as a psychological one, namely, as taking place between three inner faculties:

1974); idem, "Les observations critiques d'Isaac d'Acco (?) sur les ouvrages de Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka," *REJ* vol. 115 [N.S. 15] (1956), pp. 25-71; *Judah ben Nissim ibn Malka: Judaeo-Arabic Commentary on the Pirkey Rabbi Eli'ezer with a Hebrew Translation and Supercommentary by Isaac b. Samuel of Acco*, ed. Paul B. Fenton, (Jerusalem, 1991).

⁷ See notes 6 and 8 here.

⁸ See Moshe Idel, "The Beginning of Kabbalah in North Africa? A Forgotten Document by R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka," *Pe'amim*, vol. 43 (1990), pp. 4-15 (Hebrew).

⁹ Ed. Vajda, *R. Yehudah ibn Malka, Kitab Uns we-Tafsir*, pp. 22-23.

And three powers overcome him: the first power is that which is intermediary between spirit and soul, and the power of memory and the power of imagination, and one power is that which imagines. And these three powers are compared to a mirror, as by virtue of the mixing the spirit is purified, and by the purification of the spirit the third power is purified. But when the spirit apprehends the flux which pours out upon the soul, it will leave power to the power of speech, according to the flow which comes upon the soul thus shall it influence the power of speech, and that itself is the angel which speaks to him and tells him future things.¹⁰

The introduction of the inner senses in order to describe the psychological mechanism of revelation is important since it internalizes the revelatory event in terms that are not characteristic of the more objectivistic astral-magical systems. A personal angelic guide of an astral nature reveals the future, using the psychological structure of certain persons, a view that would not be especially surprising in the Middle Ages. However, what seems of importance for the understanding of Kabbalistic prophetology is the claim, recurrent in the book that not only should prophecy of the future be understood in an astral framework, but also Moses' prophecy in the Bible. According to ibn Malka, the speech heard by Moses from "the bush" originates in Moses himself. The Kabbalist resorts to the gematria for *ha-sneh* (the bush)—120--which is the number of years that Moses lived. Ibn Malka interprets the verse in Zechariah 4:1 in a similar manner, referring to "the angel who spoke to me" in the sense of "from within me."

The Hebrew form used by the translator of the original Arabic in order to describe the transmission of information is mentioned once as *heggid lo `atidot* and then several times as the phrase *maggid `atidot*. Already in ibn Malka we have, therefore, an anticipation of the important category later related to revelation that proliferated from the 16th century, namely, a *maggid* as a personal guide or celestial angelic mentor. Shlomo Pines has already drawn attention to the affinity between some forms of Arabic astro-magic as that found in Abu-Aflah al-Syracusi's *Sefer ha-Tamar* (which became known through a Hebrew translation from the beginning of the 14th century in Spain) and some later Kabbalistic phenomena.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

¹¹ See Shlomo Pines, "Le Sefer ha-Tamar et les Maggidim des Kabbalists," *Hommage a Georges Vajda*, eds. G. Nahon et Ch. Touati, (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 333-363.

However, we may propose a somewhat earlier date for the occurrence of such a phenomenon in Jewish occultism. R. Yehudah ibn Malka should be seen as one of the first pioneers of a synthesis between astro-magic and Kabbalistic elements, both as found in sefirotic Kabbalah and in the technique of combining letters. Important views in Kabbalah, prevalent in Spain, Italy and Safed, like the concept of *Heikhalot*, were understood in some cases not as the ancient Jewish literatures envisioned the supernal world as palaces in the middle of which God dwells, but as astral bodies wherein the respective spiritualities dwell. These views have strong affinities to the astral magic permeating the writings of R. Yehudah that point to the synthesis between the Arabic philosophical magic and Jewish esotericism. The shift from the emphasis on the theosophical-theurgical to the emphasis on the astro-magical understanding of Kabbalah based on Arabic sources is quite conspicuous. I adduce the above passage not only for its phenomenological description of revelation, but also in order to argue that it had an influence on the manner in which Kabbalah has been understood later on as well. Indeed, another figure who was active in North Africa, the 15th century R. Ephraim b. Israel al-Naqawah (born apparently in Spain, buried in Tlemsen where his tomb became a site for pilgrimage) wrote as follows:

In the books of the sages of the zodiac signs, it is written that there are people who may see powers while awake, and they will seem to them that they are bodies, and will speak with them and tell them future things. And they said that the reason is the reception man receives of the influx from the supernal entities. And this thing will be strengthened in accordance to the structure of the constellation in the hour of their birth. And they explained more, that the seer of those powers, which appear to them in the likeness of bodies, does not see them without him, but all what they see is within them, just as he sees his form within a mirror or within something pure and transparent, where he indeed sees his form with his eyes.¹²

Here we have the reverberation of ibn Malka's view expressed two centuries earlier in the geographical vicinity of Fez. Interestingly enough, this passage made its way to Safed and is quoted verbatim by R. Hayyim Vital in his classic *Sha`arei Kedushah*.¹³ Even if it is too early

¹² *Sha`ar Kevod ha-Shem*, (Tunis, 1902), fol. 94ab.

¹³ R. Hayyim Vital, the Fourth part of *Sha`arei Kedushah*, printed in *Ketavim Hadashim me-Rabbenu Hayyim Vital*, (Ahavat Shalom, Jerusalem, 1988), p. 22 (Hebrew).

to determine in a definite manner the direct influence of R. Yehudah ben Nissim on later Kabbalists within Morocco and outside of it, on the basis of the extant material and the preliminary state of modern Kabbalistic research, it is possible to consider the tendency he represents-- namely, a shift toward astro-magic that significantly changed the face of Kabbalah, especially in 14th century Spain and in late 15th century Italy (during the period of the Renaissance).

Moreover, once again Jewish culture served as a bridge between the Arab/Moslem world of thought and that of Christian Europe. The magical reading of some aspects of Kabbalah, which stemmed from the encounter between Arabic forms of magic and Jewish mysticism, was characteristic of Moroccan Kabbalah in many of its phases. This then made its way to Florence where, in the writings of R. Yohanan Alemanno, they reached their apotheosis in Christian Kabbalah as formulated in the writings of Pico della Mirandola, who reflects this astro-magical Kabbalistic synthesis.¹⁴ However, as important as the impact of this synthesis was for some developments in Spain and Italy, and perhaps for Vital, it was much less important for the further development of Kabbalah in North Africa where, as we shall see below, the theosophical-theurgical trend arriving from Spain prevailed. The main trends in 13th century Spanish Kabbalah were not concerned with psychological and astrological explanations of prophecy or the Bible, as they preferred a much more theosophical-theurgical approach. This remained the dominant type of interest until the expulsion from Spain, and then became influential on Kabbalah in Morocco. Ironically, the astro-magical Kabbalistic synthesis based upon Arabic sources was more successful in Christian Europe, whereas the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah articulated in Christian Europe was more influential upon Jewish centers located in Moslem countries. Those shifts are two fascinating and intertwined cases of cultural exchange.

