Popularization of the Kabbalah
Two Early Modern Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: In this presentation Boaz Huss of Ben Gurion University discusses two texts, one from the sixteenth century, and one from the eighteenth century, illustrating the popularization of the Zohar, the foundational kabbalistic text, in the early modern period. This presentation is for the following text(s):

- Minhat Yehuda
- Mitpahat Sefarim

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Introduction to Minhat Yehuda

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Notes: A commentary on Sefer Ma'rekhet ha-Elohut

R. Yehuda Hayat, an exiled Kabbalist from Spain, wrote Minhat Yehuda, a commentary to the early fourteenth century anonymous Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut, in Mantua, Italy, in the early sixteenth century. In the introduction to his commentary, R. Yehuda Hayat describes the sufferings he endured during his travels from Spain, via North Africa, to Italy, and discusses the importance of studying Kabbalah.

Hayat, who wrote his commentary at the request of the Sephardic exiles that resided in Mantua, presents in his introduction a list of recommended Kabbalistic treaties, foremost amongst them, the Zohar. The Zohar, written in Spain in the late thirteenth century and attributed to the second-century sage, R. Simon bar Yochai, gained an important place amongst Sephardic Kabbalists in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, but was almost unknown in Italy in this period. To the list of recommended books, R. Yehuda Hayat juxtaposes a list of books he rejects, which includes philosophical interpretations of the Kabbalah, as well as the writings of the thirteenth-century Sephardic Kabbalist, R. Abraham Abulfia, the founder of the prophetic school of Kabbalah.

While R. Yehuda Hayat's recommended list, including the Zohar, reflects the Sephardic Kabbalistic canon of the late fifteenth century, the books that R. Yehuda Hayat warns against represent the forms of Kabbalah which were current in Italy in this period. Hayat's emphatic - and very influential - declarations of the sanctity and authority of the Zohar served to undermine current Italian Kabbalistic trends and enhance the cultural hegemony of the Sephardic exiles.

R. Yehuda Hayat's strong declaration of the sanctity and authority of the Zohar was very influential in the sixteenth century. His commentary to Sefer Marekhet ha-Elohut was printed twice, in Ferrara and Mantua, in the same year - and probably as a preparation to - the first printings of the Zohar, in Cremona and Mantua in 1558-1560.
Minhat Yehuda
Yehuda Hayat, 1558
Translated by Boaz Huss, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

Notes: A commentary on Sefer Ma’rekhet ha-Elohut

It is written in Sefer ha-Tikkunim: "if along the road, you chance upon a birds nest` (Deut 22.6). `Fledglings`: these are Torah Scholars (Talmidei Hachamim), whose merit makes the Divine Presence (Schechina) dwell on earth. `Or eggs`: these are young students of the Torah (Tinokot shel beit Raban), whose merit makes the Divine Presence dwell with the people of Israel, and they are the masters of the Bible (Ba’alei Mikra). And while they are studying Torah or Commandment, who are the Holy One Blessed be He and the Divine Presence, they unite them as one, and inherit from them souls, that are called `Birds`. Because the masters of the Bible and the masters of the Mishna are her wings, `the mother sits over the fledgling or the on the eggs` (ibid). She sits upon them with her four wings. About them it is written `four wings` (Ezekiel 1.6). Suckling, small countenance - these are four faces each. With these the mother sits upon them, and at time, she ascends from them. Yet, `the young (Banim)` (Ibid) - from her own womb, on them it is said, `sons of love`. These are the masters of Kabbalah. On them it is written: `do not take the mother together with her young` (ibid) - the Divine Presence never forsakes them.^[1]

From here you can learn that the masters of Kabbalah have ten times the merit of the masters of the Bible and the Mishna. And even though it is impossible to comprehend all of its (i.e., the Kabbalah) depths, because the height and loftiness of its homilies, `Are not the Amanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? I could bath in them and be clean` (II Kings, 5.12). For the little perceived from its high and lofty homilies is of greater benefit than the much perceived from the lowly homilies.

