

GRADUATION THESIS

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Never was I more surprised at the Jewish people's love of knowledge than at the moment when I began to write this book. I started out with the intention to write on the subject of the Jewish people's love of knowledge. I was actually familiar with the subject matter, my problem was how to write it in a way that would be interesting to the reader.

To preserve the unity of the book I have tried to concentrate the material of the book into as few chapters as possible. A rapid survey of the chapters may be in place here. In the introductory chapter, I have aimed at an approach to the subject. The problem of authorship presented no easy task. One cannot be too cautious in dealing with Jewish history, and I have. Apart from the question of authorship, the discussion of the principle of Jewish law is a subject which is of great importance to the Jewish people. In that chapter my purpose is to show that the Jewish people's love of knowledge is not only a historical fact but also a living reality. The first part of the book is devoted to the history of the Jewish people's love of knowledge. In the second part, Jewish

## FOREWORD

Never was I more convinced of the Talmudic principle ~~נשקף על פניו כחול~~ than at the moment when I began to sift my material for this thesis. I started out with the ambition to write on Shir Ha-shirim in Kabballa. When I actually familiarized myself with the subject matter, my problem was how to cope with some Kabballa in Shir Ha-shirim.

To preserve the unity of the Comm. I have tried to concentrate the material of the book into as few chapters as possible. A rapid survey of the chapters may be in place here. In the introductory chapter, I have aimed at an approach to the subject. The problem of authorship presented no easy task. One cannot be too cautious in dealing with obscure historical data.. Apart from the question of authorship, the discussion of the principle of creatio ex nihilo within that chapter may prove of value in itself. Analysis of the Commentary may be considered the leading chapter of the thesis. The first part is what it is - a keynote to the Commentary. In the sketch of Jewish



## II

history I have tried to give a synopsis of the Commentary proper. A literal translation of the text proved impossible. The best I could do under the circumstances, was to recast it in my own words, following the meaning of the text as closely as possible. In Principles and Sources I have tried to elucidate the most important Kabbalistic principles interwoven within the Commentary, and to combine them into some sort of a mental picture. In order not to interrupt the sketch proper, I have relegated the tracing of the interpretations to the footnotes. The last chapter - well, let it stand as מקור לזכרון. One thing I must explain, and may it be taken as an apology. The discussion of the Taryag Mizvoth in relation to the ten commandments forming as it does, a separate book within the Commentary, is in itself a comprehensive subject for a thesis. (in the light of the historical controversy over the fixity of that number). The best I could do was to outline the general approach to the subject and embody some Kabbalistic principles within the treatise, into the discussion of the principles. By no means do I consider this thesis a complete piece of work. At best, it comprises some organized material which may prove very helpful

### III

should I desire to continue on the subject as I originally conceived it, namely, Shir Ha-shirim in the Kabbala. For the present I feel that I have plunged into the very heart of the general subject of the Kabbala, a subject which I have cherished and worshipped since my early youth.

And now to my tale of woe. Those who will only look into the subject will realize the numerous difficulties with which I have been confronted, difficulties entirely beyond my control. First, the corrupt text. I am not speaking merely of poor print, erroneous pagination<sup>1</sup> etc. These are trivial matters. The whole book is full of mistakes which render certain passages unintelligible.<sup>2</sup> Another difficulty, common

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1) The right order of the introductory pages can easily be followed by the marginal word at the end of each page which serves as a guide to the material which should follow. The pages between י' and כ' are also incorrectly numbered. The last ט' should be כ'.

2) The author of \_\_\_\_\_ under Moses ben Nachman, states that even the MS. which went to print was full of mistakes. והכל אשר מקנה נעתק בדפוס היתה מלאה שגיאות. The printer most likely added to it a נוסף משלו, thus giving



#### IV

to the larger part of the earlier Kabbalistic literature, is the anonymous character in which quoted material is transmitted.<sup>3</sup> The most serious obstacle in our Commentary arises from the incorporated glosses ( גלוסות ) by Rabbi Mordecai and Rabbi Michael of Berlin. The glosses often merge with the text so that it is quite difficult at times to distinguish between the author's own matter and that which belongs to the interpolations.

In concluding, I wish to express my profound indebtedness to Dr. David Neumark. Were it not for his

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to the book the appearance of an ancient Genizah fragment. Yellinek (p. 35, f.n. 16, Vol. II) pleads for a revised edition of the book because of its great importance to the history of Kabbala.

3) Yellinek (p. 43, f.n. 2, Vol. I) attributes it to the fact that no typography as yet existed, and authors for their own as well as for the reader's convenience, made excerpts of certain books without mentioning the source ( since the books quoted from were inaccessible to the general public ).

excellent chapter on the Kabbala in his Toldoth Ha-philosophia Be-yisroel, I could hardly grapple with the subject. It is with deep gratitude that I mention here, Professor Samuel S. Cohon. I have always found him willing and eager to help and advise. I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Jacob Mann. Not only was he generous with his knowledge, but also with his private library of which I made extensive use.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. The Kabbala

It is extremely difficult to entertain a balanced attitude toward the Kabbala. To a certain extent it must be the nature of the subject, emotional, fantastic, that calls forth either enthusiastic adherence or embittered opposition. Thus we find scholars extremely divided in their opinions on the subject. Graetz, for instance, simply foams with rage whenever he speaks of the "New Science", a satirical parody on the חכמה נסתרת, the hidden wisdom, or חכמת חסד as the Kabbala is called.

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4) Graetz has been severely criticized by scholars for his unsympathetic treatment of the whole trend of mystic thought in Judaism. (p. 68-f.n. ) though fully aware of the unkind attitude of the master, still tries to mitigate the harshness of tone and mode of presentation by pointing out that Graetz' standard of judgment is based on consequences rather than motives. Needless to say, this is a poor apology. Before the chair of history as before the chair of justice, motives should and must be taken into consideration. Graetz is prejudiced. וכיון שבא לידי כעס בא לידי טעות. Perhaps unconsciously he tries to trace the



Horodezki, on the other hand, waxes <sup>so</sup> eloquent on the subject of Kabbala that he actually draws a parallel between

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Kabbala to a late origin so as to depreciate its significance. His distinction between the ~~beginning~~ of the Geonic period and the Kabbala of the twelfth century is quite arbitrary and artificial. It is indeed hard to see the grounds on which he bases his statement that these two have no relation whatever (see p. 336- ~~337~~). One must actually close his eyes not to see that these mystic threads which run through the Talmud and the Midrash, are the very stuff out of which the whole fabric of later Kabbala is woven. It is unwise to speak of one man as the sole founder of the Kabbala (Graetz thinks that it was Rabbi Isaac the Blind). For the Kabbala did not spring full-grown out of the forehead of one individual. The twelfth century witnessed not its beginning, but its continuation. Whether we should look to Chaldea or Persia for its origin is quite another problem, as no one will deny that outside influences played an important role in directing the Gedankengang of the entire Kabbalistic system. The fact remains, however, that to trace its inner gradual development into a complete worldpict-

it and the "Torah M'Sinai", showing the surpassing qualities of the former.

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 ure of its own, we must go back to Jewish sources out of which it sprang forth like a living stream, interrupted at parts, but never dammed. Dr. Neumark, it should be emphasized, succeeded in presenting a critical interpretation of the Kabbala from the standpoint of its inner development. Because of his keen ingenuity, he might have carried the two principles of מקור מן התורה and מקור מן המסורה a little too far, especially as regards biblical sources. The fact, however, that he traces both philosophy and Kabbala to one common origin within Jewish life and literature, is enough to overthrow Graetz' vague conjectures. (Dr. Kohler traces fundamental Kabbalistic principles in Apocalyptic literature) As to what were the immediate causes that revived the Kabbala in the twelfth century, we cannot say with absolute definitiveness. The reaction against the rationalism of Maimonides no doubt had a great deal to do with it. But again it will be drastic to assume with Graetz that this is the main and only cause.

5) See his introduction to Hachassidus veHachassidim p.XIII.



If we are to appreciate the vast field of Kabbalistic literature, we must approach it critically and sanely from the artistic standpoint. That spirit which emanated the "Yiddishe Wissenshaft" movement, should also urge us to delve into the ocean of Kabbalistic literature so as to bring up the precious gems which lie at its bottom. For in the last analysis, Kabbala is religious poetry, fervent, inspired religious poetry. Kabbala may be defined as an incessant yearning to see the face of God and live. With Moses all Kabbalists, all mystics plead out of the depths of their souls: ה' אלהי נא ארומנה Show me, I pray Thee, Thy face. And as in the case of Moses, the reply comes in an anthropomorphic garb. In their intense desire to fathom the הסוד, the hidden in the revealed, they have constructed a whole hierarchy of mediums: Sephiroth, Hacholoth, Zinoroth. Frequently they become aware of the entanglement, and attempt to return to the abstract and the formless. But in vain. The more intense

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6) ה' אלהי נא ארומנה as the Septuagint has it instead of ה' אלהי נא ארומנה.