3. *The Expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula and their Two Trajectories*

We may discern three main and distinct schools of Kabbalah in Spain from the end of the 13th century: The Nahmanidean, the Zoharic, and the literature related to *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.

¹⁴ In fact, Dame Frances A. Yates' famous thesis that it was Pico della Mirandola who first created the synthesis between the Hermeticism he inherited from Marsilio Ficino's translations and writings and Jewish Kabbalah does not take in consideration the earlier stages of Kabbalistic development as combined with talismanic views stemming from Hermetic sources-- the first of which is represented by R. Yehudah ibn Malka. See Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and Hermeticism in Dame Frances A. Yates's Renaissance," *Esoterisme, Gnosés & Imaginaire Symbolique: Melanges offerts a Antoine Faivre*, eds. R. Caron, J. Godwin, W.J. Hanegraaf, J-L. Vieillard-Baron, (Peeters, Louvain, 2001), pp. 71-90.

While the first two were accepted in every center to which the Spanish exiles arrived, the third had an impact solely in the Greek part of the Ottoman Empire and then in Safed. It seems that in Northern Africa, none of the writings belonging to the literature that constituted the circle of *Sefer ha-Meshiv* attracted any significant attention.

What happened during the 14th and most of the 15th centuries in Morocco insofar as Kabbalah is concerned is not clear. We have no reliable evidence as to the development of independent schools there that might have continued and elaborated on the views of the Kabbalists above. Interestingly enough, at least regarding most of the 14th century, the lack of evidence concerning Kabbalah in Morocco is not so dramatically different from the relative lack of the same regarding Spain, the land of Israel, Ashkenaz, and Italy. Nevertheless, based on some direct and indirect evidence, it seems that already before the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula Moroccan Kabbalists were also known outside the Maghreb.¹⁵ Both the pseudepigraphic epistle, which mentions the secrets of the prophets, and the passages from R. Yehudah ibn Malka and R. Isaac of Acre betray an interest in prophecy that seems to characterize some of the discussions also found later in Moroccan Kabbalah, especially in the Dra'a area of the South.

There can be no doubt that the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal at the end of the 15th century was *the* decisive event that changed the course of the history of Kabbalah in Northern Africa, as it did the development of Kabbalah in general. This event was certainly crucial for the lives of the expelled, who suffered enormously from the vicissitudes of their eviction. However terrible these events were on the personal, economic and social levels, they nevertheless gave birth to beneficial cultural effects that changed the spiritual history of Judaism. The Kabbalists among the Spanish exiles unified Jewish culture by spreading Kabbalah in new places and creating another common denominator between an old center of Judaism and newer ones.

Spanish Kabbalists seemed to follow two main trajectories: the Northern or European one and the Southern or North African one. In some important cases, the final destination of Kabbalists was neither Europe nor Africa, but the land of Israel, which was host to the most important developments in sixteenth century Kabbalah. However, even in those cases when Kabbalists stayed for short periods elsewhere on their way to the land of Israel, I believe that the impact of short contact with indigenous cultures--when they took place--shaped, at least

¹⁵ See Joseph Hacker, "Maghrebi Jews in Egypt and Jerusalem in the Late 15th Century and Intellectual Activity Under Mameluk Rule," in eds. M. Hirshman, I. Ta-Shma, *Atarah l'Hayyim, H.Z. Dimitrowsky Jubilee Volume* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 563-603 (Hebrew).

to a certain extent, the formulations of the Spanish Kabbalists. Groups of Spanish Jews, including some Kabbalists, arrived suddenly on the northern shore of Morocco and dramatically enriched the knowledge and the impact of Kabbalah there. To enumerate just the most important of the Spanish refugees, let me mention R. Yehudah Hayyat, R. Abraham Sabba,¹⁶ R. Simeon ibn Lavi,¹⁷ R. Abraham Adrutiel,¹⁸ R. Joseph ben Solomon Alashqar, and R. Yehudah Hallewah.

At this time, the impact of Kabbalah was more decisive than it was even in the 13th century. Not only were ideas in their formative stages, but an entire literature already existed articulating rather complex systems written by authors who became well known, in addition to in some cases, books that enjoyed some form of general recognition. The expulsion was largely the uprooting of an entire community and also the exodus of an elaborate and multi-faceted culture. Arriving to the various cities of Morocco in one huge wave, this strong Spanish culture, with Kabbalah as one of its major achievements, substantially affected the high culture of Moroccan Jewry at that time. Spanish Kabbalists were often able to bring Kabbalistic material from Spain with them to Morocco where some of the manuscripts were preserved or copied. These, in turn, play a very significant role in helping understand the history of Kabbalah in Spain. Several relatively early Kabbalistic manuscripts preserved in Morocco, some of which have been found in private collections and thus were never used for the analysis of Spanish Kabbalah, shed important light on the history of Kabbalah in late 13th century Castile. So, for example, the manuscript printed by Jacob Toledano in Casablanca in 1930 under the title *Sefer ha-Malkhut* contains Kabbalistic fragments and treatises from late 13th century and early 14th century Spain that have generally been lost except in a very few manuscripts.¹⁹

The most visible and at once the most profound change that is evident in the general structure of Moroccan post-expulsion Kabbalah consists of the adoption of the books of the *Zohar* as the major work of Kabbalah and the transformation of this literature into a canon. Assuming that ibn Malka and Isaac of Acre are the two main active Kabbalists in Northern Africa before the end of the 15th century and their writings do not display any special affinity to the mythical worldview of the book of the *Zohar* (as they are concerned more with ecstatic

¹⁶ Abraham Gross, *Iberian Jewry from Twilight to Dawn: The World of Rabbi Abraham Saba* (Brill, Leiden, 1995).

¹⁷ Boaz Huss, *Sockets of Fine Gold: The Kabbalah of Rabbi Shim'on ibn Lavi* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2000), (Hebrew).

¹⁸ Gershom Scholem, "'Od Pa'am 'al Sefer 'Avnei Zikkaron," *Qiriat Sefer*, vol. 7 (1930-1931), p. 461.