How happy we are, how great is our portion that we have merited to know Sefer ha-Zohar, which our forefathers (such as R. Hai Gaon, R. Sheshet Gaon, R. Eliezer of Warms, Ramban, Rabad, Rashba and other sages) did not, although their little finger was thicker than our waist! They did not taste its honey, as it wasn’t revealed in their time. Do not be perplexed about this, because it surely was not revealed until the last generation, which we live in.
I have found a proof for that in Sefer Ha-Tikkunim: "Elijah said to R. Shimon: Rabbi Rabbi, how great is your merit! From this book of yours (i.e., the Zohar), many supreme beings will find nourishment, until it will be revealed to the lower beings, at the end of days, and through its merit `each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family` (Leviticus 25.10).[2]

It is explained here, that this book was intended to be hidden, and at that time the supreme beings, i.e., the angels, were to benefit from it, until the last generation, in which it would be revealed to the lower beings. And through the merit of those who learn and study it, the Messiah will come, for the land shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord through it, and this will be the cause for his coming, as it was written "through its merit `each of you shall return to his holding`".

You perhaps may say, that in this wisdom there are some things that are not rational, as the Divine Saint R. Shimon Bar Yochai said: `Not every mind can endure this, but only the saintly sages etc`. Even so, we must have complete faith in its words, `for this is not a trifling thing for you` (Deut. 32, 47), and if it seems a trifling, it is because of us. Thus, we must bend our heart, against our inclination, to except its words in truth with a whole heart, and to turn them into a crown on our heads. We must say: even if my heart inclines to the right or to left, I believe in whatever believed the divine saint, the candle of light, the glory of the Tanaïtes and the crown of the Sages, preferable than a prophet, R. Shimon Bar Yochai, and his comrades.

I Yehuda, son of my pious and sage father, R.Yakov Hayat, peace be on him, when I was still in Spain, tasted a small portion of honey, and my eyes have been enlightened. I have decided to look into and search this wisdom, and gathering strength, I have collected all that could have been found from this book. I have gathered a portion here and a portion there, until I had in my possession most of what can be found of it. I believe with perfect faith that this is the merit that helped me in all the predicaments that befell me during the expulsion from Spain....

After that, I arrived at the big and glorious town of Venice, through the sea, in rags. The Sephardic sages who resided there broke into tears when they saw me, and put cloths on me, may the Lord reward their deeds, in bad times may the lord keep them from harm.

If my power was the power of rocks, if my flesh was capable of suffering all these predicaments, it is surely because of the effort I have put in following this wisdom. This is what strengthened and kept me, as I have kept it, when no body else did.

From Venice I arrived to the great city of Mantua, and there I met an exiled Sephardic sage, pious and righteous in all his deeds, R. Yosef Yavetz. He, and other wise dignitaries, asked me to write a commentary on the book Ma'arechet ha-Elohut, as their heart wished `to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord to frequent His temple` (psalms 27.4). I wanted to fulfill their wish, and I did not withhold grain from them. Especially as I saw that this book is full of delights, short
but pure. This book is ten times preferable than the other books of this wisdom, because the others discuss the holy Sefirot, but they close the door. This book, on the other hand, intends to unlock the key, saying: `This is the gateway for the Lord, the righteous shall enter through it` (Psalms 118.20).

In a few places, I wished to discuss the great principals that are the special roots of the holy Kabbalah, as most Kabbalist wander unstably in them. And I have girded my loins like a man, to wage battle, sometimes against the Rabbi who wrote this book, and sometimes against his opponents, in a way that will clarify the mysteries.

I have called the name of this book "Minhat Yehuda". And even though I am not worthy to comprehend fully their ideas, and even less so to argue against them, I am like a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant. I have seen that an anonymous author who resided in this area preceded me, but I did not like most of what he wrote. In places where there was no need of explanation he opened his mouth in a measureless gape, saying un-relevant things, and in the serious and important places he kept quiet. Furthermore, he tried to explain it using the principles of Philosophy, but `this is not the road, and that is not the town` (II Kings, 6.19). Even though I will bring some of his opinions, they will be few, and in those places where I cite him, I will refer to it as `the other commentary`. Thus, his opinions will be discerned from mine.

Because I have seen in this region some Kabbalistic books who can confuse the pure mind, I would like to warn you which books you should be careful from, and which books you must hold to.