7) In the Zohar many passages occur which warn against all sorts of anthropomorphic conceptions of God. A striking example of such a warning is found in the Midrash (Gen.R. 26:8) "Rabbi Simon ben Yochai used to curse the one who would translate 'בני אלהים' as 'Sons of God'".

the desire for abstract spirituality, the more enwrapped they become in the cloak of poetic metaphor. And yet, even the concrete and the tangible are permeated with the fragrance of the spiritual. Horodezki aptly calls Kabbalistic anthropomorphism "גחלת שנתנוסה", embodied spirituality. The סולם הקבלה even like Jacob's ladder, stands on the ground and its summit reaches the very heavens, out of which spiritual nourishment (נאמה) is drawn and carried through hidden channels to a world thirsty for light and God.

## 2. Shir Hashirim

The Song of Songs is the book of books for Kabbala. Graetz calls it a "mine for Kabbala". Neumark deems it the "original source for Kabbala". The oldest interpretation of the Song of Songs is allegorical. The original tendency to read the song as an allegory, came most likely from Jewish sources. In the Midrashim the Song is turned into a blooming romance between God and the Kneseth Israel. From there the idea passed to the Church. In their zeal to show the intimate and inseparable relation of Jesus to the Church, and in the desire of the more philosophical among them to point out the relation of God



to the individual soul, the fathers of the Church surpassed even the Jews in that particular mode of imaginative thought. To prove this point would mean to enter into the history of the Church, which the scope of this work does not permit. One striking example will serve as a good illustration. St. Bernard of Clairvoux wrote<sup>8</sup> eighty sermons on the first two chapters of Canticles.

To show that the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs came down as an ancient tradition, we shall turn immediately to the historically significant statement of Akiba. It was toward the end of the third century C. E. that the question of the Canonicity of the Songs of Songs came up for discussion before the Synod at Jamnia. Akiba's defense of the sacredness of the book is most interesting. אמר ר' עקיבא : חס ושלום לא נחלק

אדם מישראל על שיר השירים שלא תטמא את אידים שאין כל העולם כלו כדאי  
 כיום שניתן בו שיר השירים לישראל אבל חכמים קדש ושיר השירים קדש  
 קדשים. "No Israelite has ever doubted that

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8) Of the historical aspect of the Song of Songs, especially in its relation to the Church, the introduction to the Song of Solomon in the Cambridge Bible, offers a clear and succinct account.

the Song of Songs defiles the hands (i.e., is inspired and canonical), for the whole world is not as important as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. All the Kethubim are holy, but the Song of Songs is holiest of the holy. (Mishnah Yodayim III 5) Akiba's extravagant praise of the Song of Songs must have rested on the basis of the allegorical interpretation then already known.<sup>9</sup>

To what extent this mystical interpretation has lent dignity and reverence to that beautiful love song, can be seen from the following Talmudic passage:

ת"ר חקורא פסוק של ציר תצאית ויעזב אותו כמין זמר. וחקורא פסוק ברות משתתות בלי זמנו. מביא רעה לעולם מפני שהתורה חוננת את ויעקדת לפני הקב"ה ואמרה לפניו: רבש"ע, שאנוי בידך ככבוד שמקנהנין בו לזים.

One who reads a verse of Canticles in the tune of a secular song,<sup>10</sup> or one who reads any verse of scriptures in a public

9) Dr. Mosensohn's comment (as has been conveyed to me orally by one of his disciples) that it was the romantic Akiba who could appreciate the sacredness of love, is only a fine homily, but can really not be taken seriously at all.

10) This is the correct translation according to Rashi.

חקורא בנביא אברהם שאינו נקרא בה

banquet hall, inopportunately, brings evil to the world.

For the Torah then girds itself in a sack, and presenting itself before God, says: "Thy children have made me like a harp upon which jesters play". (Sanhed. 101-a )

It is surprising indeed, how rapidly this allegorical interpretation sank into the consciousness of the Jews. "It is significant", says Professor Cohon, "that the Song of Songs, the finest love poem in literature, was deprived of its human import and turned into a sacred song, telling of God's mystic love for Israel. The preachers of the Midrash never wearied of explaining every relation between God and Israel in the light of the Song of Songs. The Paytanim, too, attuned their harps to its melody."<sup>12</sup> Psychologically, it is quite easy to see

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11) This seems to be the meaning here. In Tosef. Sanhed. ch. 12:10, Rabbi Akiba makes this, too, refer only to the Song of Songs, and pronounces an anathema upon anyone who sings a verse of Canticles in a secular tune at a public banquet hall. ל עקובא אומקא חמנעקע קולו בייז חצירות בביית חמשתא

. וענא אומי כמין זמר אין לו חלק לעולם הזה. In Aboth d'R. Nathan, chap. 36, a similar passage occurs in the name of Rabbi Jochanan ben Nuri, but the words בביית חמשתא are omitted. The Zohar (Trumah p. 104 ) emphasizes the condition of the public



why this mystic rendering of the love poem made such rapid headway. The whole poem is permeated with youth and passion. The pulse of life beats out of every line. Turned into a sacred romance, it becomes a lyric outburst of religious fervor and enthusiasm. Then, too, did not the prophets of Israel speak of a wedlock bond existing between God and Israel? Did not Jeremiah speak in words of endearment, of the romantic period in the desert when Israel, innocent and faithful, followed God "in a land that was not sown"<sup>13</sup>?

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banquet hall but omits the words "singing in a secular tune". כל מאן דאפיק בסוקא דאח"כ ואמר ליה רבי משתא. אורייתא איהו חגירת אק וסלק לגבי חקב"ה. ואמר קמיה : עבדו לי בניך מחוק רבי משתא.

12) "Love Human and Divine"-pg. 33, f.n. 153- Professor Cohon calls the Midrash to the Song of Songs "a veritable storehouse of mystic love".

13) Cf. Hosea, Chapt. I-III; Is. LXII -5; Jer. II-2. Ibn Ezra in the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs says:

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ועל-תתקן בעבור שהמשל נוסח ישראל לכלה שכן דין חובות.



The fact that Shir Hashirim is read on Passover and on Friday evening, is indicative of the deeply rooted belief in the sacredness of the poem. The reading of Shir Hashirim on Passover is connected with verse 9, Chapter I, where Pharoah's chariots are mentioned. For the whole song is taken as a sketch of Jewish history, starting from Egypt, and going through all the other periods of exile up to the Messianic Era. (This will be fully discussed in the Introduction to Analysis of Commentary)

With the reading of Canticles on Friday evening, another reason is connected which is one of the fundamental factors in Kabbala, that of סוד הנזיר, the mystery of the sexes. The Sabbath, it will be remembered, is spoken of in the Midrash as the bride of Israel.<sup>14</sup> The union of the Sabbath with Israel, symbolically hints at the higher union of Israel with God. The Sabbath is a sort of medium through which God and Israel become united in

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14) Yal. Sh. Gen. 216. — אמרה שבת לפני הקב"ה - רבש"ע - לכל יום בן  
יום ולי אין בן זוג. א"ל הקב"ה: ישמעל יהיה בן זוגך וכו'.

bond's of devotion. Hence, the reading of Canticles<sup>15</sup> which sings of earthly-heavenly union.

15) Cf. Prayer

„כְּמוֹנָה דְּאִינוֹן מְתִיחִין לְעֵילָא בְּאַחַד. אִין חֲכִי אִתִּי אֲתִיחֶחֶת

לְתַתָּא בְּרִנָּה דְּאַחַד

(See N. p. 239)

Dr. Kohler in his article "Cabala" (J.E.) says: "It was the ancient Cabala which, while allegorizing the Song of Songs, spoke of Adam Kadmon, or 'the God-man', of the 'bride of God', and hence of the mystery of the union of powers in God, before Philo, Paul, the Christian Gnostics, and the Medieval Cabala did".