¹⁹ See Efraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbalah Literature*, ed. J. Hacker (Tel Aviv, 1976), pp. 248-256, (Hebrew).

experiences and talismanic magic), it can be said that since the 16th century the Zoharic ways of thought with their theosophical-theurgical propensities become the dominant trend. However, this process of canonization in Morocco reflects the ascent of this book earlier in Spain, and in order to better understand it, we should inspect the nature of Kabbalistic literature as represented in the first generation of Kabbalists among the exiles.

All of them embraced forms of Kabbalah that were strongly influenced by the book of the *Zohar*. This is why there is a strong affinity between the North African community and the Safedian one: it is only in these two cases that a center of Kabbalistic literature orbited so strongly around the special status of the book of the *Zohar*. Compared to other Kabbalistic centers, like the Kabbalists of Italy or those who lived in early 16th century Jerusalem, the connection between trends in Morocco and in Safed becomes clear. Given the beginning stages of the study of Kabbalistic literature that we find ourselves in today, it is difficult to conceptualize the main lines of development in any of the Kabbalistic centers, and thus, the following discussion is rather preliminary. Some of the developments of Kabbalah in Morocco since the early 16th century have recently attracted the attention of a series of scholars who describe, for the first time in a more detailed manner, several Kabbalists and schools that enable an initial delineation of the main lines of this center.²⁰

4. *The South Mediterranean Trajectory of Kabbalah*

As stated above, Northern Africa, especially Fez, was one of the major Jewish centers that attracted many Spanish refugees. Morocco, the closest region to Spain and Portugal as well as among the first where the exiles arrived in considerable numbers, was destined to also host the first significant center of post-expulsion Spanish Kabbalah. The two main trajectories of the Spanish exiles differ both geographically and culturally; the Northern trajectory consisted of both Christian and Muslim (basically Turkish culture), while the Southern one passed through cities and areas rife with primarily Muslim culture, Fez being among the most eminent. Let me first offer two examples of Kabbalists who visited this city for short periods of time and then left for other Jewish centers.

R. Yehudah Hayyat left Lisbon sometime during the winter of 1492/93 together with his family and some two hundred others. Due to the plague widespread on the boat, it wandered at sea for over four months. Finally forced to anchor in Malaga after being refused by other

²⁰ See the bibliography referred above in note 1.

ports, the boat was robbed by Basques. At the urging of the Christian authorities (or according to another version, the priests), a hundred of the exiles were convinced to convert, while some of the others, including Hayyat's wife, died. After being kept for two months more in Malaga, they were allowed to leave. Hayyat at last arrived in Fez, only to have a Moslem acquaintance of the Kabbalist initiate a libel against him (the precise nature of which is not totally clear). Fortunately, he was rescued by the Moroccan Jewish community to whom he gave two hundred books in return for the ransom paid on his behalf. After a short stay in Fez living in totally inhumane conditions, he left for Naples in the autumn of 1493, and then again for Venice, where he was very well-received by the "noble" Spanish refugees. The abrupt appearance of such a great amount of manuscript material in Morocco, apparently Kabbalistic in its majority, is a vital component of what often took place during the exiles' Southern trajectory in the Mediterranean area.

Another important figure that is representative of the exiles' Southern trajectory is R. Yehudah Hallewah.²¹ A descendant of an important Jewish family from Spain--most eminently represented by the late 13th century R. Bahya ben Asher Hallewah--R. Yehudah arrived and stayed in Fez for an extended period, presumably following his expulsion from Spain. He then left for Safed a few years before 1545. There he composed one of the first ethical-Kabbalistic books written in the settlement, *Sefer Tsafnat Pa'aneah*, a text intended to guide the Jewish inhabitants of Safed in righteous behavior by emphasizing the consequences of such behavior for life in the world to come. He presents this strategy of guidance as the only alternative in an emerging community where the leading figures possessed little authority, particularly in contrast to the more organized way of Jewish life that had existed in Fez. This comparative remark testifies to the degree of cohesion characteristic of the Sephardi community in Fez.

An interesting testimony found in Hallewah's book comments on the transmigration of the soul of a Kabbalist who was active in the generation prior to the expulsion from Spain to Northern Africa. Hallewah tells a story he heard, apparently while in Fez, about R. Joseph della Reina's soul, which entered a body of a gentile woman as a punishment for his sinful life. In order to exorcize it, a Jewish magician, likely a Moroccan one, had been asked to help. This is the first case of possession (which will become better known under the later name of *dibbuk*) recorded by a Kabbalist in a Kabbalistic book, and it takes place a

²¹ On this figure, see Moshe Idel, "R. Yehudah Hallewah and his Book *Tsafnat Pa'aneah*," *Shalem*, vol. 4 (1984), pp. 119-148 (Hebrew).

generation before the burgeoning surge of interest in the topic. Another story told in Safed reports about an event which took place in Northern Africa and has as its main protagonist a Spanish Kabbalist.²² These are just emblematic examples of the importance of the North African trajectory of Spanish Kabbalah, which plainly impacted the new center of Kabbalah in Safed already from its beginning.

A perusal of Hallewah's book, like most other books composed in the last decades of the 16th century and early 17th century, display strong eclectic tendencies that rely basically on Spanish Kabbalah before the expulsion and some few developments afterwards, as is the case of the writings of another exile, R. Meir ibn Gabbai. If one criterion for evaluating the importance of a certain type of literature is its conceptual innovation, it would seem that only very rarely should writings composed in Morocco or in the first generation of the exiles be considered important. However, if the criterion for determining importance is the role it played in the life of the community, then there can be no doubt that Kabbalah in Morocco was extremely important.

On the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, in cities like Tlemsen and Fez, exiles from Castile and Granada brought a variety of Kabbalistic books and even composed a series of anthologies that mainly reflect the status and nature of Kabbalah as it had been in Spain rather than any fresher speculative innovation. This is obvious from a perusal of the Kabbalistic works of R. Joseph ben Solomon Alashqar and R. Abraham ben Solomon Adrutiel. In Tripoli (now Libya), R. Simeon ibn Lavi, a refugee who had formerly inhabited Fez, composed one of the most important and original commentaries on the Zohar, *Ketem Paz*, which relies on a long series of Spanish Kabbalistic sources. All of these North African Kabbalists, Spanish exiles who came to live in North Africa, or the indigenous North African Kabbalists shared the concept of the centrality of the book of the *Zohar*, a fact that remained decisive for the subsequent cultures of their Jewish communities where the ritualistic study of parts of this work became popular in large segments of the Jewish population. This phenomenon is one of the first cases of the broad infiltration of the Kabbalah beyond its tiny elites.

