

The Uplifting of Sparks in Later Jewish Mysticism*

Louis Jacobs

Although for convenience's sake we shall refer, in this essay, to light as a kabbalistic symbol for the divine, it should be noted that, for the kabbalists themselves, light and the other symbols they use are really more than symbols. They are not mere pointers to the

*Originally published in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality from the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 99–126.

reality; in a sense they are the reality itself. For the kabbalists, light, for example, really exists on high as a spiritual object. It is that entity which is the true source of physical light. Again, for them, the Hebrew language is not simply a convention. The Hebrew letters are the material form assumed by the sacred alphabet on high. God really did say: 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1:3) by combining those spiritual forces represented by the letters *alef*, *waw* and *resh* to form the spiritual word for light, or. Echoes of the Platonic 'idea' are heard in all this.

Edwyn Bevan has shown how ubiquitous is the light symbol in the religions of humanity: from the earliest times, light has impressed humans as most closely associated with our thoughts of the divine.¹ Among the reasons for the emergence and persistence of the light symbol to represent the divine are that light dispels darkness and so is a symbol for knowledge, for admission into the mysteries, for the sudden realization of the truth, as in the expression

¹Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (London: Collins, 1962), 110-33.

‘a flash of illumination’. In the darkness something hostile may be lurking. There is danger to life there, making us welcome the safety and security afforded by light. The enemy uses the darkness to pursue his nefarious ends so that light becomes synonymous with the good, darkness with evil. Again, the brilliance of light, its shining quality, is extremely attractive, exercising a powerful fascination in itself, quite apart from its usefulness. Still another property of light, which has made it serve as a symbol in Neoplatonic thought (especially relevant to the Kabbalah), is the way in which a luminous body apparently sends forth emanations of its substance without any force coming into play or any loss being suffered. To whatever distance these emanations reach, they remain always one with the luminous body.

The kabbalists have the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature as the background to all their thinking. In these works light symbolism for the good and for the divine occurs frequently. The passages are innumerable, but for our purpose we need refer only to

the Psalms: 'light is sown for the righteous' (97:11); 'the Lord is my light and my salvation' (27:1); 'at the brightness before Him' (18:23); 'the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes' (19:9); 'thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path' (119:105). In the vision of the divine chariot seen by the prophet Ezekiel (chapter 1), a passage that formed the basis for mystical speculation in Judaism, the divine is described in terms of flashing lights and the colours of the rainbow.

It is not, therefore, surprising that for the kabbalists, in Bevan's felicitous phrase, 'the numinous is essentially the luminous.' The classical work of the Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, has a title meaning 'Illumination,' even though the title is not original with the work. In the *Zohar*, the entities on high and their relationship with one another are described in terms of lights flashing, being reflected, producing sparks, and the like. It is necessary to repeat, however, that the kabbalists are thinking of the spiritual sources of light. In his defence of the Kabbalah, the Italian kabbalist Joseph Ergas (1685–1730), for instance, writes:

There are many who think of God as a great, pure, refined light, and the like, because they think that this is not to describe Him in corporeal terms. But this is the most extreme error and confusion. For although light is the most ethereal of all tangible things, it is still a matter. And there is nothing which can be imagined which is not an image of a material thing.... For whatever is grasped by the intellect is incorporeal but whatever is grasped by the imagination is corporeal, since the intellect is incorporeal whereas the imagination belongs to a man's physical nature. Even when he imagines entities that are incorporeal he does so as if they were corporeal.... When you find, in the works of the Kabbalists, that they refer to the activities of *Eyn Sof* and the *sefirot* in terms of light, it is not that these are lights in themselves.

Because it does not lie within the capacity of our intellect, while clothed in the material body, to apprehend the being and essence of the spiritual entities... the Kabbalists attributed to these entities the name 'light' since of all things perceived by the senses light is the most precious. Furthermore, light has certain properties similar to those of the entities that are emanated.... From all that we have said, you will appreciate that since light has qualities resembling those of the spiritual entities it is proper, as do the Kabbalists, to describe the *sefirot* and their functions in terms of lights. It was never their intention, Heaven forbid, to suggest that the *sefirot* are really lights. The *sefirot* are not corporeal substances, Heaven forbid.²

²Joseph Ergas, *Shomer Emunim* (Jerusalem, 1968), 2:11, pp. 59–61.

Ergas, developing his argument, suggests the following reasons for the suitability of light symbolism for the spiritual entities on high: (1) Light proceeds from its source and yet is not detached from it. Where the source is removed, no light remains—unlike wind, for example. It is possible to fill a balloon with wind and preserve it there detached from its source. In similar fashion, the *sefirot* are emanations of *Eyn Sof* and yet always remain attached to their source. (2) Light traverses objects and fills them without suffering any change. The colours of the objects into which the light penetrates are in them, not in the light. In similar fashion the *sefirot* penetrate all created things, endowing them with vitality, and yet the *sefirot* themselves suffer no change. (3) The effect of the light depends on the nature of the substance it illumines. The coarser a substance the less receptive it is to the illumination; the more refined a substance the more effective will be the power of the illumination. In similar fashion all change is not in the *sefirot* but in the capacity of creatures to receive their power.

It must be noted that Ergas is an apologist for the Kabbalah and is, therefore, more rationalistic than other kabbalists. For all that, his associates would agree that the light of which the Kabbalah speaks is in no way physical.

We must now turn to the kabbalistic doctrine of the *sefirot* and the wide ranging elaborations of the Lurianic Kabbalah in order to appreciate the significance of the idea of holy sparks. Although the Kabbalah is sometimes spoken of as if it were a single, though complex, system, it is more correct historically to see it as a number of systems developed in different ages. The later kabbalists acknowledge, in the main, two great systems. The first of these arose in the twelfth century in Spain and the Provence to find its fullest expression, at the end of the thirteenth century, in the *Zohar*. The second is that of Isaac Luria (1534–1572), taught by him in Safed to a few chosen disciples. The Lurianic Kabbalah is based on the earlier Kabbalah; Luria's ideas appear to have resulted from his profound and sustained reflection on the *Zohar*, but there are several new features that

make it, essentially, a completely new system. The Lurianic kabbalists admit to its originality, attributing the new revelations to Elijah, who appeared to their saintly master. To these new features belong the doctrine of the holy sparks.

Although an outline of the Lurianic Kabbalah has been offered in the preceding essay in this volume, it seems best to restate that outline here in the particular detail required by our subject, the motif of the holy sparks. The question this version of the Kabbalah seeks to answer is how a finite world, containing evil, falsehood, multiplicity, and imperfection), can have emerged from the perfect and infinite Godhead.

The Lurianic kabbalah is concerned not only with the sefirotic processes but also with that which preceded them—at least, at the stage when the *sefirot* begin their emergence as differentiated entities from out of the recesses of *Eyn Sof*. The first step in the process is one of contraction or withdrawal—*zimzum*. In order to make room, as it were, for the *sefirot*, *Eyn Sof* ‘withdrew from Himself to Himself’ to leave an ‘empty space’: the primordial space into

which, eventually, space and time as we know them emerged. The *zimzum* was bound to be incomplete; otherwise its purpose would have been defeated.

Nothing can come into being in the absence of God's power. The 'empty space' is thought of as a circle with *Eyn Sof* surrounding it on all sides in equal measure. So as to prevent a 'space' empty of *Eyn Sof* entirely, a 'thin line' of *Eyn Sof*'s light permeates the 'circle' but does not traverse it completely. Moreover, a residue of the light of *Eyn Sof* remains even after the withdrawal. This aspect of *Eyn Sof* remaining in the empty space forms the body of Adam Qadmon (Primordial Man), now no longer understood, as in the Zoharic scheme, as a synonym for the sefirotic realm but as a stage prior to the emergence of the *sefirot*, though embracing them in its fullness as unrealized and undifferentiated entities.

After the emergence of Adam Qadmon, the *sefirot* had to be constituted as separate and distinct entities, each with its own function, though infused with the light from *Eyn Sof*. For this to take place two aspects of each *sefirah* had to be emanated. First, there was

required the emanation of the 'vessel' of each *sefirah*, and, second, this had to be filled with light; the combination of vessel and light constituted a complete *sefirah* with its own separate identity. The process is envisioned in terms of lights flashing from Adam Qadmon and then recoiling. The light first beams downward and then returns, leaving behind a residue from which the vessel is formed.

After the formation of the vessel in this way, a second light is beamed from Adam Qadmon and returns, leaving behind a second residue to form the light which fills the vessel, thus completing the formation of the *sefirah*. These lights stream from the ears, nostrils, mouth, and eyes of Adam Qadmon.