The divine sage R. Isaac Ibn Latif, who wrote the books `ha-Shamaim ve-Haolam`, `Zror ha-Mor` and Sefer `Ginzei ha-Melekh` - his words are precious than pearls, but in matters of Kabbalah, he has one leg inside, and the other outside. So, look at some of it, but do not take is as a whole. If God wills, I shall sort out his sayings, the fine wheat from the waste.

I have also seen books written by a sage called R. Abraham Abulafia. In his foolishness and pride he called himself Abraham the teacher (ha-Moreh). Since the destruction of the temple prophecy was given to fools. And the meaning of `Moreh` in these parts is `fool`, as this is the Greek word for teacher, `shatia`, as Rashi interpreted in the verse `Listen you rebels (ha-Morim)` (Deut. 20.10). Beware of him and do not heed to his words, as his books are full of imaginations and forgeries invented from his own heart. He wrote the book `Or ha-Sekhel` (the Light of the Intellect), in which he walks in darkness. He also wrote `Moreh ha-Moreh` (the Guide to the Guide), a Kabbalistic commentary to the Guide (of the perplexed). See to what extent his foolishness reached! Interpreting the words of the Guide according to his own kabbalistic inventions, which the Rambam never had in mind! He also wrote Sefer ha-Shem - a commentary on the Name of Seventy Two. He filled it with drawings of circles, to impress the reader, as he thought that with this he would improve its deficiencies. It is full of forged combinations invented from his own mind. Concerning him the Rashba wrote in his Responsa:
one of them was that scoundrel, may the name of the wicked rot, that Abraham, who in Sicily, pretended to be a prophet and the Messiah. He drew after him some Jews with his lies. If I had not closed the door on him, in Gods mercy, with many of my writings and those of the holy communities, he would have destroyed them, with his many imagined and false words, that seemed like lofty wisdom to the fool. He put his mind on them for several days, repeatedly, making himself used to it, making numerical permutations of Scriptures and the words of the Sages, combining them with some true things taken from the books of wisdom).

And as to the sage Ibn Motot - do not let your heart inline to his ways, and do not approach the door to his house. He has in his hand the rod of wickedness that subverts from the right to the twisted way.

And these are the books you should approach:

Sefer Yezira, attributed to R. Akiva may he rest in peace. Sefer Ha-Bahir attributed to R. Nehunia ben Ha-Kanah of blessed memory - make them into a crown to your head.

Sefer ha-Zohar, let it not cease from your lips, but recite it day and night.

The books of R. Joseph Ibn Gikatilia of blessed memory, and R. Shem Tov De Leon, bind them around your throat.

The secrets of Ramban, write them on the tablet of your heart.

The books of R. Menahem Recanati may he rest in peace, bind them as a sign on your hand.

Sefer Ha-Marekhet with my commentary, let them serve as a symbol between your eyes.

Than you shall succeed in your ways and become wise.

From the Lord I ask help and say, 'it is You who light my lamp; the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness' (Psalms 18.29)

Endnotes

\[1\]TZ 21b
\[3\]TZ 116a.

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Yehuda Hayat, 1558

Prepared by Boaz Huss, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

Notes: A commentary on Sefer Ma’rekhet ha-Elohut

The author, Yehuda Hayat, provides a commentary on Sefer Ma’rekhet ha-Elohut, a book of Jewish history and teachings. Hayat's commentary is written in Hebrew and provides insights into the text, offering interpretations and explanations that enhance the understanding of its content. The commentary is an important resource for scholars and students of Jewish history and literature, offering a unique perspective on the historical events and teachings discussed in theearly modern era. Hayat's approach is both scholarly and exegetical, providing a rich and detailed analysis of the text.

The commentary is divided into several sections, each focusing on a different part of the book. Hayat's commentary is characterized by its clarity and precision, making it accessible to readers with varying levels of knowledge in Jewish studies. The author's approach is rooted in the traditional Jewish scholarly tradition, but also incorporates modern insights and perspectives.

Overall, Yehuda Hayat's commentary on Sefer Ma’rekhet ha-Elohut is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in Jewish history and literature. It offers a unique and insightful perspective on the text, providing a deeper understanding of its meaning and significance.
לאחר שאר מעשה futuro והטרונה, וגו, pelo מסוימל ומוחי, ובו, והאל וגו. בה, וההנファンת והתיה וגו. "ה"ב בערב.