### 3. The Author's View of the Kabbala

The author of our Commentary has four introductions. The first which is in the nature of a general foreword, touches upon Kabbala in general, and on Shir Hashirim in particular. The latter is taken up again in Introductions I and II, while III deals exclusively with Kabbalistic principles which we leave for later. We will try to give here, first, a synopsis of the author's view of the Kabbala, and then of his attitude towards Shir Hashirim. If the Song of Songs is a history of Israel, Kabbala is a history of the world, with Israel at its center. The unfolding of history is viewed by the author in relation to the gradually increasing and ripening realization, recognition, and consciousness of God, through and in the lives of singular individuals - the makers of history.

Adam. In the creation of Adam and Eve, an intimate affiliation between the human and the divine was aimed at. Adam sinned, and a spirit of contamination passed through the world and clung to all their descendants. (This is spoken of in the Kabbala as the um b'w' adam, the germ of poison from the serpent transmitted from Adam to all generations. Cf. Esd. III-21, Wisdom Chap. II-24, Yeb. 103-b, in the name of R. Jochanan.) When he repented, he gave birth to Seth, and Seth to Enos, and Enos to Enoch "who walked with God", that is, who strove to know and realize

God.

Ten generations rolled by. Then Noah appeared. He, too, recognized God and therefore found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Of his three sons, Shem was chosen, for he was the first to worship God in truth and faith.

Another cycle of ten generations elapsed and Abraham appeared. His comprehension of the Godhead was deeper and profounder than that of his predecessors. Urged by his convictions he began to proclaim the one God throughout the world (Gen. chap. 12:8, 21:33). The attribute of mercy was his. Isaac followed in the way of his father and he, too, called upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 26:25). He partook of the attribute of justice. In Jacob, the image of God, imprinted upon the throne of glory, found reflection. His attribute was truth and peace - the fusion of justice and mercy.<sup>16</sup> The patriarchs as well as some of their predecessors, practised all the

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16) The idea of having the patriarchs embody certain attributes is not new with the author of the commentary. It occurs in Masecheth Aziluth, chapter 14, in relation to the sefiroth. For a fuller discussion, see page 92.



mitzvot, statutes and ordinances of the Torah (even the oral law), which they anticipated through their profound knowledge of God.<sup>17</sup>

With Moses, the eagerness to know God grew most intense. To him was revealed the answer to the question: "מִי שֵׁם", What is the name of the God you speak of, and how is that name connected with the primal cause of being? He was the first to comprehend the secret hidden in the three Names consisting of twelve letters.<sup>18</sup> Then followed the giving of the Torah when all Israel saw the glory of the Shechinah, each one according to his mental power and moral perfection.<sup>19</sup> Out of the flame

17) The idea that the patriarchs practised the Law, is Talmudic. Gen. 26:5 is the basis for this idea in Umas 28-b. Cf. Baal Haturim on same verse.

עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי שֵׁם אֲבוֹתָם בְּגֵ'ם קִיּוּם אֶף עִירוֹתֵי תְּשׁוּבָתָם.  
See Ramban : יִצְחָק מִשְׁמַחֲתָם... וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ הַפִּשּׁוּט תֵּאֱמַר שִׁיחַ מִשְׁמַחֲתָם

אֲמִנִּיתִי הָאֱלֹהִים. Cf. Gen. 32:5

עַם לִבְנֵי גֵרִי וְתַכִּיף מִצְוֹת שְׂמֵחֵי (גֵרִי בְּגֵ'ם תְּרִיג'... רַעֲיִי)

See also Bahir 1-6 אֲבוֹתָם בְּגֵ'ם רַמָּה

18) This refers most likely to אֱלֹהִים - יְהוָה - אֱלֹהִים Cf. Zohar-Ex. p. 58 -a.

19) Yal. Shim. on Psalm 29-4 קוֹל יְהוָה בִּכְחַשׁ שֶׁל כָּל אֱלֹהִים

the mighty voice resounded in seventy echoes, symbolizing the seventy aspects in which the Torah may be interpreted.

Then the chain of oral transmission began. Moses transmitted it ( the knowledge of the Ineffable Name ) to Joshua, Joshua to the Elders, the Elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly : Daniel, Chananya, Mishael, Azarya, Mordecai, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Simon the Just. The knowledge then was imparted to the

20) והפנים מתהפכים ומשתנים מכל צד לשמא ולטקוק, לאסור ולמותר, לבטול

ולכשר, אמתא לעומתא. וכו' ה"ח מובן שמאצת חשדן נסחבתו.

Referring to the " תלמיד יתיב " (Rabbi Meyer ?) who could conjure up one hundred fifty reasons to make the eating of a reptile allowable. Cf. Erub. 13b.

21) Cf. Yal. Shim. 28, on Deut. 5:19 קול גדול ולא יסוק

(תרגום - ולא יסוק). According to the Midrash, the voice was divided first, into seven voices, then again into seventy, symbolizing the seventy nations. See later page 94.

22) Cf. Targum to Canticles 7:3. Now for a long season Israel was without the true God... and without law. "Without the true God" he takes to mean without the true knowledge of God; "without law" - without the true interpretation of the Law.

authors of the Mishnah. Thus we learn that Rabbi Jehudah<sup>23</sup> Hanasi before his death, conveyed it to his son, Simon; that Rabbi Akiba and his colleagues entered the mystic Pardes; and that Eleazer ben Arach and R. Jochanan ben Zakkai expounded the teachings regarding the heavenly<sup>24</sup> chariot.

But since the destruction of the Temple, under the pressure of recurring persecutions, this wisdom dwindled,<sup>25</sup> resulting in a great loss for the Torah. Not only is the Torah misunderstood, but also the oral law, since people take all things literally and hardly realize the meaning hidden in the figures of speech. Thus commentators arose who turned the Holy Scriptures into secular matter, adding to it, subtracting from it, arbitrarily

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23) Kethuboth 103-B. "מסר לו סודו חכמה"

24) Haggigah 14 B. "רש': עליו למקיע ע"י שם. תוספת: "ולא עליו למעלה ממקש אלא היה נראה להם כמקש עליו..."

25) The author refers here to II Chr. 15:3: Now for a long season Israel was without the true God... and without the law. "Without the true God" he takes to mean without the true knowledge of God; "without law" - without the true interpretation of the Law.



and artificially, according to their hearts' desire. To them the prophetic reproach might well apply: "Ye pervert the words of the living God."<sup>26</sup> (Jer. 23:36)

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26) No important Kabbalistic principles are contained in this introduction. It is based mostly on Talmudic and Midrashic sources, the majority of which we have traced in the foot-notes. From the standpoint of attitude, however, the emphasis laid on the mystical over the rational interpretation of the Torah, is both interesting and important. For a full discussion of the polemic against Ibn Ezra, see page 28.



## 4. The Author's Attitude Toward

## The Song of Songs (That is to say,

It is this rational approach to the Bible that gave the impulse to the author to write his Commentary on the Song of Songs. Three possible modes of approach to the poem exist, says the author. Some deem it a mere sensuous love poem. Such a view is sacrilegious and destructive, and is hardly worthy of consideration.<sup>27</sup> The second type of interpretation is allegorical in character. It conceives the poem as a romance between God and Israel, but it likens the love of God for his people to the love of a man for his wife, or a lover for his beloved. No criticism is offered against this attitude but the silence bespeaks dissatisfaction on the part of the author. The true interpretation is that based on Akiba's conception

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27) Were it so, the author argues, the Song of Songs would never have been taken into the Canon. The truth of the matter is that first the book was entered into the Canon for reasons indefinite (perhaps because it was attributed to Solomon), and then it was retained there on the basis of the allegorical interpretation.

of Shir Hashirim as Kodesh Kodoshim. (That is to say, the love of God is spoken of in human terms but has nothing in common with human love.)<sup>28</sup> This attitude belongs to those "who deserve to welcome the Shechinah", for they alone understand the living word of God.<sup>29</sup>

28) Ibn Ezra in the introduction to his three-fold Commentary on the Song of Songs, hints at these three possible attitudes. Our author in mentioning these three types of approach, most likely refers to Ibn Ezra.

29) This completes the general foreword of the author. The three following brief introductions will be considered in the chapter on Analysis.

30) The view held by the author of the *Sefer Hashirim* that the *Shema* is the *Shema* of *Shema* is historically incorrect. See later page 31.

## CHAPTER II

## AUTHORSHIP

Our Commentary to the Song of Songs is not the only Kabbalistic book whose authorship is obscure. A cloud of mystery hangs over the entire Kabbalistic literature. The actual authors of such books have had one primary aim in mind: to lend dignity and authority to their words. Hence, the device *לפי פה אבותינו*, to let the gray past echo their voices.