Lights streamed from the ears, nose, and mouth of Adam Qadmon and then returned, but this was no more than a preparatory stage at which vessels and lights are united, the ground being made ready for the constitution of vessels and lights of separate *sefirot*. When, after this, lights stream from the eyes of Adam Qadmon, they strike the residue of the earlier lights that have emerged, the impact removing some

of the light so as to form a vessel. The vessels are now ready to receive further streams of light from the eyes of Adam Qadmon so that the lights filling the vessels will produce the *sefirot* as separate and distinct entities.

Now the nearer the *sefirot* are to Adam Qadmon, the more powerful are their vessels since the lights forming these do not have to travel over such a vast distance as the lights that form the vessels of the lower *sefirot*; light becomes fainter as it is distanced from its source. Thus, since the *sefirot* emerge in a descending order from higher to lower, the vessels of the three higher *sefirot* are stronger than those of the lower *sefirot*, great strength being required if the vessels are not to be overcome by the impact of the tremendous power of the lights which stream from the eyes. The basic idea behind all this is that there is tension in the whole creative process. Too much of the divine love and power is as ineffective in producing that which is other than God, as it were, as too little.

The lights streaming downward cannot achieve

the total effect all at once. First there has to be the flash and the recoil to allow the vessels to be fortified in a gradual process. The divine Other can only emerge from concealment in a kind of trial and error, 'reaching and yet not reaching' in the language of the kabbalah.

When the lights from the eyes of Adam Qadmon streamed forth toward the vessels only the vessels of the three higher *sefirot* were sufficiently strong to endure the impact. The vessels of the seven lower *sefirot*, weaker than the others, could not endure the light streaming into them and they were shattered. This is the stage known as the 'breaking of the vessels' (*shevirat bakelim*). Again we have the theme of the control of the divine love in the creative process. Genesis [36:31–9], which tells of the death of the Edomite kings before there reigned a king over the children of Israel, is given a mystical interpretation. The kings who died are the seven lower *sefirot*, compelled to pass away before sovereignty could emerge. Rabbinic ideas about God creating worlds and destroying them before he finally created this world are similarly laid

under tribute to the kabbalistic doctrine. The worlds are those of the *sefirot*, which had to be destroyed before there could emerge the proper balance.

When the vessels were shattered—or, in the other metaphor, when the kings died—the lights returned to their source; but not all the lights returned. Sparks of the lights remained, adhering to the broken shards in order to keep them in being. Furthermore, even the higher *sefirot*, though they suffered no breakage, fell from their higher place to a lower one. Thus, at this stage everything was in disarray. The higher *sefirot* were in the wrong place, as it were; and, as for the lower *sefirot*, all that remained of them were their broken vessels with the sparks attached to them. The whole sefirotic realm needed to be reconstituted. This process of reconstitution is called *tiqqun*, brought by means of lights streaming from the forehead of Adam Qadmon.

For the *sefirot* to be prevented from suffering the fate that had previously befallen them, it was necessary for them to be ordered as *parzufim*, meaning configurations. A *parzuf* is a particular combination

of all ten *sefirot*. The point here is that while single *sefirot* on their own are incapable of endurance because the vessels become too weak to contain their lights, when the *sefirot* come together in a *parzuf* they fortify one another. The lights from the forehead of Adam Qadmon meet the broken vessels and the sparks which vivify them and also meet the fallen higher *sefirot*. Under the impact of these lights the *parzufim* are constituted. But after the reconstitution, things are not exactly as they were before.

There is no complete restoration; the *parzufim* require further assistance before there can again be complete harmony on high. This task of providing the *tiqqun* for the *parzufim* is the responsibility of Israel.

There are five *parzufim* (1) *Arikh Anpin* ('Long Face,' i.e. Longsuffering); (2) *Abba* ('Father'); (3) *Imma* ('Mother'); (4) *Ze'ir Anpin* ('Small Face,' i.e. Impatient); (5) *Nukva* ('Female'). Each one of these contains all ten *sefirot* but represents in particular one of the *sefirot*, around which the other nine are configured. For instance, *Arikh Anpin* represents the

Keter aspect of the *sefirot*, in which, as yet, there is no separation of Mercy and Judgment but all is love, whereas *Ze'ir Anpin* represents the *Tif'eret* aspect, where Mercy and judgment are separate but harmonized. This is the meaning of *Arikh Anpin* as Long-suffering and *Ze'ir Anpin* as Impatient or less whole and complete. It must further be noted that the six *sefirot* from *Hesed* to *Yesod* are grouped around *Tif'eret* so that the *parzuf Ze'ir Anpin*, while containing all ten *sefirot* (as do all the *parzufim*), stresses the aspect of *Tif'eret* and the other five. In the total correspondence with the *sefirot*, *Arikh Anpin* corresponds to *Keter*; *Abba* to *Hokhmah*; *Imma* to *Binah*; *Ze'ir Anpin* to *Tif'eret* (and the other Eve); and *Nukva* to *Malkhut*.

There are worlds without number, but, in the main, the Lurianic kabbalah, relying on stray references in the later Zohar literature, speaks of four worlds, one beneath the other, each of which comes into being by means of the sefirotic processes and each of which contains all five *parzufim* since it is through the *parzufim* that the divine, sustaining en-

ergy is conveyed to all. In descending order, the four worlds are (1) *Azilot* (World of Emanation), the realm of the *sefirot* proper; (2) *Beri'ah* (World of Creation), the realm of the heavenly throne; (3) *Yeẓirah* (World of Creation), the realm of the angelic hosts; (4) *Asiyah* (World of Action), the realm from which the finite universe emerges and the finite universe itself. Adam Qadmon is also called a realm or a world, so that there are five worlds, each corresponding to one of the *parẓufim*. Although the five *parẓufim* are in all the worlds, each corresponds to one of the worlds.

All creative activity is by means of the special divine name, the tetragrammaton, the four letters of which are *yud*, *beh*, *waw*, *heb*. These letters correspond to the *sefirot* thus: *yod* represents *Hokhmah*; the first *beh*, *Binah*; *waw*, Tif'eret and the other five (the numerical value of *waw* is six); and the last *heb*, *Malkhut*. *Keter* is too elevated to be represented by a letter but is denoted by the title of the *yod*.

There is a further elaboration of the tetragrammaton as the creative power in the universe. The

four letters of this name can be spelled out in full in four different ways, as has been outlined in the preceding essay (see above, pp. 83–86), resulting in the 72, 63, 45, and 52 letter names of God. These four combinations are given the following names: (1) 'aV (*ayin*=70; *bet*=2; =72); (2) SaG (*samekh*=60; *gimel*=3; =63); (3) MaH (*mem*=40; *heh*=5; =45); (4) BeN (*bet*=2; *nun*=50; =52). All four are found in all worlds but they are especially apportioned each to the four worlds in descending order. Moreover, each of them is itself divided into the four so that it is possible to speak of the SaG of 'aV; the MaH of 'aV; the BeN of 'aV and so forth. Similarly, each of the *sefirot* can be divided into ten so that there is the *Ḥesed* of *Gevurah*; the *Ḥesed* of *Ḥesed*; the *Gevurah* of *Ḥesed*, and so forth. Again, since each *parzuf* contains all ten *sefirot* and all five *parzufim*, it is possible to speak of the *Ze'ir Anpin* of *Abba*; the *Abba* of *Nukva*; the *Keter* of *Binah*; the *Binah* of *Ḥokhmah*, and so forth. All is relevant to the human task since these complex associations correspond to this or that human act by means of which one can 'put right', perform

the *tiqqun*, for this or the other category on high.

Before we proceed to consider the doctrine of the holy sparks it will be helpful to set it all out in diagrammatic form.

<i>Sefirot</i>	<i>Parzufim</i>	Worlds	Letters	Names
1. <i>Keter</i>	<i>Arikk Anpin</i>	<i>Adam</i> <i>Qadmon</i>	tittle of <i>yod</i>	—
2. <i>Hokhmah</i>	<i>Abba</i>	<i>Azilut</i>	<i>yod</i>	‘aV
3. <i>Binah</i>	<i>Imma</i>	<i>Beri’ab</i>	<i>heb 1</i>	SaG
4. <i>Tif’eret</i> plus five	<i>Ze’ir Anpin</i>	<i>Yezirah</i>	<i>waw</i>	MaH
5. <i>Malkhut</i>	<i>Nukva</i>	‘ <i>Asiyah</i>	<i>heb 2</i>	BeN

The further extremely complex relationships, such as the division into the letters of the Torah, the vowel points, the crowns of the letters, and the musical notes, are part of the whole system, but to examine these in detail would demand a whole volume and would take us beyond the scope of this enquiry. For our purpose it is sufficient to sketch the main outlines only.