אוונא את תעם ביון העצמתו וגו. הפרות והקירות, ובו, והבריריה והחלביות והכונח אחד, והเยอะות של מדבריה.

ולא התחי את הנאתו של השם, ושאינו ינשוף, וה عليك שלמד, ובו, והבריריה והחלביות והכונח אחד, והزواج של מדבריה. }

וככזו קולות ומילים וגו. הפרות והקירות, ובו, והבריריה והחלביות והכונח אחד, והزواج של מדבריה.
בקולו תשמע אל מפניו המריר (י, כמדבר), והמרים נא שמעו בפסוק ל"זי רש שכתב כמו שטייא'.
לספר פי וההוא המורה哪家好עשה גם הולך ובחושך השכל אוור ספרעשה הוא מליבובדויים וזוงามו דמיונותמלאי ספריו כי מחשבתו על עשה לאאשר מליבובדויהקבלה דבריו עם המורה דבריו לפרששכלותוokusמה עד ראה הקבלה דרך על המורה כי המעיני את להבהיל בעגוליכתוב כלו עשאו ב"ע בן לשם פי וההוא שם ספרעשה וישדך אחר.
לך הנבל אותו היה מהם ואחד בתשובותו ל"זא הרשב לשון לזו והרב של הנבל אדמום מ ActivityCompatים מלאו וחסרונו ישלים בזוחשבבפניו הפתח שסגרתי ولולי ישראל מבניכמה בכזכיו ופתה בציציליאה ומשיח נביא עצמו ששם אברהם אותו ירקב רשעים שם.
לך הכונים ויהיו והכוזבים הדמיוניםaroo דבריו ברוב מכלה והיה שהתחיל מעט הקדש קהלות וכתביהרוב עם השם בחמלת ארומם והבארץ חכמים ודבריו הכתובים ולוקח他自己מרגיל Jazeera מהו בתמיד ימיםכמה עליהם דעתו ושנתן לאויל רמות רמה בידו כי ביתו פתח אל תקרב ואל ליבו אל ישט אל המטוט והחכם.ל"ע החכמה מספרילקוחים אמתים מעטים דברים: המעוקל אל הישר מדרך להטיות רשע עטרה תעשם ל"ז הקנה בן נחוניא' לרהכת המנקה להבהיר ספרה ה"ע עקיבא' לרהכת ייצוג ספרה אליהם תקרב הספריםאשר אלה אלה עלדם דליון טוב שם ר'.והרב ל"זיקעטילא ג'ן יוסף' ר הרב וספריו אליהם תקרב בהיותו משיח ברם יומם בו והגית מפיסוימוש לא הזרה וספרה: לראשך עם המ悅ת ואל הדעתם תדライフנה מנחמ' ר.הרב וספריו.לבך לוח עלכתבם ג'ן המודע וסודות.גרגרותיך יגיה אלקי הני.תראי אתה כי ואומר ההעזר אשאל ומ.תשכיל ואזדרכיך ואתה צלך ואת התקב אל发声יתו פירושי: חשכי.

Endnotes


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R. Yakov Emden, one of the foremost Jewish intellectuals and rabbinic authorities of the second half of the eighteenth century, known for his fierce battle against Sabbatianism, wrote and published Mitpahat Sefarim, in Altona, in 1769. Mitpahat Sefarim includes lengthy arguments against the antiquity and authoritative status of the Zohar. It represents Emden's response to Sabbatianism still active at the time. It is also a response to the popularization of Kabbalah in his period.