The Commentary in question is not as enshrouded in mystery as is the Sefer Yeziroh or the Sefer Habahir. Yet its authorship presents a problem, and a difficult problem at that. The book is attributed to Nachmanides. Modern scholars such as Yellinek, Graetz, Neumark, L. Ginsberg, and others, believe that it is the work of Azriel, the teacher of Nachmanides.<sup>30</sup> The best we can do under the circumstances, is to present systematically the evidence on hand, and then to draw, if possible, a plausible conclusion. Let us, then, examine the evidence.

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30) The view held by the author of the *ספר חובות הלבבות* that Azriel was the disciple of Nachmanides is historically incorrect. See later page 51.



The title page of the Commentary contains the following lines:

פנוש על עיר השירים

מקבאון אמיתי מקפורסם מרבינו ורבינו משה בר נתמן זצוקל

These lines were evidently written by the editor, Isaac of Kalver, who had printed the book in Altoona in the year, 1763. In his foreword he informs us that the MS.

which went to print was in the possession of Rabbi Mordecai of Berlin who copied it himself from an old MS.

which bore the name, Moses ben Nachman. The entire thing is rather suspicious. It becomes more so with the reading of the Haskomoth, especially the first, if Haskomoh

it may be called, by Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz. The wavering tone of Eibeschutz is of course due to the circumstances under which he found himself. Yet, the line referring to the Commentary,

ומסתמך מקורם קדוש בא וכן בו רמז

31 We refer to the historical controversy between Eibeschutz and Jacob Emdon during which, accusations were hurled against the former that he was a secret adherent of Sabbatai Zevi. Hence the lines:

אבל שאתי אני מן הממרים כבר הוא בקומכם אצל שלם ליתן הסתם  
על ספרי קבלה ועם נעלמים לא אבא סתם מעמים

relation to the verse "אני מן הממרים" (as in our Commentary). In this, then, the same Commentary which Uziel suspects not

"Assuming that it (the book) came from a holy source, and there is no deception about it," certainly do not help to verify the title page.<sup>32</sup>

Of the scholars who deem the Commentary the work of Azriel, Yellinek is the most important, since he attempts to base his opinion on external-internal evidence. His proofs may be classified accordingly:<sup>33</sup>

#### A. External Evidence

##### 1. Manuscript-

Zunz<sup>34</sup> testifies to the fact that the MS. under the name of Moses ben Nachman, in the hands of de Rossi<sup>35</sup> was

32) The author of the Commentary states that the MS. which went to print was in his possession, and in it there was no mention of its author.

33) For the discussion of the problem in Yellinek, see pp. 39-45, Vol. I; pp. 32-37, Vol. II.

34) Vorrede zu Rebenstein's Bearbeitung des H.L. Yell. p. 40, Vol. I. (I could not obtain this book in the library of the H.U.C.)

35) Cod. 1072, de Rossi states that the Commentary to the Song of Songs in his possession bears the name of Moses ben Nachman. It contains the treatise on the Shema in relation to the verse שמע ישראל (as in our Commentary). Is this, then, the same Commentary which Uziel suspects not

different from the one printed in Altoona. Rapaport (according to Yellinek) possessed a Commentary on the Song of Songs in MS. form, under the name of Rabbi Ezra, which agreed with the one printed in Altoona under the name of Nachmanides. This Rabbi Ezra, Yellinek identifies with Azriel, assuming that the same person has been quoted by contemporary writers of the thirteenth century, interchangeably, sometimes under the name of Ezra and othertimes under the name of Azriel.<sup>36</sup> (The reason for this may easily be

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to be Nachmanides'? Or has Uzelai seen a different Commentary? De Rossi is puzzled, for Uzelai might have seen his MS. which was bought in a book store in Livorno where Uzelai stayed for some time before the arrival of de Rossi.

36) The duality or identity of these two names is a much disputed problem. The author of the *Sefer HaChinukh* identifies the two as one person. Graetz maintains they were two persons, perhaps brothers (p. 70-Heb.) His strongest proof is that a contemporary poet, Meshulam ben Shlomo eulogizes the three great Kabbalists, Nachmanides, Ezra, and Azriel. (p. 83) The fact that Abraham Zacuto names Ezra as the teacher of Nachmanides while Rabbi Meyer ben Gabai and Rabbi Chayim Vital name Azriel as the teacher of Nachmanides, or the fact that in the books of Recanati, references are



explained. Certain names, especially those ending with  $\text{אל}$ , were written in abbreviated form so as not to mention the name of God. Thus, Azriel might have written his name in Roshe Tevoth  $\text{רש"ת}$ , or  $\text{רש"ת אצל}$ , which the first copyist might mistakingly have rendered "Ezra", thus giving rise to the confusion.)

made to Ezra and Azriel interchangeably, does not warrant the assumption that they are identical. For some reason or other, these writers confuse the two (Cf. Isaac H. Weiss, p. 14, f.n. 15, Vol. V). As regards Recanati, we may even go a step farther and say that he did it consciously. (Cf. Graetz p. 360, Heb. "A MS. of the Commentary on the Song of Songs is found in the possession of Joshua Heschel Shore. Upon it are written the following words:  $\text{פירוש שיר השירים}$   $\text{לחכם בן יצחק מיוחס לרבי עזריאל ובקצת מקצת מיוחס לרבי עזריאל}$ ".)

Yellinek, himself, hesitates. Cf. p. 41, Vol I. Practically, the entire problem is not of serious character. For since we know of the life and works of Azriel, and know nothing of Ezra, we shall still cling to the name of the former, irrespective of a possible confused identity.

2, Recanati in his Taame Hamizvoth, names Azriel as the author of the Commentary on the Song of Songs. On page 4 B he states: והיה זה (המקום) על הסדר שכתב אותו חזקוני 37  
ל' ערמל ל' ב' שד"ש שלו. כי הוא ז"ל כולם מקום בעצרת הדברים.  
 (Cf. Recanati on the Torah, beginning of Numbers, where he quotes the Commentary in the name of Ezra). Generally he clings to the name Azriel in his Taame Hamizvoth, and to the name of Ezra in his Commentary on the Torah.

#### B. Internal Evidence.

1. In the general introduction the author of the Commentary says: ראיתי כי פנה היום לנגד והזקנה הלכה אלין וקרבה  
על כן קדמתי לפירש אחר מלך ספרים.

"I saw that my day was about to set and that age was coming fast upon me. Therefore did I hasten to interpret one of the twenty-four books of the Bible." This could hardly have been written by Nachmanides who had written Commentaries on the Pentateuch and on the Book of Job. (Yell. p. 41, f.n. , Vol I. )

37) That the treatise on the תורה originally formed a part of our Commentary is assumed by all scholars, and rightly so. For though it may be considered as a separate book within the Commentary from the standpoint of subject matter, it is so interwoven with the Commentary proper that no one can seriously question its place within the book.



2. The polemic against Ibn Ezra ( Cf. Commentary, page 20 A, correct pagination ) is in harmony with the spirit of the fourth decade of the thirteenth century, (the assumed date for the writing of the Commentary. See later page 45 ).

This needs a more elaborate explanation. Nowhere within the Commentary does the author mention the name of Ibn Ezra. That he refers to Ibn Ezra, however, there can be no doubt. Let us then examine the passage to which Yellinek makes reference.

ואין בזה (במורה) אות ונקודה  
אחת שלע לזרך, כי כולו בנין אלקים... ואין חמשה בין יתמנע היתה  
בלש לא ליב... ובין עשרת הדברות ומכשת שמע ישראל.  
"There is not a superfluous letter or vowel in the entire Torah. For the whole of it is a divine structure. And there is no difference (in value or importance) between

38) Yellinek undoubtedly refers here to the controversy between the Maimunists and the anti-Maimunists. He also mentions that the attempt at conversion hinted at in the Commentary (p. 29 A ), chimes in with that particular period. Here again he must mean the destructive activity of the Dominicans as a result of the controversy.

the verses: 'And Timnah was the concubine of Eliphaz.' (Gen. 36:12), and the Ten Commandments, or the section of Sh'ma Yisroel." The viewpoint expressed here has its source in the Talmud (Sanhed. 99 B). There the paralleled sections of the Torah cited above, are put in the mouth of Menasseh ben Hezekiah with the aim of exposing him as a blasphemous ridiculer of the most holy. <sup>39</sup> Maimonides (דברי מרדכי - פ"ה) cites the very same verse of Genesis in parallel with the Decalogue and Sh'ma Yisroel. But while Maimonides aims only against the conception that some verses of the Torah were written by Moses without having been received "Nipi Hagevoorah", the author of the Commentary extends his criticism to those who claim that some verses were inserted in the Torah by

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39) Profoundly interesting is the answer given by the rabbis to the question raised as to the importance of the verse in Genesis. This verse, say the rabbis, conveys a vital lesson. Timnah was of royal descent. She came before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob expressing a wish to be converted to their faith. But they refused her. As a result she indignantly turned away and became the wife of Eliphaz the son of Esau, from whom Amalek descended. Moral: וְלֹא יָרָא They should not have rejected her...

post-Mosaic editors or copyists. And here we come to the reference to Ibn Ezra.