Part of the post-Expulsion literature was composed in order to commit to writing religious traditions that had been circulating in some restricted circles, perhaps orally, for many years. The authors were naturally afraid that they might be lost as part of the

²² Idel, *ibid.*, p. 123, and J.H. Chayes, *Between Worlds, Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2003), pp. 25-26.

vicissitudes of the exile. Indeed, this seems to be the fact in cases like R. Abraham ben Solomon Adrutiel's Kabbalistic work *'Avnei Zikkaron*, namely 'Monuments of Remembrance.' As Scholem has pointed out, several earlier sources had been copied verbatim in this treatise, and thus saved from oblivion.²³

To a great extent, this is also the case in the lengthy *Tsafnat Pa'aneah* by R. Joseph ben Moses Alashqar. The treatise, the most important and Kabbalistically oriented of his writings, was written in 1529 in Tlemsen. In its literary form a mainly Kabbalistic interpretation of the Mishnah, this voluminous text offers us, on the one hand, an understanding of the Kabbalistic library that Kabbalists in Northern Africa possessed, and from a literary point of view, reflects the interpretive-conservative attitude that emerged among the exiled Kabbalists of this period. From the point of view of sources, I would say that Castilian Kabbalah at the end of the 13th and early 14th century constituted the major impact on Alashqar's thought.

5. *The Kabbalists at Dra'a: A Circle of Late 16th and Early 17th Century Kabbalists*

Some of the exiled Spanish Kabbalists moved into towns in the south of Morocco in the provinces of Sous and Dra'a where two main circles of Kabbalists emerged during the 16th century. It was mostly in the latter city that a more complex Kabbalah appeared, continuing Spanish trends similar to those found in Gikatilla's earlier Kabbalistic writings, in R. Abraham of Granada's *Sefer Berit Menuhah* and to a certain extent, in the vast literature known as *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.²⁴ The most well known Kabbalist of this time is R. David ha-Levi, the author of *Sefer ha-Malkhut* and *Kesef Tsaruf*, who seems to be the main figure in a small circle that included two other Kabbalists. These two works are highly difficult Kabbalistic texts, which are based upon a detailed theory of letter combinations that is basically independent of ecstatic Kabbalistic techniques. Printed only recently in a complete manner, it had been commented upon by R. Abraham ben Esqira Mas'ud in a book named

²³ See note 18 above.

²⁴ On the books that constitute this extensive Kabbalistic literature, see Gershom Scholem, "'The Maggid' of R. Joseph Taitachek and the Revelations Attributed to Him," *Sefunot*, vol. 11 (1971-1978), pp. 69-112 (Hebrew); idem, "On the Story of R. Joseph della Reina," *Hokhma Bina veDaat, Studies in Jewish History and Thought Presented to A. Altmann*, (Alabama University Press, University, Alabama, 1979), pp. 100-108 (Hebrew); Idel, "Inquiries," idem; "Neglected Writings by the Author of *Sefer Kaf ha-Ketoret*," *Pe'anim* vol. 53 (1993), pp. 75-89 (Hebrew); idem, "Magic and Kabbalah in the Book of the Responding Entity," in ed., M.I. Gruber, *The Solomon Goldman Lectures* (The Spertus College of Judaica Press, Chicago, 1993), pp. 125-138; idem, "The Origin of Alchemy According to Zosimos and a Hebrew Parallel," *REJ*, vol. 144 (1986), pp. 117-124; idem, "The Lost Books of Solomon," *Daat*, vol. 32/33 (1994), pp. 235-246 (Hebrew).

Ginzei ha-Melekh.²⁵ A student of R. David, R. Mordehai Buzaglo, wrote a lengthy and difficult Kabbalistic book entitled *Ma`ayanot Hokhmah*.²⁶ This earlier circle is less concerned with the ritualistic aspects of Kabbalah, gravitating towards a theosophical-magical conception of language as well as combinations of letters.²⁷

Later on, another circle of Kabbalists arose in Southern Morocco, one which was basically concerned with mystical interpretation of ritual and canonical texts. Unlike the earlier circle described above, the *Zohar* played a much more central role for this later group. One of the most important treatises to emerge from this circle is R. Moses ben Maimon Elbaz's voluminous *Sefer Heikhal ha-Kodesh*, which was printed in Amsterdam in 1653 by Emmanuel Benveniste's press due to the insistence of the famous R. Jacob Sasportas - himself originally from North Africa. It included an opening poem by Sasportas and glosses added by R. Aaron Siboni of Sale.²⁸ *Sefer Heikhal ha-Kodesh* is a lengthy commentary on Jewish liturgy whose composition began in 1575 in the town of Taroudant and was finished, after many vicissitudes, in approximately 1603. This is the most influential book written within this circle, which consists also of other Kabbalists who were Elbaz's students. Elbaz also composed a commentary on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and a *Commentary on the Passover Haggadah*.

The disciples of R. Elbaz also adopted his interpretive propensity and commented on canonical Jewish texts. R. Yehudah ben Hunain wrote a lengthy and relatively original commentary on the 613 Commandments entitled *Etz Hayyim*, which was printed, as well as another book *Sefer ha-'Or* that is still in manuscript form. R. Isaac b. Abraham ha-Kohen of Taroudant wrote a commentary on the ten *sefirot* entitled *Ginnat Beitan*.²⁹ A younger Kabbalist from this circle, R. Jacob b. Isaac Ifargan of Taroudant, wrote a lengthy commentary on the Torah entitled *Minhah Hadashah* (recently printed)³⁰ and a commentary on the Treatise Avot, entitled *Perah Shushan*.³¹

It seems that these four Kabbalists agreed upon a division of labor that produced complementary commentaries on the most significant parts of Jewish ritual. However, this

²⁵ See ed., Gad Amar, *Le Livre de la royauté celeste de Rabbi David Halevy, texte hébreu commenté par son élève Rabbi Abraham Asqira* (Jerusalem, 1998).

²⁶ See Elior, "The Kabbalists of Dra."

²⁷ See Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 224-231 (Hebrew).

²⁸ See now the new edition (Jerusalem, 2005).

²⁹ Ed. Moshe Hallamish, *Sefer Ginnat Beitan* (Jerusalem, 1998).

³⁰ Ed. Moshe Hallamish, (Jerusalem, 2001) two volumes.