Irked by the centrality of Zohar study amongst the Sabbatianists, Emden, a Kabbalist himself, sought to challenge the authority of the Zohar by proving that the Zohar was not written by the second-century sage, R. Shimon bar Yochai. Emden argues that the Zohar is a complex composition, which, although may include some ancient texts, includes also many later additions and corruptions. He provided many historical and philological arguments that prove that the Zohar could not have been written in the Mishnaic period. Emden's critique of Zohar, which was partially based on earlier critiques against its authenticity, was the most elaborated and influential criticism against the Zohar at the time. His work was very influential: his critique of the Zohar was adopted enthusiastically by nineteenth-century Maskilim, who objected to the Kabbalah altogether, while some of his arguments were also accepted by modern academic Zohar scholarship.
Concerning the author, I have already explained well and clarified my opinion in the first part, and I will not change it. Only if someone shall prove the opposite, than I will admit the truth and accept it. For the flawed mixture that is found in the Zohar, which I have explained there, seems like a new Torah. Furthermore, I find it very difficult to account for the great visions, the assemblies of angels, and the revelations of the Shekhina, which are mentioned many times in the Zohar, especially in the Idra. In the Talmud, only three lectures (on Ma`aseh Merkava) are accounted for, no more, and only four who entered the Pardes, no more.\(^1\) If Rashbi of the Zohar is the famous Tanna, why is he not mentioned amongst the lecturers, or those who entered the Pardes? Furthermore, it is perplexing that according to the Zohar he was frequented by (deceased) souls and higher powers, while in the Talmud, at the end of the 4\(^{th}\) chapter of Me`ilah\(^2\), we have found that he complained that he was not visited by an angel even in times of distress? This may have happened before he suffered in the cave, but the other cases are difficult to account for.

I will preach then one more time to the house of Israel, even if, `indeed, I wrote down for you a threefold lore` (Proverbs 23.20). Happy are those who keep my ways, keepers of the word of the Holy One of Israel, who guard His covenant, who approach its gates early each day, to seek the word of the Lord, to know and observe all of the Lords commandments, to guard His precepts and laws, and to walk in His ways. These are the mighty creatures that do His bidding, ever obedient to His bidding, who remember to observe His precepts. Most important is not the homily, but the deed, as the wisest of all men said in the conclusion of his book: `the sum of the matter, when all is said and done: reserve God and observe His commandments! For this applies to all mankind` (Eccl.12.13).

I have already brought charges against those who study mainly the Zohar and throw behind their back the study of the commandments and the proper way to observe them. As I have written with Gods help in `Mishneh Lehem`, do not obey and do not submit to them. Even though it is written in the Tikkunim that with this compilation they shall exit from the exile, and through its merit you shall proclaim release.\(^3\) Such sayings have diverted the Sons of
Israel from worship. They leave aside the books of the Talmud and all the books of Law and precepts, and do not worry about the proper conduct. They are interested only in Sefer ha-Zohar, nothing else. Verily, they delay the end of days. Many obstacles have come out of this, for our many sins, and it brought forth life of licentiousness and immorality. This strengthens the new and accursed sect of Shabtai Zvi (may the name of the wicked rot) who impels the end of days and incites my enemies to flung abuse at His anointed at every step. Woe to the generation that such had occurred in its time, as through that heresy spreads in the world.

We have already shown to those with open eyes, that the author of the book `Raya Mehemna`, should not be relied upon, as he wrote this only to recommend his merchandise. Yet, he surely did not mean to abolish the study of the fulfillment of the practical precepts, and to disturb the people form their deeds, God forbid....

Sefer Ha-Zohar is the holy of holies, and Sefer Raya and the Tikkunim likewise. Yet, the first is prior in time and in its worth - it was written in the times of the Geonim, whilst the author of the last was a Sephardic author. I have proved this with clear evidence, especially showing that he used the language of Sephardic authors. And even if a sage is preferable than a prophet, two prophets do not prophesize in the same tongue. Indeed, angels sent from above, and holy souls, accompanied the authors of these books of secrets, and aided them with this godly task, as it is mentioned at the beginning of the chapters of ha-Tikkunim. And it is agreed upon that this happened many times, to the great ones of their generation, even in exile, especially to the ancient ones. Thus wrote Rabad in his commentary to Sefer Yezira, at the end of the `Fifty Gates of Wisdom`: `The beauty (!) of the ancient sages who behaved according to the true Kabbalah, as we have found thirty two wondrous paths of wisdom that that sages of the Mishna have received etc, and as the teachers of the fathers were well known angles, which were sent from the Holy King (may His people be elevated), in order to teach and educate them in the paths of the ancient wisdom`, etc.[4] He continued to mention, at length, the names of each one of the angels that were sent to Adam, the fathers, Joseph the just, Moses our Rabbi, and Elijah of blessed memory. We have also found in Sefer Ha-Zohar, on the verse `This is the record of` (fol. 55b) and in other places. The Tannaim, Amoraim and Geonim were also frequented by Elijah, and the books Kana and Peliah, the works of a blessed sage, were written with the private divine assistance of divine messengers. Also in the last generations some sages were evidently known for that, such as the Rabbi Beit Yosef, who had a spiritual Magid, a well-known fact that cannot be denied. Likewise, the confirmation of the words of prophet from Avila in the days of the Rashba, which the Rashba himself, although it was difficult for him to believe, strongly confirmed.