The Holy Sparks

As we have seen, the sparks adhering to the broken vessels helped in the reconstitution of the *sefirot* into *parzufim* and the formation of the world of *Azilit*, the sefirotic realm. But there was an overspill of these sparks from the world of *Azilit*; thus was the world of *Beri'ah* constituted. The overspill from this world resulted in the emergence of the world of *Yeẓirah*, and, in turn, from this world there was an overspill that brought about the world of *‘Asiyah*. The idea here is that fewer sparks are required for the formation of the worlds as they descend; less energy is needed to keep lower worlds in existence, so that as the sparks flash out those which are redundant insofar as that world is concerned spill over to create the next lower world.

There is a further overspill from the world of *‘Asiyah* and it is this which nourishes the *qelipot* or demonic forces. In this way the effect of the breaking of the vessels results in holy sparks being imprisoned among the *qelipot*. It is the human task to reclaim

these sparks for the holy and by so doing perform the necessary *tiqqun*, assisting the fallen worlds to be restored to their former harmonious state. The reclaiming of the sparks from the *qelipot* is achieved by rejecting evil, that is, by obeying the negative precepts of the Torah. So far as the highest *qelipah* realm, the ambiguously holy/unholy world of *nogah* is concerned, the sparks therein are reclaimed by directing aright the natural drives of the body and so bringing this *qelipah* into the realm of the holy. Furthermore, in a very elaborate scheme, every detail of the precepts of the Torah is directed towards this or that aspect of the *parzufim*. Every evil deed not only keeps the holy sparks imprisoned among the *qelipot* but also sends baneful impulses on high to disturb further the harmony among the *sefirot*. Conversely, every good deed sends beneficent impulses on high to promote harmony among the *sefirot* and reclaim the holy sparks.

In kabbalistic exegesis, the creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis does not refer to the emergence of this world but to the emanation of the *sefirot*

and, in the Lurianic school, to the whole process as described. The verse (Gen. 1:2) states that the spirit of God (*Elohim*) hovered over the face of the waters. In the rabbinic midrash, the name *Elohim* denotes judgment, sternness, severity. The reference is said by the Lurianic kabbalah to be the breaking of the vessels, the restriction of the divine light, and hence the emergence of severity and judgment, albeit for the sake of God's love, so that creatures might come into being to benefit from his goodness and share it forever. The spirit of judgment, then, hovered over the waters, that is, the lights were too powerful and the vessels too weak for the process to be completed.

The word for 'hover' is *meraḥefet*. If the first and last letters are detached from this word and placed together they form the word *met*, 'death', referring to the death of the 'kings'. When these two letters have been removed from the word, we are left with the letters *resh*, *peh*, *het* (*resh*=200; *peh*=80; *het*=8) with the numerical value of 288. The number of holy sparks to be rescued is consequently said to be 288. The significance of this number becomes clearer when it is

recalled that the highest of the four divine names, the name $\text{'}aV$ has the numerical value of 72. Four times 72 (four because there are four divine names— 'aV and the other three—and four letters in the tetragrammaton) is 288.

In the extremely bold sexual symbolism that the kabbalists favour, the unification or harmonization among the *sefirot* is described as *zivug* (copulation). First there takes place the *zivug* of *Abba* and *Imma* and then of *Ze'ir* and *Nukva* (*Tif'eret*, the male principle; and *Malkhut*, the female principle, personified as the *Shekhinah*). The male principle, *Tif'eret*, is given the rabbinic name for God: "The Holy One, blessed be He" (*qudsba berikh hu* in Aramaic). For *zivug* to take place, both male and female orgasm are required; the male orgasm is described as 'male waters'; the female orgasm as 'female waters'. The male waters are attained through the flow of grace and power from above, from the higher *sefirot*, but (here is the most startling aspect of the whole doctrine) the female waters are provided by humans who send on high the reclaimed holy sparks. The holy sparks

provide the female waters so that the sacred marriage can take place. (Again and again the kabbalists issue the sternest warnings against taking this in any physical or corporeal way, but solely as descriptions of complex relationships between spiritual entities in the sefirotic realm).

At first it was intended for the *tiqqun* and the reclaiming of the holy sparks to be performed by Adam, whose great soul embraced all the souls of humanity. If Adam had obeyed God the *tiqqun* would have been completed and harmony restored throughout all creation. But, as a result of Adam's disobedience, there was a second cosmic fall, repeating, as it were, the original breaking of the vessels. Adam's soul became fragmented, each of his descendants having a mere spark of Adam's mighty soul. Thus the Lurianic school thinks of two kinds of sparks. The first are those which fell when the vessels were shattered. The second are the sparks of Adam's soul.

It is not only the sparks in creation that require reclamation, but, in addition, every soul has to assist in its own *tiqqun*, that is, in the perfection of

that particular spark of Adam's soul. A vast cosmic drama is being played but with the human being in the central role. Each individual has to engage the dual task of restoring his or her own holy spark, an inheritance from the first father of the human race, and one has to reclaim the holy sparks in creation, both of which are achieved by keeping the precepts of the Torah. (Occasionally it is hinted that the process applies to all the descendants of Adam—not only to Jews—but this is infrequent. The kabbalistic doctrines are addressed primarily to Jews, to whom the Torah has been given, every detail of which corresponds to some aspect on high.)

The bare performance of the precepts is not sufficient, however, for the rescuing of the sparks and the achievement of the *tiqqun*. The mystical adept must be thoroughly familiar with all the details of the sefirotic map, so that when he carries out the precepts he has the required *kawwanot* ('intentions'), by which his mind is directed to the particular detail his act puts right. For instance, each festival in the Jewish calendar has its own particular *tiqqun*, its

special promotion of harmony among the *parzufim*. As an observant Jew, the mystic will naturally keep the festivals in the way the law demands. But of him much more is required. He must be fully conscious at every stage of his observances of that which his efforts put right on high.

The spiritual exercises of the kabbalists are, consequently, in the nature of prolonged meditations on the complex relationships among the *sefirot* and the *parzufim*. Some opponents of the kabbalah based part of their objection on this very point, arguing that the kabbalist becomes so absorbed in the *kawwanot* that he has no time to think of God!

There is a mystical formula, incorporated into the prayer books in the seventeenth century, whereby the kabbalist directs his heart to the *tiqqun* before he carries out any of the precepts. In its fuller form this declaration reads: 'I perform this for the sake of the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His *Shekhinah*, to unite the name *yud, heb* with *waw, heb*, by means of that Hidden and Concealed One, in the name of all Israel.' The letters *yud, heb*, the first

two letters of the tetragrammaton, represent, respectively, *Hokhmah* and *Binah* (with *Keter* represented by the title of the *yud*). The performance of the precepts brings about the unification of *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut* (corresponding to the *parzufim Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nukva*), represented by the letters *waw*, *beh*, the third and fourth letters of the tetragrammaton. This produces the further unification of the higher and lower *sefirot* and thus the unification of *yud*, *beh*, with *waw*, *beh*. It is all brought about by the power of *Eyn Sof* (Hidden and Concealed). And it is performed in the name of all Israel, each individual being only a spark of Adam's soul. In many versions of the formula there is the addition: 'And I perform it in love and fear', representing the love of God, corresponding to *Hesed*, and the fear of God, corresponding to *Gevurah*. One who approaches God in love and fear brings into play on high the divine *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, united and harmonized in *Tif'eret*.

The Lurianic kabbalah also has a strong messianic thrust. The doctrine runs that although Adam had sinned and by so doing prevented the restoration

of the sparks, his descendants were given a second chance when the Torah was given to Israel. By their willing acceptance of the demands of the Torah, the Israelites were set to put right the whole realm of the *sefirot*, restoring the harmony Adam had failed to achieve. The sentence of death, decreed on Adam, was annulled and they were destined to become immortal. But these privileges were forfeited at the time of the worship of the golden calf. The catastrophic breach was repeated and all was in disarray again. The process of reclaiming the sparks now had to be a gradual one; only to be completed in the far-off messianic age.