³¹ Printed as an addenda to Haim Zafrani, *Éthique et Mystique, Judaïsme en Terre d'Islam* (Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris, 1991).

enterprise amounted to an organization of earlier traditions according to the subject-matter of the interpreted text, rather than according to overarching theosophical-theurgical and magical systems (as was the case in Safedian Kabbalah) or according to more experiential-ecstatic concepts (as is the case in Polish Hasidism). In addition, the Kabbalistic sources that inform their writings offer rather similar views to those stemming from R. David b. Yehudah he-Hasid's books concerning the ten supernal *sefirot* (which are higher than the 'regular' *sefirot*), as well as to other Kabbalistic writings such as R. Abraham Adrutiel's and R. Joseph Alashqar's books written a hundred years beforehand in Northern Morocco.³² In fact, Adrutiel's book, still extant only in manuscripts, is one of the major sources of Ifargan's Commentary on the Pentateuch, which quotes *Sefer 'Avnei Zikkaron* tens of times.

We may see the emergence of a certain Kabbalistic tradition in Southern Morocco, since the later Kabbalists were dependent on the writings of the earlier who were active in the same geographical area. The conspicuous absence of the theosophical innovations stemming from the vibrant Safedian center, which had already declined when the Southern group of Kabbalists started its activity around 1575, is to be emphasized. Though the circle in Southern Morocco had been interested in Safedian Kabbalistic customs, they were much less receptive to the more general systemic schemes of both Cordovero and Luria. Needless to say, later Kabbalists from this group relied on earlier ones, which contributed to a certain conceptual homogeneity likely resulting from a type of cultural isolation. This represents a noticeable contrast with the more variegated and interactive atmosphere found in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in Salonika and Adrianopol and later on in Safed.

6. Moroccan Kabbalists of the 16th and 17th centuries in the Land of Israel

R. Yehudah Hallewah was certainly not the only Moroccan Kabbalist who arrived to Safed, neither was he the most important one. In the period immediately following his stay in Safed-- he later left for Syria--other Kabbalists arrived, joining the circle of R. Isaac Luria's students. The best known is R. Joseph ibn Tabul, who seems to have been one of the most reliable transmitters of Lurianic Kabbalah. Also noteworthy are R. Abraham ha-Levi Berukhim, R. Suliman ben Ohana, R. Massud Azulai Ma`aravi Sagi-Nahor, and R. Hayyim Ma`aravi, who all played important roles among Luria's followers. R. Hayyim Vital, whose

³² See the Introduction of M. Idel to the facsimile edition of R. Joseph Alashqar's *Sefer Tsafnat Pa'aneah* (Misgav Yerushalayim, Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 14-20 (Hebrew).

writings are one of the major sources of information concerning the Moroccan Kabbalists, mentions also a certain R. David Ma'aravi, an expert on incantations of spirits. R. Abraham b. Solomon 'Alon came from Dra'a to Safed via Egypt. Their arrival in Safed and activities there contributed to the special ambiance of Safed as a place where a variety of Kabbalists encountered each other and cooperated. If we assume that such a significant number of individuals coming to a certain place in a rather short period of time could plausibly have an influence on the spiritual processes going on there, we may surmise such an influence. Although for the time being it is difficult to assess the precise nature of such an impact, we have nevertheless one strong example: the conspicuous manner in which R. Yehudah ibn Malka's passage had an impact on R. Hayyim Vital. It should be noted that in many cases we learn about the names and activities of the Moroccan Kabbalists in Safed from books dealing with various occult events--reports of dreams in the case of Vital, wondrous stories related to Luria and R. Abraham ha-Levi Berukhin--and much less from quotes of their original books or even from quotes taken from lost books. The arrival of the numerous Moroccan Kabbalists, or at least those Kabbalists who stayed for a while in that country, led to a significant exchange between the two most important centers of Spanish Kabbalah in the aftermath of the Expulsion.

Lasting contributions to the dissemination of Safedian forms of Kabbalah are due to some members of the Azulai family, especially R. Abraham b. Mordekhai Azulai (1570-1644). Born in Fez to a well known family that arrived there after the expulsion from Spain, he immigrated in 1619 to the land of Israel where he was active in Jerusalem and Hebron. Azulai's Kabbalistic thought reflects the strong impact of R. Moses Cordovero's Kabbalah,³³ and his books, especially his *Hesed le-Avraham*, played a significant role in the dissemination of Cordovero's Safedian Kabbalah in Eastern Europe, as we shall see below. In addition, his commentaries on the book of the *Zohar* demonstrate the vital impact of the Cordoverian Kabbalah, still powerful many decades after the emergence of the Lurianic one. Interestingly enough, other Cordoverian treatises, such as R. Abraham Galante's commentaries on the *Zohar* entitled *Zoharei Hammah* and *Yareah Yaqar*, were known in Morocco. The manuscript of the latter commentary had been brought to Fez by none other than R. Elisha Ashkenazi, the father of Nathan of Gaza, a leading Sabbatean figure. This manuscript had attracted the admiration of several Sabbatean Kabbalists in Morocco.³⁴

³³ On this issue, see Isaiah Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1982), vol. I, pp. 255-267 (Hebrew).

³⁴ See Moyal, *The Shabbetaian Movement in Morocco: Its History and Sources*, pp. 212-215.

7. *The Place of Femininity in Spanish Kabbalah Before and After the Expulsion*

Let us now turn to a phenomenological aspect of the development of Kabbalah in Spain before and after the expulsion. One of the common denominators of the two major Kabbalistic schools that developed in Spain in late 13th century—the Nahmanidean and the Zoharic—is a more positive and even egalitarian attitude towards the feminine elements of divinity. This approach differs sharply from the ecstatic Kabbalah that developed contemporaneously outside of Spain, in which the feminine elements are conceived of as definitely negative. The feminine elements as described within the Spanish Kabbalistic corpora reverberated for centuries and contributed to formulations found in many Kabbalistic discussions after the expulsion. At the same time, those such as R. Isaac ibn Latif or R. Joseph ibn Waqar, who attenuated the importance of the feminine elements in their discourses about Kabbalah, remained at the margins of Spanish Kabbalah in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Let me bring some few examples from a more widespread spectrum of similar views. In a collection of Kabbalistic traditions stemming from Nahmanides' school, it is written that "God, Blessed be He, created a subtle creature in [the manner of] *du-partsufin*, [possessing] an equal power [*be-koah shaveh*] and they are 'Ateret [and] Tiferet."³⁵ The subtle creature is not the human Adam, but a divine power that incorporated two entities with equal power, namely two *sefirot*. This view recurs several times in the writings of 13th and 14th century Spanish authors owing to Nahmanidean traditions. (The full publication and analysis of these traditions will have to be undertaken elsewhere.) Let me offer just one more example for this argument of equality. In R. Isaac of Acre's celebrated *Sefer Me'irat 'Einayyim* we read:

This is the reason why *Tiferet* and 'Atarah are called *du-partsufin* since at the beginning they were emanated from *Teshuvah* [as] *du-partsufin*, and they receive [from there] in an equal manner [*be-shaveh*] but the sins of Israel caused that they are in exile, and this is the reason that it is necessary to bring atonement, and this is the meaning of the Prosecution.