The author of the Commentary follows up his criticism with a warning:

מלבד בהעתקתו כמן והכנעני או בארץ, חנה ערשו ערש ברזל - כי זה חסר

Beware of labelling yourself

as a Min by saying that Ezra the Scribe while copying, added from his own mind, certain verses such as :

"The Canaanite was then in the land", or "His bed was of iron"

- for this is absolute heresy (unbelief, denial).

To show that the author refers to Ibn Ezra, we shall have to go to the source where the latter actually intimates such inferences. Ibn Ezra makes this striking statement on the words " (Deut. 1:2) :

וגם תבין סוד השנים (12) עשר, גם ויכתב משה, והכנעני או בארץ, ובהר ה' יראה,

גם והנה ערשו ערש ברזל, תכיר חזקת.

"And if thou understandest the mystery of the twelve, 'And Moses wrote', 'And the Canaanite was then in the land', 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided', 'And behold his bed was of iron' - thou shalt discern the truth."

The difficulty which confronted Ibn Ezra in the verse in Deuteronomy is quite evident. "These are the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on that side of the Jordan in the wilderness" ... would logically imply that the author



of these lines was already on the other side of the Jordan. How could it then be written by Moses? Instead of answering directly, Ibn Ezra points out the other verses which also imply post-Mosaic authorship. Since the scope of this work does not allow a more elaborate discussion of the entire problem, we shall limit ourselves to two of the verses to which the author of our Commentary refers. "And the Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12:6) - is intelligible only if at the time the verse was written, the Canaanites were no longer there. (The Canaanites ceased to be a distinctive part of the population in the reign of Solomon) "And his bed was of iron" (Deut. 3:11). The bedstead of Og is spoken of as an interesting relic of a vanished race. How is such a description consistent with the view that Moses was relating a victory of a few months or weeks before? The logical conclusion we are driven to, is that these verses were not written by Moses, but are post-Mosaic insertions or expansions in the Pentateuch.<sup>40</sup> The author of our Commentary referring specifically to two of the verses cited by Ibn Ezra, must undoubtedly have been familiar with the passage in Deuteronomy.

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40) Cf. Spinoza's Theol. Polit. Chap. 8 -Gebhardt Ed., where the entire passage of Ibn Ezra is quoted and discussed.

That he understood its implications is quite evident from the reference he makes to the Talmud: (Sanhed. 99 A) "Because ye have despised the word of God" - This refers to the one who says that the Torah was not revealed from God, or to the one who maintains that the entire Torah was revealed with the exception of one verse.<sup>41</sup>

Under internal evidence we may add two conclusive proofs that the Commentary could not have been written by Nachmanides. Uziel states that he saw the Commentary attributed to Moses ben Nachman, in MS. form, and that the enumeration of the mitzvot did not agree with Nachmanides' system. He therefore suspects that the Commentary on the Song

41) Cf. Nachmanides Introd. to Comment. on Torah -

כל חמור מפי קרבן למשה ומפי קדמות התורה ידבר בזה שלישי.

This evidently is to offset Ibn Ezra's criticism on the verse יכתב משה

Cf. also Zohar III - p. 152 - "Woe unto the person who says that the Torah is a display of stories and fiction. Were it so we could make a new Torah even now."

אלה כל מלין דגוריתא מלין עלאין אגון, ורין עלאין...

The Commandments are the body of the Torah. This body is clothed in garments which are the narrative parts of the Torah. Those who are wise look for the soul beneath the garment, while the wisest look for the soul of souls.

of Songs is not the work of Moses ben Nachman (see Shem  
 Hagdolim under "Ramban"). Whether Uziel saw the Commen-  
 tary before us or not, we could not ascertain. His criti-  
 cism can also be extended to the Commentary printed in  
 Altoona.

Finally we come to the most conclusive proof. With  
 the monotheistic theory of creation the principle of cre-  
 ation ex nihilo became fundamental in Judaism. True, the  
 Kabbalists, and others fall back on the theory of a prime  
 substance created at some early point in time. (It is

42) We have made a careful comparison between the "Minian  
 Hamizvoth" presented in the Commentary and the one given  
 by Nachmanides, and have found that the two do not harmon-  
 ize at all. To give a few examples: "Avodoh" or "Tefilah"  
 is counted as a positive commandment in the Commentary,  
 while Nachmanides deems it voluntary, (Reshuth), but not  
 obligatory (Chovoh). Nachmanides does not count the ent-  
 rance of a maimed or drunken priest into the Temple as a  
 separate "Law" while the Commentary does. (For systema-  
 tic presentation of Nachmanides' "Minian Hamizvoth" cf.  
 p. 182 of "Yesh Umayin" by assum-  
 ing matter to be coexistent potentially with God, the  
 actual form principle. (N. p. 145)

To the speculative Kabbalists, the entire problem  
 presented a serious difficulty. On one hand, they felt



two principles of "Maase Mercabah" and "Maase Breshith", the logical conclusions of which are the theory of emanation and the Platonic theory of ideas, respectively, are expounded in Talmudic and Midrashic literature. But those Tanayim and Amorayim who entered the Pardes, did not follow the mystic principles to their logical conclusions. In the last analysis, Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Jehudah Hanasi, and others fall back on the theory of a primal substance created at some early point in time. (It is in this sense only, that we are to take the idea of a preexistent Torah or Temple in the Talmud and Midrash) With Dr. Ginsberg we may safely generalize and say that "It was an attempt to Judaize the un-Jewish conception of primal substance by representing them (the various primal elements) also as having been created."

When we approach the Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages, we find that the great schools of Maimonides and Saadia cling faithfully to the principle of creatio ex nihilo. It was Gabirol, according to Neumark, who deviated from the principle of "Yesh Meayin" by assuming matter to be coexistent potentially with God, the actual form principle. (N. p. 145)

To the speculative Kabbalists, the entire problem presented a serious difficulty. On one hand, they felt

that the Kabbala in order to gain an independent and firm basis of its own, must get away from the principle of creatio ex nihilo. On the other hand, they realized the philosophical inconsistency involved in the theory of emanation (which supersedes the theory of Creation in the Sefer Habahir and in Masecheth Aziluth). For how could the material world emanate from God who is pure spirit? Pressed by this dilemma, many resorted to the rather naive device of minimizing the first emanated object out of which the entire world subsequently evolved. Latiff, for instance, calls the first emanated object נקודה חצונית OR

נקודת העולם האמצעית. Nachmanides similarly calls it

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נקודה דקה קטנה, a thin small dot. As regards Nach-

manides, however, he never deviated from the principle of creatio ex nihilo by a hair's breadth. "For just as Saadia believed that God created the Mercabah out of the visible air (אוויר נראה), so did Nachmanides believe that God created the Sefiroth out of the visible air which he created out of nothing." (N. p. 187).

Let us now, without any further introduction, examine the Commentary in question and establish the

fact that God created the world out of the pre-existent matter,

and not out of nothing. The fact that God

43) For the main part of this introduction, cf. N. pp. 60, 82, and 104.

opinion of the author as regards this problem. On page 6 A of the Commentary, we find the following significant passage:

והוא על דעת אפלטון האומר כי שוא הוא שומציא הבוכא דבר  
מלא דבר. כי יש חומר במצא. והוא על דרך משל בחומר ליוצר או  
בכחול לנפח, שיצייר ממנו מה שיכצה. בן הבוכא יתברך יצייר  
מן החומר שמים וארץ, ופעם יצייר ממנו זולתי זה. ואין קוצר  
בחק הבוכא יתברך כשלא יכרא דבר מלא דבר. כמו שאין  
קוצר ביכולתו כשלא ימציא דברים חנמנעים. שיכרא מקובע  
שיקא אלכסונו שזה לצלעו, ולקבץ שני הפנים ברגע אחד. וכמו  
שאין זה קוצר ביכולתו, כך אין קיצור (קוצר?) אם לא יאציל  
דבר מלא דבר. כי זה בכלל חנמנעים כולם.