However, it seems evident that the Holy Spirit shined also in the author of Raya Mehemna, whoever he may be. Because he was a great visionary, who envisioned with great resemblance the character of the ugly, defective, abominable Shabtai Zvi (and his sect, which he called `Erev Rav`), whose signs and descriptions are that of the distress of Sheol and Abaddon, four hundred years before he came into being. We have copied its words in
'Mizbeah Gadol'; you can find them well explicated there. This is indeed an evident wonder, real words of prophecy. He also informed of the heretical sects that are spreading in the world, of the impudent and barefaced rich people of our generation, of the officers of Sodom who boast over the poor people, those who govern Israel at the end of days, who despise them, and of the power of the oppressors who drive the people, and of their conduct with the Torah scholars (Talmidei Hachamim). From the beginning the author of the Raya Mehemna said thus, extensively, in several ways. His words are faithful and correct.

Yet, the fact that there are errors in Sefer ha-Zohar, as well as in the Raya Mehemna and the Tikunim, is not surprising. They have passed through the hand of authors, who copied them from vessel to vessel, and added to them things born out of their imperfection, making their own signs into supreme ones. Because of that they are deficient (as the author of Sharsheret ha-Kabbalah wrote, if the whole Zohar was to be found, it would weight as much as a camel load), as well as containing false editions, be they good and excellent, or be they false waste (and refuse as I have said in front of sages), covered with clay. We have shown this and gave examples of it, and even if they were said by a spirit or a Magid, one should not heed them. As the Ari said, in some cases the Magid lied to the Rabbi Beit Yosef, even though he was a holy angel. And he explained in Sefer ha-Gilgulim for what reasons such mistakes and errors happen in the words of a divine Magid. And this is not strange for us, because we have found such a case in our holy Talmud, the firm pillar that all the house of Israel relies on. The supreme saints, the Tannaim, have heard a divine voice (Bat Kol), in the holy land. And in that generation of knowledge of the first Tannaim, who were close to prophecy (even though they have learned from scripture that a divine voice may be used), they did not take heed, and did not stray because of it from the way of the Torah even a small bit. And R. Yehoshua debated against the divine voice and said: it is not in heaven, as the Toarh was already given in Sinai, and in it is written ‘You shall divert after the many’ (Exodus 23, 2), and we hold that we do not heed to a divine voice.[5] How much more so in the last generation, on impure land, we do not heed a Magid, a spirit or and angel to annul even one world of the Torah, God forbid, for ‘the word of our God is always fulfilled’ (Isaiah 40, 8), ‘He issued His commands to Jacob, His statutes and rules to Israel’ (Psalms 147, 19), ‘Sworn are the rods of the word selah’ (Habakkuk 3, 9). Thus, I say to my soul, even if you incline to the right or to the left, do not stray to the right or to the left from the words of the Torah that God commanded his servant Moses, and do not deviate from anything that the real teachers of the Torah teach you, those who follow the law of the Lord, who have done no wrong, who stand in the breach and wish for the repair of the Golah, the scattered sheep, lame and expelled, and guard it from evil and meanness, and from every obstacle and impediment. ‘Your word is exceedingly pure, and Your servant loves it’ (Psalms 119, 140), ‘Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies they always stand by me’ (Psalms, 119, 98), ‘Blessed is the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity, Amen and Amen’ (Psalms 41, 14), ‘Sing forth, O you righteous, to the Lord; it is fit that the upright acclaim Him’ (Psalms 33, 1), ‘For the guardian of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted’ (Psalms 47, 10).
The Israelite person, who is faithful to his God, must know, than, that there is no obligation to believe in everything that is found in the printed version of the Zohar, nor in everything that is found in writings and manuscripts in the name of the Ari. The Ari himself, of blessed memory, said in the hour of his passing away, that even his renowned disciple R. Hayyim Vital of blessed memory did not truly know and wholly understand even one principal of the secrets of the Torah, but only a small portion, as it is written in Nagid u-Mezaveh (and also, R. Menahem de Lonzano in his book `Omer Man` criticized the Ari). What, than, should small foxes say, that are not proficient even in the holy language, and do not know the Aramaic language, but aspire to study on their own, or from an unfit teacher, the books of the Kabbalah.