This is the secret meaning I received: Know that the *Teshuvah* is the king

³⁵ Ms. Oxford-Bodliana 1610, fols. 90b-91a. On the issue of equality between man and woman, see Moshe Idel, "Androgyny and Equality in the Theosophico-Theurgical Kabbalah," *Diogenes*, vol. 52, issue 4, no. 208 (2005), pp. 27-38, and *Kabbalah & Eros*, pp. 59-73.

of the kings of kings. How is it: *Teshuvah* is king, kings are the arms of the world [namely *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, [second] kings are *du-partsufin*, that are two kings that serve and use one crown, which is the *Teshuvah*, that is the Holy One, blessed be He. When the 'Atarah stood and accused and said to *Teshuvah*: 'it is impossible that two kings will use the same crown,'³⁶ because you know that the *du-partsufin* were equal, since during the six days of creation the light of one was like the light of the other, since *Tiferet* was the first day and 'Atarah is the second one."³⁷

These views regarding the primordial equality of the divine powers and of celestial bodies reverberated in many Kabbalistic sources before the expulsion from Spain, including within the writings of R. Menahem Recanati in Italy. The Spanish Kabbalists who left the Iberian Peninsula adopted this view, as is the case with R. Meir ibn Gabbai and later on with R. Moses Cordovero.³⁸ In Morocco, it had been adopted by R. Yehudah b. Ya`aqov Hunain in his book *Minhat Yehudah* around 1600, and from there they were copied by R. Jacob b. Isaac Ifargan's *Minhah Hadashah* in 1619.³⁹ Elsewhere in his book, Ifargan develops the equality between the male and the female principle even without explicitly mentioning the term *shaveh*.⁴⁰ Independent of ibn Gabbai's and Cordovero's treatments of this topic, these discussions preserve the Spanish concept of equality for the male and female divine powers, a view that was canonized in several passages of R. Isaac Luria's *Sefer 'Etz Hayyim* where it is written that the last *sefirah* is: "The last point *Malkhut*... and the peak of her growth is that she will include all her ten *sefirot* and she will be in a face-to-face position with *Ze'ir 'Anppin*, totally equal, and the two kings will use the same crown"⁴¹.⁴² This is just one of the many instances in which the equality between the feminine and the masculine divine powers is described as taking place during the daily theosophical process.

In the book of the *Zohar*, the concept of equality between the masculine and feminine elements is less explicit but not absent. In fact, the woman was called the half of the body several times, a phrase that in my opinion implies equality. However, what is more

³⁶ B. Hullin 60b.

³⁷ *Me'irat 'Einayyim*, ed., Amos Goldreich (Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1984), p. 22.

³⁸ See Idel, "Androgynity and Equality."

³⁹ Ed. Moshe Hallamish (Lod, 2001), vol. I, pp. 103-105.

⁴⁰ Idem, II, p. 755.

⁴¹ B. Hullin 60b.

⁴² *'Etz Hayyim*, Gate XXXVI, ch. 1: "שהיא נקודה מלכות האחרונה שבה כנ"ל ותכלית גידול שלה הוא שיהיה בה כל הי"ם שלה ותהיה עם ז"א פב"פ שוה לגמרי וישתמשו ב' מלכים בכתר א'."

interesting is the emergence of a cult of the *Shekhinah* that is hardly found in earlier Kabbalistic sources. This cult, in a manner similar to the above discussions, should be understood as part of the emphasis placed on the coupling of male and female powers, whose origins are much earlier in Jewish texts.⁴³ This cult assumes different forms, the most widespread of which argues that the feminine divine power--*Shekhinah*, *Malkhut*, *'Atarah*, *Knesset Yisrael*--should be united with the masculine divine power, *Tiferet*.⁴⁴ Moreover, the famous story about the beautiful maiden, which had a huge impact in the history of Kabbalah, attributes to a feminine power a paramount role in initiating the study of this esoteric lore by the male Kabbalist.⁴⁵

In the case of the revelations received by R. Joseph Karo, the feminine entities—known basically as the "admonishing mother," the "*Matronita*," or the *Mishnah*--are the dominant factors in his spiritual life. They reveal a major desire, namely, the need to concentrate on the feminine entities of *Torah*, *Mishnah*, or *Shekhinah*.⁴⁶ This is the case also regarding the revelation that Karo had during the two nights of Shavuot he spent in Nicopolis in 1534, a revelation that can be described as the foundation (though certainly not the actual creation) of the ritual of *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, as reported by R. Solomon ha-Levi Alqabetz.⁴⁷ It should be noted that in Ifargan's *Minhah Hadashah*, the role played by the last *sefirah* called *'Atarah* is paramount, and definitely deserves a special analysis, about which I intend to do elsewhere. To a certain extent, such a role is discernible also in the writings of his companion, R. Isaac ha-Kohen, the author of *Ginnat Beitán*.⁴⁸

⁴³ See M. Idel, *Kabbalah & Eros* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005), pp. 25-32.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 104-152. For a different understanding of this topic, see Elliot R. Wolfson, in many of his studies, especially in his *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1995). For another approach, see Daniel Abrams, *The Female Body of God in Kabbalistic Literature: Embodied Forms of Love and Sexuality in the Divine Feminine* (Magnes, Jerusalem, 2004) (Hebrew).

⁴⁵ See *Zohar*, II, fol. 99b. This story has enjoyed a variety of interpretations in modern scholarship. See, e.g., Elliot R. Wolfson, "Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: Peshat and Sod in Zoharic Hermeneutics," in ed. Michael Fishbane, *Midrashic Imagination* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1993), pp. 155-203 and Daniel Abrams, "Knowing the Maiden Without Eyes: Reading the Sexual Reconstruction of the Jewish Mystic in a Zoharic Parable," *Daat*, vol. 50-52 (2003), pp. lix-lxxxiii.