And this is in accord with Plato who says that it is folly to think that God creates something out of nothing. For, we do assume preexistent matter. Just as the potter shapes the clay, and just as the smith welds the iron, so does God form and fashion out of the preexistent matter, heaven and earth and all other things. The fact that God



does not create something out of nothing does not indicate a want in His power any more than the fact that God does not create a square whose diagonal is equal to its sides, or that God does not combine two mutually exclusive terms. For all these are to be classified under the category of impossible things."

Here we have a clear refutation of the principle of creatio ex nihilo. For the author does not merely make a statement to this effect, but also formulates a principle based essentially on the Platonic doctrine of ideas (Maase Breshith). An illuminating passage in relation to the author's view of primal matter, we find in the third introduction (which is a Kabbalistic interpretation of the twenty-eighth chapter of Job).

#### קץ שם לחושך

ידוע הוא כי חושך הוא אפיסה, ולא יתכן לומר בו בשום פנים.  
 וזיכה כי אם בריאה. וחבריה עצמה ל"ל שבורר מן החושך שאין  
 לו קץ וסוף, כלל אחר ונצילות אחר. ובאמרו קץ שם לחושך.  
 ל"ל הגבול מן החושך גבול נתן לו קץ ותכלית. ולכל תכלית  
 היא חקר. ולכל מדה ומדה והוי' העומדת בבח האפיסה שהוא,  
 נתן לה חקר. ל"ל אחר שהוציאו מן הבח אל הפועל, פעל.  
 בפועל ההוא. ועשה מדות וכלים שיש לחם חקר וגבול. ואל.  
 בן באמר במקרא החושך בלשון בריאה. וחומר שהוא עומד.  
 בבח החושך בלשון וזיכה. וזכר אור ובורא חשך.

"He setteth an end to darkness" - Job, 28:3.

It is well known that darkness is a nonentity, and that by no means can we apply to it Yeziroh, but Brioh. By Brioh we mean that God has selectively drawn forth out of the infinite darkness, a new principle and a new motive force. What the words, "He setteth an end to darkness" really mean is that God limited the darkness by vesting it with finite qualities, with meaning and purpose. "And searcheth out to the furthest bounds" - that is to say: After having drawn forth a new order of things from potentiality (within the darkness) to actuality, He formed and fashioned the Actual and reduced it to norms and principles. This is the reason why Scriptures speak of darkness in terms of Brioh, and of light which is potential within the darkness, in terms of Yeziroh, as it says: "He formeth light and createth darkness".

Here, then, the author defines the principle of primal substance, basing himself essentially on Bahya, <sup>44</sup>

44) ומצאתי כיון הוא המקור אשר הוא Ch. 3, p. 7. מוכח תופע  
אליו התורה, שחשך הוא מין דמיונים. וכל הנמצאים אשר הוצע הם ענפי  
והוא היסוד אשר עליו נוסדו כל המקודשים, והחמק לכל הנבראים. והוא  
דברא סתר העולם, נסודו, ועקרן נשכחו.

who considers darkness not as a mere negative of light, but as a positive substance, the hyle out of which the entire creation was formed. This needs some explanation. The author of the Commentary takes from Bahya the idea of חסך as a primal substance, not in the sense of a primal created substance as Bahya takes it (interpreting חסך in the sense of חסך), but חסך in the sense of eternal matter (taking חסך as meaning eternally was, as does the Sefer Habahir, paragraph 2 ) to which the term creation is applied as a synonym of limitation or restriction.

45) This tallies with Azriel's definition of בריאה :

כל בריאה מנוצלים מקנה תמקעט ומתחמך

(quoted by Graetz, p. 362, Heb.) A few additional remarks will, I believe, be in place here. The term אפיסה with which the author of the Commentary designates חסך is to be understood with the Greek term εἶς, applied to the world of matter. Cf. Bahir, paragraph 10, where both terms, בריאה and אפיסה are used in relation to חסך.

On page 5 B of the Commentary, we find : וחסך באפיסודי  
Cf. Bahya, p. 18, where fire and darkness are identified.

An interesting passage is found in Tamid, 32 B. One of the ten questions which Alexander of Macedonia asked the Zikno Hanegav was whether light or darkness was created



Within the Commentary, the terms, water (p. 22 b  
 (מַעַלְלֵי מַמַּת כִּסּוּס חֲבוּד, 6 A, וַיִּלְדוּ אֶפְרַיִם)  
 occur in relation to the mystery of creation. That these  
 two terms designate primal substance is clearly established.  
 The term "water" is traced to the ancient semitic concep-  
 tion of the "primal ocean", known to the Babylonians as  
 46 Apsu. For some reason or other, the rabbis deemed the  
 term water improper, and thus changed it to the term "snow".  
 (N. p. 71)

first. They answered: This cannot be solved. The Gemoroh  
 then raises the question: Why did they not tell him that  
 darkness was created first? (On the basis of the verse:

(וַיִּהְיֶה עֲרָפֶל וַיִּהְיֶה חֹשֶׁךְ). To which the significant  
 answer is given: They feared lest he came to inquire into  
 the mysteries of

מִן הַמַּעַלְלִים מִן הַמַּמָּת

מִן הַלְפָּנִים וּמִן הַלְאָחוֹר

Cf. Rashi ... וַיִּמְנַע וְלֹא יִשְׁאַלֵם עוֹד מִמַּעַלְלֵי בְרֵאשִׁית

46) J.E. Art. K. Neumark (p. 71) thinks it is a vestige  
 of the old Tiamat legend, traces of which are found in  
 Gen. 1:2; Ezek. 1:22,24;

-Both terms occur in Talmudic and Midrashic literature in the sense of primal matter. The quoted passage about the water producing darkness is found in Ex. R.

15:22. Water, air, and fire are spoken of there, as having existed before the creation of the world. "Water produced darkness, fire produced light, and air produced wisdom." The other passage is found in "Pirke de Rabbi Eleazer, chapter 3. "Whence was the earth created? From the snow beneath the throne of glory".<sup>47</sup>

~~כי למטה יאמר ה' אכץ~~ (Referring to Job, 37:6)

47) Other illuminating passages on the subject are:

Jer. Hag. 77 A - First water condensed into snow.

Gen. R. 5:2 - ~~נעשה קולו של הקב"ה מים מרכין על המים~~

N. (p. 73) interprets "Kol" in the sense of Logos which served as the form principle to matter, here called water.

Cf. also Mid. Konen: Water disobeyed God's command. (Quoted by Ginsberg, Art. K.) This refers evidently, to God's contest with matter, the latter being considered the source of all evil. Cf. Bahya, p. 16.

~~וכל כח תחת מעשלת חמץ~~  
"Tohu Vavohu" are also taken as matter and form respectively.

Cf. Commentary, p. 24 -

~~מסודרכ שאין לו צורה~~

~~ובתו - המלבש התוהו~~

These passages from the Talmud and Midrash may be interpreted, it is true, as primal created substance. But as regards the Commentary, in the light of the passages quoted before, we have but one alternative: to consider these terms as referring to eternal matter. <sup>48</sup>

This entire view is in absolute opposition to Nachmanides who clings to the principle of creatio ex nihilo no less than Saadia. Let us now examine Nachmanides' view

Cf. Bahya, p. 14 - הוא יתכן ויחולק - חסם את המים והאש

See also Neumark's ingenious interpretation of the passage in Hag. (Bab.) p. 14 B - אמר להם ל' עקרב כמדתם קדשין  
אכל צבני מים טהור, אכל תאמר מים, מים.

Neumark takes צבני מים to mean snow,

Finally, cf. Gen. R. 3:4 and Pirke de R. Eleazer, chap. 3. God wrapped Himself in light ..... (quoted in Comm. p. 6 A)

48) The author of the Comm. uses all these terms interchangeably and confusedly, and quotes the Talmud or Midrash with little or no discrimination. Thus on p. 24 A, Rav's statement about the ten things that were created on the first day, is quoted - which is in absolute opposition to his own theory of eternal matter. Note however, the change from the original נורא, to נצח.



of creation as presented in his Commentary on the first verse of Genesis: *בראשית ברא* ...