The risk of a third catastrophic failure could only have been avoided by a step-by-step restoration rather than an immediate storming of the heavens. But soon after the Expulsion from Spain, the Lurianic kabbalists seemed to have felt that redemption could no longer be allowed to tarry. Their aim was to hasten the process. They developed the theory that in the age in which they flourished the store of souls from Adam had almost been exhausted. The great

ones of the past possessed souls from the head of Adam, with a progressive degeneration then setting in, and the souls of the sixteenth century were seen as deriving from the heels of Adam. Moreover, most of the sparks in creation had already been reclaimed. All that was needed for the Messiah to come was for the few remaining souls with sparks from Adam to rescue the correspondingly few sparks in creation. A final effort of great power was seen to be required in order to rescue the few remaining sparks from the *qelipot*. The members of the Lurianic school were ascetics, seeking, by holy living, self-denial, prayer, and the practice of the *kawwanot*, to complete the task of *birur* ('selection'), the total rescue of all the holy sparks and their complete separation from the domain of the *qelipot*.

The whole process, from beginning to end, is seen by the Lurianic school as one of exile and redemption. The first act of *zimzum*, the withdrawal, betokened a kind of exile, with the filling of the 'empty space' a partial restoration. This process was repeated when the vessels were shattered and then reconstituted in

the form of *parzufim*, in Adam's sin and the giving of the Torah, in the worship of the golden calf and the task of restoring the fallen sparks. It is small wonder, then, that the exile of the *Shekhinah* and her redemption occupy such a prominent place in the Lurianic scheme.

New rituals were introduced by the Lurianists with the express purpose of hastening the redemption, of restoring the *Shekhinah* to her spouse. There are two aspects of the *Shekhinah* in Lurianic thought, two *parzufim* (each of the five *parzufim* is further divided into two, making a total of ten) known as Rahel and Leah (the biblical stories represent, chiefly, for the kabbalists, the relationships on high, though, of course, the historicity of the matriarchs and the other biblical personages is not denied). The mystic rises at midnight to recite various scriptural verses and prayers intended to restore the *Shekhinah* from her exile. The passages are arranged in two parts: somber *tiqqun Leah* and the *tiqqun Rahel*, in which the note of consolation is sounded more emphatically.

The custom of rising at midnight to mourn for

the exile of the *Shekhinah*, like other Lurianic rituals, was later adopted by many devout Jews who made no claim to being mystics or kabbalists. On the eve of the new moon, the ritual of the Minor Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur Katan*) was introduced for the same reason. In the kabbalah, *Tif'eret* is symbolized by the sun and *Malkhut*, the *Shekhinah*, by the moon; the waxing and waning of the moon represents the exile of the *Shekhinah* and her eventual return from exile. Since the reunification of the *Shekhinah* with her spouse depends on the reclaiming of the holy sparks, the eve of the new moon festival is made into a day of repentance and confession of sin in preparation for the new effort required in order to bring on the hoped-for event. This practice, too, was later adopted in many Jewish communities.

Another liturgical innovation by the kabbalists is the prayer recited before the performance of the precept of counting the Omer (Lev. 23:15–16). There are seven weeks from the second day of Passover to the festival of Pentecost, the traditional anniversary of the giving of the Torah. The *tiqqun* of which the

kabbalists speak involves chiefly the restoration of the seven lower *sefirot*. Only these were shattered; the three higher *sefirot* only fell from their place. Each *sefirah* contains all the others, so that, as we have noted, one can speak of *Hesed* of *Hesed*, *Gevurah* of *Hesed*, and so forth. To each day of the *Omer* period one of the forty-nine combinations is allotted, beginning with *Hesed* of *Hesed* on the first day and ending with *Malkhut* of *Malkhut* on the last day. Every sin brings in its wake a *pegam* (flaw) in one of these combinations, but through carrying out the precept the flaw is removed and the *tiqqun* process assisted. When all forty-nine days have been counted and all seven *sefirot* in their forty-nine combinations have been restored, the Torah can be received in purity. The mystical prayer recited each day before the counting reads:

‘Sovereign of the Universe! Thou didst command us through Moses Thy servant to count the Omer in order to purify us from our *qelipot* and our contaminations. As Thou hast writ-

ten in Thy Torah: “And from the day on which you bring the sheaf (*omer*) of wave offering—the day after the sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days” (Lev. 23:15–16), so that the souls of Thy people Israel will be cleansed from their filth. Therefore, may it be Thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that, in the merit of the counting of the Omer which I have this day counted, there should be a restoration of that which I have flawed in the *sefirah* (adding whichever of the forty-nine combinations is appropriate for that day). And may I be purified and sanctified in the holiness which comes from on high. Amen, Selah.’

The idea of the purification as extending even to

the sefirotic realm in this connection is based on the Zoharic notion that the counting of seven times seven here represents the counting by the *Shekbinah* of her days of impurity just as a menstruant must count seven days before she can be with her husband (Lev. 15:28). Ritual purity has been raised to the level of profound mystery.

Especially through prayer, with the mind on the special *kawwanot*, each soul can rescue the holy sparks and assist in the *tiqqun* process. This is not understood as the same *tiqqun* performed repeatedly. Each day has its own *tiqqun*. Each prayer is a new *tiqqun*. No two prayers, even if they have the identical words, achieve the same result. For example, the disciples of Hayyim Vital describe the *tiqqun* performed through the early morning prayer and ablutions (*Peri 'Ez Hayyim, Sha'ar ha-Tefillah*, chap. 4). We must first note that, strictly speaking, the world of *Azilut* is unaffected by the *qelipot* and requires no *tiqqun*. The lowest of the four worlds, *'Asiyah*, is given over entirely to the *qelipot*, and it is here that the rescue operation is required. But, through the rescue of the

holy sparks in *‘Asiyah*, the other two worlds, *Beri’ab* and *Yezirah*, are also put right. It is, in fact, in these that the actual *tiqqun* is achieved. However, as we have seen, each of the worlds contains all four, so that there is the aspect *‘Asiyah* of *Azilot*, where the *tiqqun* is required. The kabbalist writes:

‘This is the meaning of prayer and its mystery. Man must rise up early in the morning, relieve himself, and wash his hands. He must put right the four worlds by means of his deeds and his words. He performs the *tiqqun* by deed when he relieves himself. The act corresponds to the World of Action (*‘Asiyah*) so when he evacuates his bowels he should have the intention (*kavanah*) of cleansing the World of Action from the *qelipot*, namely, the *‘Asiyah* of *‘Asiyah*. After this he should have the intention of putting right *‘Asiyah* of *Yezirah*. This is achieved when he puts on the small

garment with the fringes attached... After this, when he puts on the *tefilin*, he should have the intention of putting right the *'Asiyah* of *Azilut*... And then, when he dons the large *tallit* and wraps himself around with it, there is the overall and surrounding *tiqqun*. Thus far the *tiqqun* performed by deed. And now the *tiqqun* performed by word of mouth. When he recites the order of the sacrifices there is achieved the *tiqqun* of *Yeẓirah* of *'Asiyah*. When he recites the songs of praise there is achieved the *tiqqun* of *Yeẓirah* of *Yeẓirah*. This is followed by *Kaddish*, *Barekhu*, and the *Shema*. These correspond to the *Beri'ah* of *Beri'ah*, and when the *Shema* is recited there should be the intention of performing the complete unification.'

The above is a very small example of how the process operates. The purpose of the *Peri 'Ez Ḥayyim*

is to put all the kabbalistic doctrines to work by showing the particular intentions required when the rituals are carried out, demonstrating how each detail has its special correspondence in the supernal realms. By means of the whole range of Jewish observances the various *tiqqunim* are achieved; each observance, each individual, and each hour and day makes its own contribution to the complete *tiqqun* through the rescue of the holy sparks from the *qelipot* until the great cosmic drama reaches its finale.

The Lurianic kabbalah won adherents in many parts of the Jewish world, especially in Italy, Turkey, Germany, and Poland. The Lurianic *kawwanot* were practised by individual kabbalists in isolation, but small groups of *mekhawwenim* (those who practised the *kawwanot*) were also to be found, such as the group in the famed *kloiz* in the Galician town of Brody. A circle of *mekhawwenim* was formed by Gedaliah Hayyon, in Jerusalem, in the year 1737. In Bet El, as the conventicle was known, prayer with the Lurianic *kawwanot* was engaged in until the present century. Hayyon was succeeded in the leader-

ship of the circle by his son-in-law, Shalom Sharḥabi (1720–1777), a renowned Yemenite kabbalist. Sharḥabi produced a prayer book, *Nehar Shalom* (Salonika, 1806), containing all the *kawwanot*. The elitist nature of Bet El has been described by Ariel Bension, the son of one of its members:

‘The center consisted of a small group of the intellectual elite, whose mystic joy lay in the heart of the silence which enveloped them in its seven veils for centuries. Living in a retirement that screened it off from the vulgar gaze of the public, the group pursued its upward course, striking the synthesis between conviction and action. It was a community agreed to live in unity and sanctity. Of those who sought to enter its portals it demanded the attainments of the scholar and the self-abnegation of the ascetic. Thus it missed the masses... In Beth-El joy was attained by no

artificial means, but by silent meditation, by introspection in an atmosphere in which music, blending with men's thoughts, induced a forgetfulness of externals. Each man's eyes were turned inwards. Seeking to mine the wealth of his own soul he found there the wealth of the universe. Amazed at his own discovery of the hidden treasure the mystic pursues his course upwards until he attains the ecstasy that brings him to the mystery of creation, where sits joy enthroned.