⁴⁶ See R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (JPS, Philadelphia, 1977), pp. 148-167. I am inclined to emphasize the role played by the feminine powers that spoke through the throat of R. Joseph Karo, and to reduce to the minimum the possible role of the *Maggid*, implicitly a masculine power, in those revelations. On the issue of the paramount role played by feminine powers in Karo's revelations, I shall return in a more detailed study.

⁴⁷ See Rachel Elijor, "R. Joseph Karo and R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov: Mystical Metamorphosis, Kabbalistic Inspiration and Spiritual Internalization," *Tarbiz*, vol. 65 (1996), pp. 671-709 (Hebrew).

⁴⁸ Ed. Moshe Hallamish (Lod, 1998), p. 45-52.

Let me present one example of this cult of the feminine divine power found in R. Moses Cordovero's *'Or Yakar*, his commentary on the *Zohar*, as well as in a passage that was copied almost verbatim found in R. Abraham Azulai's *Hesed le-'Avraham*⁴⁹ brought here:

Whoever performs a commandment nowadays, he prepares something that sustains the *Shekhinah*, and draws to her a little bit of influx...and he has notwithstanding a retribution for his toil...and the proof for it is the daughter of the king when she sits in the palace of her father and one of her servants performs for her an act of worship, she will certainly pay attention to him but not so much would she be outside the palace in trouble in exile. and if the servant would give her even a small thing like a piece of moist grass to help her, recovering it will be more important in her eyes than whatever she had when she was governing. Know that the main intention of Rashbi, blessed be his memory, when he composed the book of the *Zohar* was for this reason, since the *Shekhinah* was in exile without any influx, without anyone to sustain and help her. And he wanted to do something to sustain her and unite her with her husband, [creating] a little union by the composition of the book of the *Zohar*, by what he and his companions are dealing with the secrets of the Torah, which is causing the union of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His *Shekhinah* by means of *Yesod*, which is *Raz* and in gematria, is Light.⁵⁰

Both Cordovero and Azulai share the view that the very composition of the most important Kabbalistic book is intended to help the *Shekhinah*, just as the ritual R. Joseph Karo calls for is a type of study intended to elevate the *Shekhinah* from her low state. It is interesting that both views were formulated in the Eastern centers of Kabbalah, the Ottoman Empire and Safed, while in Northern Africa no parallel idea has yet been found. Paradoxically, there the *Zohar* was indeed very important and its study in popular circles was much more pronounced than in any other Sephardi community.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Bracha Sack, "The Tracing of Sources in R. Abraham Azulai's Work *Hesed le-Avraham*," *Qiriat Sefer*, vol. 56 (1981), p. 168 (Hebrew).

⁵⁰ Azulai, *Hesed le-Avraham* (Lemberg, 1863), fol. 6c.

⁵¹ Harvey Goldberg, "The Zohar in Southern Morocco: A Study in Ethnography of Texts," *History of Religion* vol. 29 (1990) pp. 249-251 and Abraham Stahl, "Ritual Reading of the Zohar," *Pe'amim*, vol. 5 (1980), pp. 77-86 (Hebrew).

8. *The Divine Sparks, the Alien Beautiful Woman, and the Inner War*

Turning to another dimension of the mobility between centers of Kabbalah, it now seems that R. Abraham Azulai's books mediated many of the views of R. Moses Cordovero, and some of R. Isaac Luria, to the East European Jewish mystics known as Hasidim. Let me submit in this context one interesting discussion of Azulai's that adumbrates a basic assumption of Polish Hasidism, i.e., that *Tsaddik* is responsible for the sparks found in his vicinity, since they are originally parts of his own soul. There are a few antecedents relating this view among the exiles, like in the works of R. David ibn Avi Zimra and R. Solomon ha-Levi Alqabetz,⁵² but it seems that the most interesting formulation is found in Azulai's commentary on the Bible. There, he argues in an explicit manner that the shells, namely the demonic powers, contain not just divine sparks, but the spark of the specific righteous that go forth to war. When commenting on the biblical discussion of the beautiful alien woman that can be made prisoner and ultimately married,⁵³ Azulai, or his Kabbalistic source, says:

Know that it is incumbent on the [people in] exile to purify the holy sparks which were mixed - because of the sin of Adam - within the shells, where good and bad are mixed,⁵⁴ as it is known.⁵⁵ Behold, according to this issue you should understand the matter of the beautiful woman. It is known that those who go to that war, that is a war of choice, were completely righteous persons, who did not [even] speak between a prayer to one another. Thus, it is impossible that the evil inclination would overcome these righteous persons, and defile them with an alien woman. This is the reason why the Torah announced that if he [the righteous man] desires her, it is [only] because there is a holy spark mixed in that nation, which is found in that alien woman, a spark that belongs to the soul of that man.

⁵² I hope to deal with those views in a separate study.

⁵³ Deuteronomy 21:11.

⁵⁴ For the theory of mixture and its plausible Manichaean sources, see Moshe Idel, "The Interpretations of the Secret of Incest in Early Kabbalah," *Kabbalah*, vol. 12 (2004), pp. 153-154 (Hebrew).

⁵⁵ The sentence from the beginning until here is found in Vital's *Likkutei Torah*, fol. 104b. However, Luria's passage deals with the general redemption, while Azulai takes the discussion in a different direction.

This is the reason why he desired her and why the Torah allowed him to have sexual intercourse with her.⁵⁶

Therefore, warfare is a matter of the confrontation between a righteous man and a spark originally belonging to his particular soul, and this spark is redeemed from its mixture within the impure nation by the battle. It should be emphasized that in some cases, the person entering this war is described as righteous, a *Tsaddik*, and thus, the war is conceived of as a matter of restoring the lost parts of the soul of that righteous man, a view quite reminiscent of the theory prominent among the 18th century Hasidism, as we shall see below. Moreover, according to another passage, which occurs immediately after the above quote, we learn about a view that differs, to a certain extent, from the Lurianic view as described above: ““The enemies of man are the members of his household”⁵⁷ which are the drops of semen from which the body of the shells have been created ...and when someone comes to repent, namely he goes forth to the war on his enemies, which are the enemies and his limbs.”⁵⁸

For Azulai, it is the bodies of the evil powers, not only the sparks within them, that are created by the ejaculated semen. It seems therefore that in the Safedian type of Kabbalah a certain approach to war as described in the Bible developed, which assumed it constitutes an occasion for liberating the reifications of someone’s sins embodied in shells. Moreover, in a manner reminiscent again of Luria’s distinction, Azulai also distinguishes between two enemies of man--the shells, on the one hand, and the *nig‘ei benei ‘Adam* (the personified drops), on the other.