Much more so after it became clear that bad weeds have grown in the lovely fruit Sefer ha-Zohar. These need weeding, as they are not compatible with our ancient true Kabbalah. But not everyone is proficient in the Torah, for its own sake, so that they will have assistance from heaven to remove all the slag of dross from the refined writings, the straw and chaff from the wheat, the grain from the waste, the lees from the preserved wine, the lumps from the clear oil of beaten olives for lightening.

Thus my son, guard yourself and be careful, take heed of my warning, do not lie in your heart to say, I shall investigate much, and will not stray at all from the way. Look well into Nahmanides introduction to his Torah commentary. The gist of the matter is whether my heart inclines right to the words of the Kabbalists, or inclines left to the external books, to the wise and their riddles, do not study what is inexplicable for you, do not investigate what is hidden from you, and do not rely on your own understanding. Do not be wise in your own eyes, like the Bedershi, at the end of Sefer `Behinat ha-Olam`[6], nor let your heart be quick to bring forth speech before God, like the author of `Nishmat Hayyim` at the end of his book.[7] But, believe in what your forefathers believed in (`Ask your father he will inform you` [Deut. 32,7], `Ask the generation past` [Job 8,8]) and your Rabbis, the authors of the Mishna, that was written and compiled by our holy Rabbi, the disciple of the true Tanna Rashbi, the disciple of R. Akiva, the disciple of R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua, the disciples of R. Yohanan ben Zacai, the disciple of Hillel the elder, who received from the couples, who received from the prophets and elders, until Moses from Sinai. And from the words of the Talmud that the Tannaim and Amoraim have founded do not let your feet stray, and do not deviate from the verdict that they announce to you either to the right or to the left. Know that if one attempts to annul an impediment in their decrees he is seeking after evil, `today he says do thus` etc.[8] We have learned from experience that everyone who at the beginning was lenient with the decrees of Hazal, at the end attempted to change the law.

**Endnotes**


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Yakov Emden, 1769

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של רשב", 'א"ל צומצם ט"נ שלוש תשדד הדבר בעיינו, תקע ובמסורות 흉וק (ט"א ה"ק שלון).

"א"ל צומצם ע"כ שלוש תשדד הדבר בעיינו, תקע ובמסורות 흉וק (ט"א ה"ק שלון).

במג våter המגיד זכר לאר

'א"ל צומצם ע"כ שלוש תשדד הדבר בעיינו, תקע ובמסורות 흉וק (ט"א ה"ק שלון).
חсим, פיקת הקפה[10], אלא האמנם בנה שואת הארץ אבותינו (שלא בך וצדיך וגו'; [אברים ל' ז] שלא נא לחרר ראשנו וגו'. [אובד ת' חו') וברכות, ביבי המשנה שדרה והברה רבתי הכהור, תלמודי של ראש', התנאים הקדומים, תלמודי של ר' עקיבא, תלמודי ר' א"ז, תלמודי בר' חלום של רחל הכהור, שלחן וגו'. דסבלן במתנה ומקומינו דע משה מתנים, ורסיבי התלמוד אשר רוד נאמנים ופרימורים, אל חסנינו ולא ישרו כאל חסנינו ולא ישרו, אשר יביאו וכל חסנינו ורגלי קדושה וגו'. ונסיר רמאיו והחורש של תלמידו, ומשה וarResult אלה חסנינו ולא ישרו, אשר יביאו וכל חסנינו ורגלי קדושה וגו'.

Endnotes


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