In a silence in which alone the soul may meet its God, destroyed worlds are reconstructed and restored to their pristine perfection. And this is the aim of the *kawwanot*—the meditations on the mystic meaning of certain prayers with intention bring restoration. In a song which follows the meaning-

ful word, continuing and deepening its meaning—even as a pause in the rendition of a symphony is but the continuation of the music—this wordless song attains that which cannot be reached through the medium of words. And the word of prayer, arising at a given moment from the throats of all Israel, attains its highest form in the silence of Beth-El, imaged in song by the Master seated on his divan and surrounded by silent, thought-inspired mystics.’³

The following brief statement of the *berurim* (the ‘selections’) in prayer by Shalom Shar‘abi, the second and most famous leader at Bet El, is typical of the practice of the *kawwanot* at this centre.

‘All this applies to the weekdays. But, afterwards, on the Sabbath, as a result of the prayers, those *berurim* that

³Azriel Bension, *The Zohar in Muslim and Christian Spain* (London: G. Routledge, 1932).

have been refined and put right on the weekday now emerge once again in order to be refined and put right though the supernal *parzufim* more than could have been achieved during the weekday, each prayer proportionally, until the Afternoon Prayer (of the Sabbath). Then *Ze'ir Anpin* ascends to the place of *Arikkh Anpin* and then all the *berurim* ascend to become combined and put right by means of the 'aV of the 'aV and the 'aV of the SaG of Adam Qadmon.'⁴

Prior to this statement, Shar'abi had observed that the weekday prayers have the effect of refining (performing the *berurim*) the various stages in the divine process but only as a beginning. On the Sabbath these find their more complete refinements as they ascend even higher. We have seen that the four names,

⁴The passage is translated from the Hebrew text in *Siddur Hage'onim Vehamekubalim*, ed. M. Y. Weinstock (Jerusalem, 1970-3), 7:37.

‘aV, SaG, MaH, and BeN, are present in all four worlds and they are present, too, in the world of Adam Qadmon. Thus, on Sabbath afternoon the prayers complete the refinement process begun on the weekday and continued on the Sabbath, until toward the end of the Sabbath the *berurim* extend even to the highest of the high, to the ‘aV of the ‘aV of Adam Qadmon. All this the mystic is required to have in mind before he begins to recite the prayer. During the prayer itself, various other complex associations in the realm of the *parzufim* are required to be in the mind, and these are provided by Shar‘abi.

The Sabbatian Heresy

The movement founded by the false messiah Sabbatai Sevi (1626–1676) and his prophet Nathan of Gaza, despite its antinomian departure from Jewish tradition, managed to win over to its redemptive fervour a large proportion of Jews of diverse social classes in many lands. Historians have been puzzled by the astonishing successes of Sabbatianism; but, however the special factors that led up to the new messianic

enthusiasm are to be understood, there is no doubt that the movement's theology is based on the Lurianic kabbalah, with the doctrine of the holy sparks occupying a prominent place—though the doctrine was completely recast in order to justify the messianic revolution.

Nathan of Gaza encouraged Sabbatai Sevi to believe that he was the long-awaited Messiah, maintaining that with the advent of Sabbatai, the *tiqqun* had received its fulfilment, all the holy sparks having been successfully reclaimed. A new era had been inaugurated. Even the practices of the Torah were no longer required in their traditional form. Their purpose had been the rescue of the holy sparks, and that task had been accomplished, rendering them superfluous. What had hitherto been sinful was now permitted, even mandatory, as a joyous celebration hailing the completion of Israel's mission. Sabbatai carried out certain acts, sternly forbidden in the Jewish sources, such as the eating of tallow, a food unpalatable in itself but precisely for that reason an instance of sin not for self-gratification but for its own sake. Sabbatai

recited over the tallow the benediction: 'Blessed art Thou, who hath permitted that which has hitherto been forbidden.' In the new theology, the soul of the Messiah now occupied a prominent place in the whole cosmic scheme; that soul had been present in a mysterious way even at the time when the vessels were shattered. In the traditional Lurianic system, all the emphasis is on the age of the Messiah, when the *tiqqun* will have reached its fulfilment, not on the person of the Messiah (though, as Orthodox Jews, the Lurianic kabbalists obviously did believe in a personal Messiah).

When the stormy career of Sabbatai Sevi ended in his conversion to Islam, the hopes of all but his most faithful devotees were dashed. These were obliged to develop an even more radical theology in order to justify his apostasy. With the coming of the Messiah in the person of Sabbatai Sevi, it was argued, all the holy sparks dispersed for the children of Israel to reclaim had already been rescued. In this sense it was indeed true that the mission had been successfully completed. But there still remained holy sparks

among the Gentiles, and these awaited their rescue. In order to achieve this final restoration it was necessary for the Messiah to descend into the domain of the *qelipot*, here represented by Islam, to elevate the holy sparks still imprisoned there. Long after Sabbatai's death, his still-faithful followers became enamoured of this intoxicating idea of the holy sin, adopting it as a rule for all believers, not only as a task to be undertaken by the Messiah alone.

These later Sabbatians outwardly kept all the observances of the Torah but secretly endeavored to rescue by the performance of illegal acts the holy sparks imprisoned among the *qelipot*. This involved a complete reversal of the Lurianic kabbalah. In the Lurianic scheme it is never permitted to attempt to rescue the holy sparks through sinful acts. On the contrary, refraining from sin was one of the ways in which the sparks were to be rescued and the restoration completed.

Hasidism

Hasidism, the movement inaugurated in eastern Europe by Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (ca. 1700–1760) and his disciples, claimed to be 'a new way of serving God.' The Hasidic writings are in the conventional Hebrew and Aramaic of traditional Judaism, so that the novelty of the teaching can only be discerned by reading between the lines and by observing how the older vocabulary has been adapted to express ideas that had never been intended.

In these texts there is to be found a subtle blending of the old and the new, resulting if not in a completely original doctrine, at least in marked new emphases. Hasidism utilizes the concept of the holy sparks to a far greater degree than the Lurianic kabbalists themselves. But although on the surface nothing has changed, in effect the whole concept has undergone a radical transformation. Close examination of how the doctrine fares in Hasidism reveals several significant points of departure. The extent of the Sabbatian influence is still debated by scholars

but it cannot be denied that Hasidism, like Sabbatianism, used the teachings regarding the holy sparks in order to advance its own theological position. The *mitnaggedim*, the rabbis, and communal leaders who opposed Hasidism, recognized this; although they believed that Luria's idea came to him by divine inspiration, they still declared Hasidism to be heretical and its adherents sectarians.

First, it has to be appreciated that while some Hasidic masters did engage in severe denial and mortification of the flesh, their ascetic mode of life belonged to their background as Lurianic kabbalists or to individual temperament. It was only incidental to the Hasidic way of life, which stressed the idea of *'avadah be-gashmiyyut*, 'divine worship through the use of material things'. This involved a positive embrace of things of this world as means towards the greater service of God. The Hasidic ideal and the asceticism of a few of the masters were in flat contradiction. Students of religious psychology are able to quote many examples of such contradictions existing side by side in the religious mind. In the essential

Hasidic doctrine, God is to be worshipped not only by the study of the Torah, prayer, and the observance of the precepts but also, and particularly, by engaging in worldly pursuits with God in mind. Little is made in the Lurianic kabbalah of the holy sparks residing in food and drink and in other worldly things except when the discussion has to do with their rescue through the performance of the precepts—eating and drinking as sacred acts on the festivals, for example, or eating unleavened bread on Passover.

Otherwise, abstinence and holy living are the way in which the sparks are rescued. In Hasidism, on the other hand, the holy sparks clamour to be rescued by the Hasid fully engaged in the world. When attending to his material needs for the sake of God, the Hasid is carrying out acts of divine worship. For him to lead an ascetic life is to shirk his duty of rescuing the holy sparks. Traditional Judaism also knows of eating for the sake of heaven, that bodily appetites should be satisfied not out of hedonistic motives but in order to keep the body strong and healthy for the service of God. In Hasidism, worldly pursuit in

the spirit of holiness is not simply a means to the noblest of ends; it is an end in itself. 'For the sake of heaven' means, in Hasidism, that the true motivation must be to carry out the heavenly task laid upon humanity—that of rescuing the holy sparks.