We can therefore conclude that Azulai, or his sources, went beyond Luria, and perhaps also Cordovero, when he explicates the strong affinity between a righteous man and the beautiful alien woman. She is understood as a combination of primordial shells--the impersonal evil powers--and the drops of the righteous person that are related to his soul and to his sin at the same time. The allowance given for marrying a beautiful alien woman is understood here as part of a religious world-view that combines the personal form of salvation, namely, the redemption of the souls of one’s own children metamorphosed in hostile bodies, with a theurgical operation that deals with divine sparks rescued from their corporeal demonic prison. To put it a different way, someone may worship God not only by performing the Rabbinic commandments, but also by repairing his sins and acting in a

⁵⁶ *Ba`alei Berit ‘Avram*, (Ahavat Shalom, Jerusalem, 1982), fol. 87b.

⁵⁷ Micah 7:6.

⁵⁸ *Ba`alei Brit ‘Abraham*, fol. 87b.

manner that does not specifically reflect a Rabbinic commandment. Interestingly enough, this view also assumes that there is a primordial link between the male and the female, though it differs from the egalitarian one mentioned above. Moreover, this view reflects a more flexible attitude toward non-Jews than the more ordinary Rabbinic attitude and that of other Kabbalistic approaches. This mode of action, namely, the expansion of what is valid among the traditional spectrum of religious acts, is known as *Avodah be-Gashmiyyut*, the worship within the corporeality, a concept that attracted plenty of attention within Polish Hasidism.⁵⁹ R. Abraham Azulai was also acquainted with this approach.⁶⁰ Thus, we may assume that if there are some affinities between the views of the Moroccan Kabbalist and the very similar theory found within Polish Hasidism, some earlier Spanish Kabbalistic tradition likely informed both.

It is the founder of Hasidism, R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, known as the Besht, who is reported to have addressed this theme:

I have heard in the name of the Besht that he said: 'Enemies⁶¹ of a man are the members of his household:' those are the transgressions that he committed, because from them the shells [*kelippot*] have been generated and they are embodied in some bad people...who are arguing and struggling with him. Behold, men have two types of foes: one, mentioned above, which emerges from a sin he committed. The other kind are the wicked people, who hate those who walk in upright ways...whose obliteration does not depend upon the [upright] person...But the foe that emerges from an aspect of his sin can be repaired when God is pleased by his deeds, also his enemies [namely, his personal enemies] will be reconciled with him. Since then his heart will understand that it is the enemy [manifested] by means of the shells that were created from his sins.⁶²

⁵⁹ See Tzippi Kauffman, *Between Immanence and Religious Behavior: Avodah be-Gashmiyyut in the Early Stages of Hasidism* (Ph. D Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2004) (Hebrew).

⁶⁰ See his voluminous commentary on the *Zohar*, 'Or ha-Hammah, (Premislany, 1887), V, fol. 30b. On the reverberation of this topic in Cordovero and in a ethical-Kabbalistic writing before Hasidism, see Bracha Sack, "R. Moses Cordovero's Ethical Theory-Some Remarks," in *Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah Presented to Professor Sara O. Heller Wilensky* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1994), p. 178 note 59 (Hebrew); M. Idel, "On Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Koidanover's *Sefer Qav ha-Yashar*," *Judische Kultur in Frankfurt am Main von den Anfaengen bis zur Gegenwart* ed. Karl E. Groetzinger (Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 128-129.

⁶¹ 'Oyivei 'Ish. For the internalization of the enemies, see above in the quotes from the Alexander the Great literature that will be dealt with in my monograph on the inner war in Jewish mysticism (in preparation).

⁶² Quoted in the late 18th century in R. Gedaliyah of Lunitz, *Teshu' ot Hen*, (Brooklyn, 1982), p. 100.

This passage is brought as an interpretation of the verse from Deuteronomy 21:10 on 'going forth to war against thy enemies.' Implicitly, the Besht is dealing with a war waged against two types of enemies-- one is an externalization of his own sins and the other constitutes 'objective' enemies. At least implicitly, we have here two types of war. One war is based upon repairing someone's sins, something that may be approximated as repentance, while the other kind of war involves actual enemies that should, presumably, be battled by conventionally external deeds, as in a concrete war. The Besht resorts to the term *kelippot*, which has been translated as shells, a term referring to demonic powers that was widespread in Safedian Kabbalah, in order to account for the manner in which the transgression has been reified. These are the external manifestations of one's personal evil that can be repaired by amending one's own religious behavior, a shift that will destroy the inner power of those shells. In a peculiar way, the combat with evil is, as found already in Abraham Azulai's passage discussed above, an internal combat, in which the person encounters and liberates his own sparks, embodied in shells, because of his sins. However, what is important from my point of view is the fact that at least in principle, the shells externalized as an alien beautiful woman can be understood as part of the Jewish man's personality, and in a way reintegrated by the act of reparation. In general, let me emphasize that in Hasidism, the contemplation of the beauty of women, Jewish or not, was conceived of as an act that has religious valences, again following a text preserved by a Sephardi Kabbalist, R. Elijah da Vidas.⁶³

This brief survey invites another understanding of Spanish Kabbalah, in which women were conceived of differently than in the other theories of personality in Jewish culture: Halakhic, philosophical, or Kabbalistic. When a full inventory and analysis of the declarations on equality of women to men, at least in principle, is performed, a characteristic of Spanish Kabbalah--as proposing a distinct and different approach in Judaism--will emerge in a stronger light than can be completed in this succinct analysis.⁶⁴ Nota bene: It goes without saying that this more open approach is not the single attitude toward women to be discerned in the diverse Kabbalistic and Hasidic literatures, neither is it free of all the limitations and negative aspects found in the periods in which the Kabbalistic writings have

⁶³ See Idel, *Kabbalah & Eros*, pp. 153-178 and my "Female Beauty: A Chapter in the History of Jewish Mysticism," *Within Hasidic Circles: Studies in Hasidism in Memory of Mordecai Wilensky*, eds., I. Etkes, D. Assaf, I. Bartal, E. Reiner (The Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 317-334 (Hebrew).

⁶⁴ See meanwhile, the source referred to in Idel, *Kabbalah & Eros*, pp. 272-274.

been composed. Nevertheless, this is an interesting voice to be given its proper place in the general complex picture of Kabbalah.