הקדוש ברוך הוא ברא כל הנבראים מאפיסה קטנה למטה ואין אצלינו בלשון  
הקדוש בהוצאת יש מעין אלא לשון ברא ואין כל הנעשה תחת השמש אג  
למעלה חוץ מן האין תתחלה ראשונה אבל הוציאם מן הצפס והגמור  
המחולט וסוד דק מאוד, אין בו ממש אבל הוא כח מקצא, מוכן לקבל  
הצורה ולצאת מן הכח אל הפעול, והוא החומר הראשון, נקרא  
ליוסם חוליו, ואחר החוליו לא ברא דבר, אבל יצר ועשה ממנו כי  
ממנו מקצא הכל והלביש הצורות ותקן אותם... וזוהו בבריאה  
הזאת שחיה בנקודה קטנה דקה, ואין בה ממש, ובראנו כל הנבראים

Thus all things according to Nachmanides, were formed out of preexistent matter which the Greeks called "hyle". But unlike the Greek philosophers who assumed eternity of matter, to which the term creation is entirely irrelevant, Nachmanides believes that the "thin element", or the "small thin dot" out of which all things were formed, that minimized hyle was created out of nothing. Once you accept the principle of creatio ex nihilo, it makes little or no difference whether the primary created matter was as bulky and weighty as a mountain, or as light and vapory as a soap bubble. in other

words, Nachmanides borrows from the Greek, the term "hyle", but uses it not in its original sense of eternal matter, but in the sense of preexistent, created matter, created at some point in time. This quoted passage from Nachmanides, is not only different from that of our Commentary, but is in absolute opposition to it, for in the latter, we have an unambiguous formulation of the principle of eternity of matter as Plato understood it.

It was therefore with great surprise that we read Yellinek's passing remark on the quoted passage of the Commentary (p. 44, F.n. 10, Vol. I ):

"Auch Moses b. Nachman nimmt eine feine Urmaterie an, die der göttliche Schöpfungsakt in Formen kleidet." A reference to Nachmanides' commentary on the first verse of Genesis closes his abrupt remark on the subject.

Yellinek seemed to have misunderstood the fundamental distinction between preexistent, created matter as Nachmanides assumes, and eternal matter as Azriel, the supposed author of the Commentary assumes. His failure to realize this distinction might have arisen from the author's (of the Commentary) use of the word *לְבָרָא* instead of *לְבָרָא*, toward the end of the passage on *לְבָרָא* in the third introduction. This, however, can easily be explained by the fact that the author makes use of the theory of eman-

ation and the theory of ideas (which involves the theory of eternal matter) at one and the same time, throughout the book - two irreconcilable principles. (Cf. N. p. 104) And yet, not only are these two contradictory and irreconcilable principles very much interfused within the Commentary, but are found inseparably interwoven in the entire Kabbalistic literature. The very relation of Adam Hakadmon to the Sefiroth indicates the combination of Maase Mercahah and Maase Breshith, or the theory of ideas and the theory of emanation. Why the Kabbalists who believed in eternal matter resorted to the theory of emanation, is indeed puzzling. The fact, however, remains that Plotinus did read into Plato the theory of emanation, and thus set a good example for later mystic thinkers.

This, then, may serve as a conclusive proof that the Commentary, containing a forceful refutation of the principle of creatio ex nihilo, and a clear formulation of the principle of eternal matter, could not possibly have been written by Nachmanides.<sup>49</sup>

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49) In speaking of Nachmanides' adherence to the principle of creatio ex nihilo, Neumark remarks: there is more than a mere joke in the observation of Rabbi Isaac of Akko



that the Ramban was too great a Halachist to attain to a high place in Kabbala (p. 125). It seems that Nachmanides only gradually and even hesitatingly, entered into the mystic Pardes. In the "Shem Hagdolim" (letter p 17-18), the following passage occurs: ולא ובה לחכמה  
חזק... אלז בקומו כי ברחותו לא היה מאמין בה עד אשר  
רבו ר' עזריאל נחם לו שלקוח על ידי אותה מעלה שעשה שוב  
אצלו בקביצת חורן.

Sachs may be right in saying that חכמה חזק refers to Kabbala. But that קביצת חורן should mean the "arrival from a distant place" is an attempt to rationalize (See Hapalut, p. 47). An interesting story in relation to Nachmanides' late acquisition of the Kabbala is found in "Shalsheth HaKabbala", p. 43 A. There it is related that a certain Kabbalist who tried to win over Nachmanides to the Kabbala, let himself be found in a house of ill fame, where he was seized by a government official and sentenced to death. On the day of execution which was the Sabbath, he visited Nachmanides to partake of the שלש מעלות. He then explained to Nachmanides that he was really innocent but intended to show him the miraculous power of the Kabbala. Now he had achieved his purpose, for instead of himself, an ass was being executed as the victim. Needless to say, after such a miracle, Nachmanides became an ardent follower of the Kabbala.

## Conclusion

From the discussion we can readily see that the negative proofs, that is that the Commentary is not the work of Nachmanides, are stronger than the positive proofs that it is Azriel's. The latter supposition is based almost exclusively on Recanati's statements. For the other evidence may only serve to show, once it is assumed that Azriel is the author of the book, that all other data in relation to time and principles, would chime in with the fourth decade of the thirteenth century, the supposed date of the Commentary.

Can we accept it as a plausible conjecture? Before answering this question let us attempt to establish the ad quo and the ad quem of the Commentary in question. The book in the form in which we have it, could not have been written earlier than the end of the twelfth century. The Kabbalistic principles contained therein are too ripe and mature for any earlier date. What about the ad quem? This we may place toward the end of the following century. The latter date would rest chiefly on evidence from Recanati's works. In his מכתב ל המורה על הפסוק and especially in his הקדמה ל הפסוק, numerous passages of the Commentary are quoted verbatim. Recanati's approximate date being

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50) Here is a list of all parallel passages in Recanati's

the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, we may safely assume the thirteenth century as the most probable date for the Commentary. Of course, if the book חזקוני (Yell. p. 454-ff.) is the work of Abraham of Cologne (who lived about the middle of the thirteenth century), as it is attributed to him, we would be in a position to narrow down the date of the Commentary to the first half of the thirteenth century, since the entire third introduction of our Commentary occurs there verbatim with the opening line והנה כי ידוע. But since the authorship of that book is a disputed question, Yellinek

Yellinek In a quoted extract from the Commentary, the Taame Hamizvoth and our Commentary:

T.H. 5a, Comm. 8d; T.H. 6a, Comm. 12d, 13a; T.H. 7a, Comm. 9b, 10cd; T.H. 9a, Comm. 9d; T.H. 9b, Comm. 9d, 10a; T.H. 10a, Comm. 10a; T.H. 10b, Comm. 10c; T.H. 13a, Comm. 11d; T.H. 13b, Comm. 13c; T.H. 14b, Comm. 14d; T.H. 15b, Comm. 14d; T.H. 18b, Comm. 15ac; T.H. 21a, Comm. 15d; T.H. 22a, Comm. 16a; T.H. 25b, Comm. 17cd; T.H. 26a, Comm. 18c. (Yell. p. 35, f.n. 16, Vol. II.)



attributing it to Menachem Zioni (Ziyyuni) who lived about the middle of the fifteenth century, our attempt at a narrower date proves unsuccessful.

Returning again to the thirteenth century, we find that the two prominent Kabbalists, Azriel and Nachmanides, are suggested as possible authors of the book. That the book is not the fruit of the latter is evident from point of style as well as from point of principle. Shall

51) Unless we should assume, despite the difference in style, that Nachmanides wrote the Commentary in the name of Azriel, his teacher. Such a suggestion is hinted at by Neumark. In a quoted extract from the Commentary, the opening words of which are וְעַתָּה בְּיָמֵינוּ חֲתוּמֵי ז'ל, Neumark encloses in parenthesis the remark: (אֲמָרְךָ בְּשֵׁם רַב עֲזַרְיָה ז'ל ?)

Such an assumption would perhaps mitigate, somewhat, the ever remaining difficulty presented by the passage within the Commentary: מִן זֶלֶם מַעֲלִידִים - נִתְּלָה שָׁר שְׁלֹחַם בְּיָמֵינוּ מִן עֲזַרְיָה

בְּיָמֵינוּ חֲתוּמֵי ז'ל. Cf. Nachmanides on Numbers 14, where the same explanation of the verse occurs with the additional remark: וְכָכָה חֲתוּמֵי ז'ל וְכָכָה בְּקִימוֹת אֲחֵרִים

Comm. p. 5a; N. 280; Yell. 41, f.n. 4, Vol. I.

we assume, then, with Yellinek, that it is the work of Azriel? We may, with caution. For though the numerous references to the Zohar belong to the glossators,<sup>52</sup> it would still be a bit too drastic a step on our part, to trace the influence of Azriel from the content of the Commentary, upon the authors of the Zohar.<sup>53</sup> All we know

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52) There is no doubt in my mind that all the twenty-nine references to the Zohar as well as the eight references to the works of the Ari, and the few references to other late Kabbalistic books, were inserted by the glossators. The majority of these references come enclosed within parentheses with the *וזהו* at the beginning, end, or both. The same is true of the references to Nachmanides' Commentary on the Torah with the usual remark: *וזהו כפי חזקוני* (except the one quoted above)

53) Yell. devotes a few pages to the influence of the Comm. on the Zohar in regard to both terminology and principles. Cf. pp. 41-44, Vol. I. On p. 41, f.n. 6, Yell. remarks: "Komisch ist es daher, wenn Recanati, 6b von R. Azriel, bemerkt: *וזהו כפי חזקוני* da die ganze Schrift des R. Azriel oder Ezra von den Bearbeitern des Sohar benutzt wurde!"

is that similar passages occur in both. Should we resort to the not yet excluded possibility of placing the date of the Commentary toward the end of the thirteenth century, we could simply reverse the order and trace the influence of the Zohar upon the Commentary, since by that time, the Zohar was already in existence.