Various theories have been advanced to account for the Hasidic transformation. It is likely that the Sabbatian notion of the holy sin, though never adopted in its stark form by Hasidism, paved the way, at least, for the spiritually adventuresome idea of finding the holy in the depths of the material. It is also highly likely that the early Hasidic masters, witnessing a lack in the spiritual life of the masses, for whom asceticism could have no appeal, wished to encourage a far greater participation in the religious life on the part of the ordinary Jews. Another factor, no doubt, was the harsh economic reality for the Jews in eastern Europe. Of what use was it to preach that the world was to be lost for the soul to be gained to people who had so little of the world to lose in any event? The lesson needed was that God is very near to all and near to these people in their travail, that the world

is shot through with divinity. Downtrodden simple Jews needed to hear that they, too, could draw near to God, even if removed from the niceties of rabbinic learning, by perceiving the divine vitality in all things. The description of Hasidism as ‘mysticism for the masses’ certainly contains some truth.

Second, the Lurianic kabbalists were elitists; they alone knew the secret method of reclaiming the holy sparks. Yet anyone with the necessary qualifications was allowed to join the mystic circle in order to participate in the tremendous cosmic engagement. Hasidism was, on the contrary, egalitarian. It was open to every Jew to become a Hasid, no matter how humble his origin and attainments. (The very word *Hasid*, meaning in the rabbinic and medieval literature ‘saint’ now denoted a follower of a spiritual guide and mentor who numbered quite ordinary Jews as well as the learned and saintly among his followers.) But what Hasidism gave with one hand it took away with the other. All the Hasidim were treated as equals but their lives now revolved around the *zaddiq*, the holy man, the guru-like figure, the righteous

leader whose commands must be obeyed even by the Almighty himself. In some versions of Hasidism it is the *zaddiq* alone who can attempt the perilous task of reclaiming the holy sparks residing in the material. But more generally the Hasid, too, is encouraged to embark on the great adventure, yet he can only hope to succeed because he is aided by the *zaddiq*, to whom he owes allegiance and whose mystical aura embraces his followers to elevate their souls.⁵

Third, as Gershom Scholem has shown, in Hasidism each individual, or at least each *zaddiq*, has his own unique sparks to reclaim.⁶ There is nothing of this in Luria. True, in the Lurianic scheme each individual is called upon to elevate his own spark of Adam's soul. In this respect, each individual has his own task to perform even according to Luria. But the sparks found in creation as a result of the breaking of the vessels are in no way peculiar to each individual. All must engage in the task, each in accordance with

⁵On the authority of the *zaddiq*, see the treatment by A. Green in ch. 5 of this volume.

⁶G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 176–202.

his soul-root.

In Hasidism the two sets of sparks—those belonging to Adam's soul and those residing in the material universe—are intimately connected. The task of the individual is to rescue those sparks in creation that belong to him, having an affinity with his soul-root. There are sparks in creation waiting for him to rescue them because they are his and he alone can perform that particular task. The development of the doctrine in this way is perhaps due to the renewed Hasidic emphasis on the individual as unique.

It is because of this that we find many a Hasidic tale of a master being propelled by a force beyond his control to journey to distant places for no other purpose than to carry out there some task, otherwise neutral or insignificant, that would have the effect of rescuing the holy sparks held there captive by the *qelipot*—these sparks awaiting the coming of the one rescuer whose soul-root is close to them in the divine scheme. The princess enslaved in the ogre's castle will consent to be rescued by the knight in shining armour to whom she had plighted her troth.

A few examples must now be given of how the doctrine of the holy sparks is treated by the Hasidic masters. The doctrine appears frequently in the first Hasidic work to be published, *Toledot Ya'akov Yosef*, by Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye (d. ca. 1784). In one passage Jacob Joseph speaks of two kinds of intentions when eating.⁷ The simple intention is to gain strength for God's service. The higher and more difficult intention is for the purpose of elevating the holy sparks in the food. God has given us the desire for food and drink as an inducement to elevate the holy sparks. This is the spiritual aspect of eating and drinking, concealed by the physical pleasure, just as an honest woman whose face is veiled may be mistaken for a harlot. The *zaddiq* sees through to the reality. His thoughts are not on the pleasure he obtains, only on the holy sparks to be rescued.

The grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, Barukh of Medzhibozh (1757–1810), is said to have gone even further in his enthusiasm for the idea of reclaiming

⁷Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, *Toledot Ya'akov Yosef* (Warsaw, 1881), 'Emor', p. 225.

the holy sparks through engagement in the world. In the work containing Barukh's teachings, *Bozina di-Nehora*, there is a remarkable homily on the following text:⁸ 'If a man has two wives, the one beloved, the other hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated... he may not make the son of the beloved the firstborn before the son of the hated, who is the firstborn; but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the hated, by giving him a double portion' (Deut. 21:15–17). The beloved wife represents the service of the one who worships God by studying the Torah and prayer. This is beloved to those who observe it since that is, indeed, how the majority understand worship. Not so the worship engaged in by the *zaddiq* when he engages in worldly things for the purpose of reclaiming the holy sparks.

People find it very strange that such an activity should be termed divine worship, failing to see that while the *zaddiq* eats, drinks, and engages in com-

⁸Barukh of Medzhibozh, *Bozina di-Nehora*, ed. R. Margalioth (Lemberg, 1930), *ki teze*, p. 59.

merce no differently from other men, his intentions are quite different. This aspect is represented by the 'hated wife'. It is the child of the hated wife, however, who is to receive the double portion that is the right of the firstborn. The result of this type of worship, its 'child', is twice as valuable in God's eyes and must have priority, though repellent to men. Barukh himself conducted a splendid 'court' with magnificent furniture, tapestries, and even a court jester. His many opponents were not slow to criticize him for departing from the simple life of his grandfather. Evidently he sought to justify his opulent life-style on the grounds that it was all for the purpose of reclaiming the holy sparks.

Perhaps in overcompensation, Barukh roundly declares that the Torah holds this way to be greatly superior to that of study and prayer. Such an extreme view does not appear to have been shared by the majority of the masters, and it is certainly a far cry from the original idea of reclaiming the sparks as found in Luria. The novelty of his approach is acknowledged by Barukh himself when he describes this way of wor-

ship as ‘hated’. It should be noted that Baruch speaks of the *zaddiq*, evidently holding that the ordinary Hasid is incapable of having God in mind when following worldly pursuits.

According to legend, another Hasidic master, Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt (d. 1825) was almost obsessed with the idea of reclaiming the holy sparks inherent in food. He is said to have eaten colossal meals whenever he could, with his mind on God as he ate, in order to rescue more and more sparks. In his work *Ohev Yisra’el*, the Apter examines the tradition that ‘inverted nuns’ (i.e. the Hebrew letter *nun*) are to be inserted in the Torah scroll before and after the small section: “And it came to pass, when the Ark set forward...” (Num. 10:35–6).⁹ The traditional explanation of this phenomenon is that the nuns are like our inverted commas and are intended to show that this passage is out of place, that it does not belong here. The Apter, very anachronistically to be sure, but obviously with an eye on the Hasidic practices of his

⁹Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt, *Ohev Yisra’el* (Jerusalem, 1962), *be-ha’alotekha*, p. 177.

day, remarks that the section refers to the stages of the Israelites' journeys through diverse places in the wilderness. These journeys were necessary in order to rescue, by means of the holy Ark which went with the people and the holiness of Moses and their own holiness, all the holy sparks residing in those unclean places.

The letter *nun* has the numerical value of 50, pointing to the 50 gates of Understanding (*Binah*). The rabbis (*Nedarim* 38a) speak of 50 gates of understanding (*binah*), 49 of which were open to Moses. Even the great leader was unable to pass through the fiftieth gate. In the kabbalah, this is made to refer to the *sefirah* of *Binah*, the mother of the seven lower *sefirot*, which has 49 gates (seven times seven). On their holy journeys, aided by the holiness of the Ark and Moses, the people were able to draw down from on high even the illuminations from the fiftieth gate so as to rescue the holy sparks imprisoned in those places among the corresponding fifty gates of impurity. When the sparks, who had imagined that their cause was lost and that they were doomed forever to

remain in captivity, saw the great illumination reaching down to them from all 50 gates on high, they sprang out to meet them and so could be elevated to their source by the holy people.

This is the mystery of the inverted *nuns* and, indeed, this small section is out of place since the true home of the holy sparks was not among the *qelipot*. It is interesting to compare the Apter's homily with the Sabbatian idea of the descent of the Messiah into the realm of impurity in order to reclaim the sparks residing there. Possibly in conscious reaction to the Sabbatian doctrine, in the Apter's homily it is the *nun*, representing the sacred realm on high, that descends (is inverted). Moses and his people, on the contrary, do not descend and only elevate the sparks after their release from imprisonment through the descent of the celestial powers.

The Hasidic emphasis on the need to rescue the holy sparks through engagement in the world naturally presented its own temptations. It became all too easy for worldly men to indulge their appetites and ambitions under the guise of sanctity. The ap-

parently worldly *zaddiq* may not have been worldly at all, because his intention is solely for the rescue of the sparks, but who was to know whether, in fact, his motives were pure? Even among the Hasidic masters themselves there is a realization of how open to abuse the doctrine is. Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomer (d. 1800), in his book *Or ha-Me'ir*, for example, is extremely critical of the *zaddiqim* of his day who journey periodically to elicit contributions from their followers for their own upkeep.¹⁰ Ze'ev Wolf is opposed to the practice, refusing to believe that these much-travelled *zaddiqim* only journey from place to place for the purpose of reclaiming the holy sparks. After all, he says, beggars too are decreed by fate to go from house to house to solicit donations. Only the holiest of men can be sure that their need for travel is induced by God so that they might rescue the holy sparks. Such journeys may, in reality, be nothing more subtle than the desire to be supported by others without having to work for a living. It

¹⁰Ze'ev Wolf, *Or ha-Me'ir* (Jerusalem, 1968), 'Tzav', pp. 95d-96d.

may be only the decreed fate of the abject beggar.

According to Ze'ev Wolf, discernment is imperative. Not every urge is to be seen as the call of the holy sparks to be delivered. Before responding to the urge, the *zaddiq* must be sufficiently confident in his spiritual power to elevate the sparks. He must know with certainty that when he sets out to rescue the sparks he will succeed in his task because he really is a holy man. Lacking such confidence, he can easily fall prey to self-delusion. Instead of rescuing the sparks, he himself will become enslaved by the *qelipot*.

In a number of passages in Hasidic writings it is suggested that the taste of food and drink is the spiritual aspect of that food and drink, the holy spark that sustains it. At the end of the work *Noam Elimelekh* by the early Hasidic master Elimelekh of Lizensk (1717–1787), there occurs this passage:

‘Before washing the hands preceding a meal, recite the penitential prayer of the *Ari* (Luria) of blessed memory. After eating the piece of bread over which

grace before meals has been recited, say: "For the sake of the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His *Shekbinah*. I do not eat, God forbid, to give enjoyment to my body but only that it be strong to worship God. Let not any sin, transgression, evil thought, or bodily pleasure prevent the unification by means of the holy sparks in this food and drink."

Whenever one eats and drinks, he should have in mind that the taste he experiences when he swallows the food and imbibes the drink is the inward part of the holy sparks which reside in that food and drink; and that, through chewing with the teeth and digesting with the stomach, the inward part of the food becomes refined so that it does not become a surplus wherewith the outside ones are fed. His soul will then benefit

from the inward part of the food, the residue becoming waste matter to be expelled for the outside ones. He should also have in mind that as soon as he will feel a need to evacuate his bowels he will not, God forbid, keep the waste inside his body to contaminate his mind and render his soul abominable by keeping the excrement and urine inside his body for a single moment. And, as he eats, he should depict to himself the letters of the word *ma'akhol* (food) in their 'Assyrian' (square Hebrew) form, and should have in mind that numerically they total 91, the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton and *Adonay*.¹¹

The meaning of this last statement is that the tetragrammaton represents *Tif'eret* while the name *Adonay* represents *Malkhut*. The word *ma'akhol*, equal

¹¹Elimelekh of Lizensk, *Noam Elimelekh*, ed. G. Nigal (Jerusalem, 1978), *Zetzel Qatan*, vol. 2, no. 15, p. 617.

in its numerical value to that of *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut*, suggests the idea that by eating in a spirit of consecration the unification is brought about of these two *sefirot* through the rescue of the holy sparks.

From the earliest period, the Hasidim were very fond of tobacco. The complaint that the Hasidim waste their time in smoking is reiterated in the polemics of the *mitnaggedim*, collected by Mordecai Wilensky in his *Ḥasidim u-Mitnaggedim*.¹² The main reason for this addiction to the weed, claim the Hasidim, is also because of the need to elevate the holy sparks. The argument runs that tobacco was unknown in Luria's day because the time had not yet come for the very subtle sparks in tobacco to be released by smoking. But now that almost all the coarser sparks had received their restoration, tobacco was sent by God so that the Hasidic masters should elevate these 'new' and subtle sparks! A similar defense of tobacco is found in the work *Oẓar ha-Ḥayyim* by

¹²Mordecai Wilensky, *Ḥasidim u-Mitnaggedim* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1970) p. 39 n. 20, p. 54, and elsewhere in the book.

Yitzhak Eisik of Komarno (1806–1874).¹³ This author informs us, in the name of his father-in-law that one of the Ba'al Shem Tov's disciples thought ill of a colleague who stooped to retrieve his pipe, which had fallen to the ground during his prayers. On reflection, however, he came to appreciate that there are subtle souls which can only find their *tiqqun* through the most ethereal of substances. This is the 'sweet savor unto the Lord' mentioned in Scripture in connection with the sacrificial system. Also found in Hasidic sources is the idea that smoking corresponds to the incense in Temple times, having the same effect of elevating the holy sparks.

Another aspect of the sparks from Adam's soul was seized on by the Hasidic writers. This was the idea that the souls of his descendants were present in Adam's soul in families or groups, each with its own soul-root. Since Adam's sin, when the souls were scattered, Adam's descendants each receive their souls in this pattern of roots. Furthermore, a soul not yet

¹³Yitzhak Eisik of Komarno, *Ozar ha-Ḥayyim* (Lemberg, 1869), vol. 3, *qedoshim*, p. 171b.

perfected while in one body has to return to another body in order to perform the *tiqqun* it requires. The doctrine of *gilgul* (transmigration of souls) features prominently in the Lurianic kabbalah. The return to earth may be in the form of an animal or a bird, but more often it is in the form of another human being. There are many descriptions among the kabbalists of this or that scholar or saint having the soul of an earlier, perhaps biblical, spiritual hero. Sometimes it is not necessary for the soul of a saint to return to inhabit another body entirely. He may find his *tiqqun* by only partial residence in a body that already has its soul. This is known as *‘ibbur*, impregnation. This means that the soul of the departed is impregnated into another soul, the latter still in the body, for mutual assistance in performing the *tiqqun* each of them needs. All these ideas were accepted implicitly by the Hasidic masters. Hasidic legend tells of certain masters having the souls of saints who lived long ago and with whom they share the same soul-root.

It was also believed that there are sparks of souls waiting to be restored in various kinds of food, es-

pecially in fish, which is why the *zaddiqim* made a point of eating fish on the Sabbath. This notion is probably behind the tale referred to above of the disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov and his pipe. It is as if the souls of the greatest of saints can only bear to return to earth if they are allowed to reside in tobacco, that is, in the refined form of rising smoke, so that when the *zaddiq* smokes his pipe he elevates the soul of the departed and it finds its *tiqqun*. This is the reason, too, for the many tales of disciples going from master to master without finding spiritual rest until they discover a master with the same soul-root as themselves. It is also the reason why a *zaddiq* is able to assist his followers. The *zaddiq* knows of his follower's previous existences on earth and so is able to advise him on the special *tiqqun* he requires in his present existence.

In one other important respect the development of the holy sparks doctrine in Hasidism differs from the Lurianic kabbalah. In Lurianic thought the mystical adept must not only have in mind the rescue of the sparks but also—indeed, primarily—the precise

tiqqun he achieves by that rescue. When, for example, he carries out a particular precept, his mind must be on the details of the complex relationships he intends to achieve among the *sefirot* and the *parzufim*. These are the Lurianic *kawwanot*, referred to earlier. For a reason to be noted shortly, Hasidism urges the mystic to leave the *kawwanot* aside, dwelling only on the intention to rescue the holy sparks. This is certainly the attitude adopted by the majority of the Hasidic masters, though some of the masters, as expert kabbalists, still practised the *kawwanot*. They did so, however, as kabbalists, not as *ḥasidim*. The *ḤaBaD* movement in Hasidism also had a way of its own in the matter of contemplation.¹⁴ In a sense, *ḤaBaD* is a separate system rather than a movement within Hasidism.

Why did the Hasidic masters virtually abandon the Lurianic *kawwanot*, even though they believed implicitly that Luria was the recipient of divine inspiration? The answer is to be found in the Hasidic

¹⁴On this, see the discussion by Rachel Elior in ch. 6 of this volume.

idea of *devequt*, attachment to God. *Devequt* means that the mind of the *ḥasid* must always be on God, even though such an ideal is extremely difficult to attain. The *mitnaggedim* rejected the *devequt* ideal, considering it to be undesirable, since, if the mind is to be on God when studying the Torah, for instance, the texts will never be mastered, requiring as they do sustained and undivided attention. If the *ḥasid* has his mind on God when studying, say, the intricate talmudic discussions about property rights, he is, to be sure, engaging in a devotional exercise, but he is not really studying at all. There is much tension here even among the *ḥasidim*, many of whom were talmudists of distinction, and who evidently limited the *devequt* ideal to the period before and after study. During their studies, they admitted, the mind must be concentrated not on God but on the subject studied.

For the same reason that *devequt* found a rival in Torah study, it found a hindrance in the practice of the *kawwanot*. How could the mind of the mystic be on God alone when it had to be absorbed in the

details of the sefirotic scheme? Of course these details were themselves part of the divine processes, and thought of them was really thought of God. Yet the very fact that there is a system worked out in rich detail with a host of complex symbols tended to create a dichotomy between simply having God in mind and concentrating on the arcane symbolism. Thus, the Hasidic emphasis on *devequt* tended to make the doctrine of the *kawwanot* something of an embarrassment. It was impossible to deny the truth of the sefirotic picture, and yet to dwell on it was to frustrate the *devequt* imperative. The usual way out adopted by the *ḥasidim* was to postulate that in the later generations, unlike in the time of the great Lurianists, it was no longer possible to reconcile the *kawwanot* with the *devequt* ideal. Men of these inferior generations have their work cut out in achieving *devequt* without having to cope with the distraction of the *kawwanot*. To concentrate on reclaiming the holy sparks for the sake of God was enough, it was argued, and the various *tiqqunim* were achieved automatically as a result of such concentration. There was no

longer any need, nor was it desirable, to have the *kawwanot* in mind.

Among those spiritually weaker generations God allows, as it were, the processes to continue and the perfections to be achieved without conscious devotion to the actual details. Some of the Hasidic masters even discouraged the study of the kabbalah precisely because *devequt* is an exercise of pure devotion, not a matter of studying difficult texts. This is why there are so few references in the Hasidic texts to such topics as the combinations of the divine names and the associations among the *sefirot* and *parzufim*.

The Lurianic *kawwanot* are explicitly rejected by the chief disciple of Elimelekh of Lizensk, Kalonymos Kalman Epstein of Cracow (d. 1823), in his work *Ma'or Vashemesh*, a work studied extensively by the Hasidim and hence as authoritative as can be in a literature that is more impressionistic than systematic, more personal than official. Kalonymos Kalman's statement reads:

‘In our generation it is improper to have

in mind the *kawwanot* of prayer handed down to us in the Prayer Book of the *Ari*, of blessed memory, whether from the written text or by heart. So did I hear it from my master and teacher, the holy rabbi, the godly man, head of all the Exile, our teacher Elimelekh, may the memory of the righteous and holy be for a blessing. He said that one should not think or reflect on the *kawwanot* of the divine names. Instead he should bind both his external and internal self, that is, his vital force, his spirit, and his soul, to *Eyn Sof*, blessed be He. As a result he will bind all the revealed worlds and all the inner aspects of the worlds to Him, blessed be He. His thoughts should be so attached to the pleasantness of the Lord that he has no time, not even for a moment, to have the *kawwanot* in mind. When a person's prayers are of this order, the *kawwanot*

and unifications are offered automatically.’

What has happened, in effect, in Hasidism, is the continued use of the Lurianic vocabulary and a belief in its efficacy in controlling the upper worlds without any suggestion that the Lurianic intentions are still relevant. The Hasidic ideal, to which all else is made subordinate, is that of *devequt*, where the total concentration of the mind is on God. While all the Hasidic masters refer repeatedly to the reclaiming of the holy sparks, this terminology has now become virtually synonymous with the acknowledgment of the sacred in material things, the recognition that there is a vital force that keeps them in being. Humanity’s rescue of the holy sparks has now come to mean the constant awareness of the divine energy suffusing all creation.

The elevation of the sparks really amounts to the elevation of the finite universe to its source in God. Indeed, in a non-systematic way, there is a definite panentheistic thrust in most varieties of Hasidism.

Everything is in God; he is both transcendent and immanent. The rescue of the holy sparks thus comes very close to meaning that all the veils concealing God from humanity must be stripped away and only the divine glory seen in such power that the material world dissolves into nothingness.

The doctrine of the holy sparks, it can be said in summary, had its origin in the earlier kabbalah but was only developed in the Lurianic school, where it is connected with the whole process by which God emerges from concealment to become manifest in his creation. The Lurianic mystic reclaims the holy sparks from the domain of the *qelipot* by an ascetic mode of life and the performance of the precepts. All the details of the manifold rituals are directed toward these processes in the worlds on high. The mystical adept, thoroughly at home with the higher realms and their correspondences, has all this in mind when he engages in the task of elevation.

There are the sparks from Adam's soul, which he is also required to elevate in the same process. When the task of elevation is complete, when all the holy

sparks have been restored to their proper place, the Messiah will come and the world will be perfected. Among orthodox kabbalists the doctrine has continued unchanged to the present day. It found its expression, particularly among the mystics at Bet El. Sabbatianism gave a heretical turn to the doctrine. The role of the Messiah there becomes far more central and the world of *tiqqun* has been established, Sabbatai Sevi being the promised Messiah.

Even before Sabbatai's apostasy, the idea that the holy sparks may be redeemed from among the *qelipot* through a descent into their impure domain is found in Sabbatai's sinful acts, legitimized in accordance with the new theology. After Sabbatai's conversion to Islam, the idea of the 'holy sin' is given further prominence by the crypto-Sabbatians. With the rise of Hasidism the doctrine again took a new turn. In this movement, much emphasis is still placed on the need to reclaim the holy sparks, but the doctrine is now pressed into the service of the *devequt* ideal with its concomitant of serving God through engagement in the world. The rescue of the holy sparks is now

much more a personal and individualistic affair, and the role of the *zaddiq* in the process has become highly significant. The belief that the *tiqqunim* on high really take place is not abandoned, but there is no longer any need to dwell on the details. The *tiqqunim* take place automatically when the *ḥasid* is faithful to his own ideal of *devequt*. In most versions of Hasidism there is less interest in the mystical life as theosophical reflection than in direct awareness and personal experience of the divine.

The holy sparks have become almost synonymous with the recognition that all is in God. The Hasidic master Moses Teitelbaum of Ujhely (1759–1841) can say that Moses at the burning bush did not see a special bush created for the purpose. He rather saw the divine vitality which burns in every bush to keep it in being.¹⁵ This comes very close to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's words:

‘Earth’s crammed with heaven,

¹⁵Moses Teitelbaum of Ujhely, *Yismah Moshe* (Jerusalem, 1976), *noah*, vol. 1, pp. 286–29a.

And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pick blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware
More and more from the first similitude.'

Bibliography

Somewhat surprisingly there is no work devoted solely to the doctrine of the holy sparks. The doctrine is treated as part of the Lurianic scheme in Scholem, *Major Trends*, in the chapter on Isaac Luria and his school, and in Tishby. For the doctrine in Sabbatianism, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*. A number of the essays in Scholem, *Messianic Idea*, are relevant. On the doctrine in Hasidism, the chapter in Scholem, *Major Trends*, is still one of the best treatments. Jacobs, *Hasidic Thought*, contains a number of extracts, some of which are referred to in this essay, from the classical Hasidic works. The doctrine of the holy sparks in connection with the enjoyment of food is treated in Jacobs, 'Eating'.

Jacobs, Louis. 'Eating as an Act of Worship in Hasidic Thought', in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History: Festschrift A. Altmann*, 157–66. Edited by Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe. University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979.

———. *Hasidic Thought*. New York: Behrman House, 1976.

Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. 3rd edn. New York: Schocken, 1954.

———. *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*. New York: Schocken, 1971.

———. *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Tishby, I. *Torat Hara Vehakelipah Bekabalat Ha'Ari*. Jerusalem: Akademon, 1968.



The Matheson Trust

For the Study of Comparative Religion

With thanks to

The Friends of Louis Jacobs