If, therefore, we are inclined to accept the opinion that the Commentary on the Song of Songs attributed to Nachmanides, is the work of Azriel, we must do it with the full consciousness that it is only a conjecture - a plausible conjecture it is true. It is from this standpoint that we must approach the Kabbalistic principles within the Commentary. That is to say, we must not strain ourselves to effect a harmonization of the Kabbalistic principles contained in the Commentary with those principles expounded by Azriel in his other works. Rather should the principles be traced to the chronologically preceding writers on the Kabbala, such as Saadia, Bahya, Barzelai, and others, always keeping a critical eye on the similar principles found in the Zohar.



## The Life of Azriel

54

(Sketch)

Rabbi Azriel ben Menachem (or ben Salomo) was born in Gerona (Spain), the birthplace of Nachmanides, about the year 1160, and died at a ripe age in the year 1238. He was a disciple of Rabbi Isaac the Blind and the teacher of his task of his life to acquire as much knowledge of the

54) The sketch of the life of Azriel is based on Yell. 32-35, Vol. II; Graetz, Chap. 3, Vol. V, Heb.; Hapolit; Azriel's Introduction to the book *דברי חיים* p. 47 to end.

55) That Azriel was born in the year '60 of the twelfth century, is a conjecture on the part of Yellinek, based on the Introduction to the Comm. Just before the already quoted passage: *ראשית כי פתח חיים לנולד*, we read:

*וידוע כי שבעים שנה היה אזריאל בן מנחם כשראשית חיי*  
*הוא שנת ה'תשס"ו* The last is taken by Yell. to mean the seventy-first year of one's life, based, I suppose, on Psalm 90, verse 10,

where the normal life cycle of man is given as seventy years. One year of, that is, above the normal years of a life, must then refer to the age of seventy-one. That

*הוא שנת ה'תשס"ו* is the right reading, follows from the content which speaks of old age. The *מקור החיים* most likely refers to the day of death. Cf. Brachoth, 10a-

*עלמיה*

57  
of Nachmanides.

From his introduction to the book Ḥofetz (Hapalit . . .)  
we get a glimpse of his personal life as well as of  
the spirit of the time. From his early youth, he began  
to travel with the aim to inquire into the mysteries of  
God. Believing in the power of the Kabbala, he made it  
the task of his life to acquire as much knowledge of the  
subject as possible through oral communication with the  
people with whom he came in contact. Traveling in Spain,  
he chanced to stop at Seville (58). There he met people

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At any rate, if the work is Azriel's, it must have been  
written toward the close of his life. Since, then, we  
know that he died in the year 1238 and that he was then  
seventy-one years old when he began to work on the Comm.,  
the year 1160 as the date of his birth, would seem to  
be a plausible inference

56) Ḥofetz - p. 132b, ed. Krakow.

57) Cf. Recanati - Comm. to Pentateuch, 173-d.

58) Ḥofetz - is taken by Graetz to be Seville, while  
Yellinek thinks it is Balladolid.

with philosophical pretensions who proved very skeptical<sup>59</sup> toward his theories of the Sefiroth and the En Sof. They asked him to present rational proofs for his theories. That gave him the impulse to write the book Ḥanukhah (i.e. חנכה by him) as a response to the skeptic inquirers.

From this account we can readily see why Azriel resorted to the dialectic method in his presentation of the Sefiroth. It was to pave the way for Kabbala, and to render it acceptable to those versed in philosophy.<sup>60</sup> The truth of the matter is that the מקובלים of the type of Azriel, Nachmanides, and Latiff were well versed in philosophy, and what is more, cherished a deep love for philosophical reflections. (Cf. N. p. 46 and p. 186) Azriel was a great and influential personality, due partly

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59) Hapalit, p. 54 f.n.) והתקירו על פיהם בדיבורם ובראיותם  
גם התקירו בו בחזקת עור.

is taken to mean that the people ridiculed him for being the disciple of Rabbi Isaac the Blind.

60) Graetz characteristically remarks that Azriel "coquetted with philosophy".



to his original and systematic way of presentation, (he was the first to present the theory of the Sefirot, systematically), and also to his versatility, occupying himself with philosophy, Kabbala, exegesis, and Talmudical studies. His chief works are:

\_\_\_\_\_ מ' הקלוצים on the Kabbala;

\_\_\_\_\_ פיוט על מ' יצחק - based chiefly on symbolism (מלכות השמים);

\_\_\_\_\_ על המפירות expounding the theory of the Sefirot on a dialectic basis;

\_\_\_\_\_ (?) פיוט על שיר השירים -

This is presumably correct - the best of songs.

It is not one of many songs. It is the best of songs.

Except the Song of Songs (Shir) or the one in 1:1?

cf. Lashon. Cf. Sederim, Chap. 1, Halacha 7, 580.

Reb. explains: The identification of Sholomo with

God was suggested to the rabbis by the omission of Ben

David, unlike the title verses of Prov. and Eccles.

## CHAPTER III

## ANALYSIS OF COMMENTARY

## 1

## Keynote

"The Song of Songs" - The choicest of songs, the most  
<sup>61</sup>praiseworthy of songs - "which belongs to Sholomo" - to  
 God, the King of peace (Comm.) . This interpretation of  
 the title verse is in accord with the Midrash. Assuming  
 the allegorical import of the Song of Songs, the rabbis  
 endeavor to establish the sacred authorship of the book  
 by taking the name, Sholomo, in its literal meaning, i.e.,  
 Sholom, peace, one of the names of God (based on Judg.  
 6:24 ~~וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ יְהוָה שְׁלֹמֹה~~, Gideon called the altar Yhwh  
 Sholom). Hence the Talmudic formula: "Every Sholomo in  
 the Song of Songs is holy." <sup>62</sup>To complete the thought,

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61) This is grammatically correct - the best of songs,  
 and not one of many songs. Cf. ~~אֵין שִׁיר אֶחָד מֵעֲשָׂרִים~~ or ~~אֵין שִׁיר אֶחָד מֵעֲשָׂרִים~~

62) Except ~~אֵין שִׁיר אֶחָד מֵעֲשָׂרִים~~ (8:12) or the one in 3:7

~~אֵין שִׁיר אֶחָד מֵעֲשָׂרִים~~. Cf. Soferim, Chap. 1, Halacha 7, Sheb.

35b. Rashi explains: The identification of Sholomo with  
 God was suggested to the rabbis by the omission of Ben  
 David, unlike the title verses of Prov. and Eccles.

attention is called to the fact that in I Kings, 5:26,

God calls Solomon, Sholom. (וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה שְׁלֹמֹה לְשֵׁמוֹ)

— (וַיִּשְׁמֵהוּ). The homily then follows: וְהָיָה כִּשְׁמִי

אֲתָךְ. "Since your name is like mine. I shall

give unto you my daughter" (which is the Torah or wis-

dom).<sup>63</sup>

In harmony with the Midrash the author states:

(Int. I) The Song of Songs is the inspired work of Sol-

omon who composed it in his old age.<sup>64</sup>

There is, how-

ever, a vital point of difference between the author's

interpretation of the poem, and that presented by the

63) See ~~ענין שמו של מלך~~ p. 42 - 3, where this homily occurs. See also Sefer Habahir, paragraph 3 and para-

graph 31. ~~אין ידוע אם נאמר שמו של הקדוש~~ I do not know

whether it is found in the Talmud or Midrash.

64) Whether Solomon composed the book in his youth or in

his old age, is a matter of dispute in the Midrash. (R.

Cant. 1:10.) No wonder the author sides with the view

of R. Hyyah, for Rabbi Jonathan's guiding principle, ...

~~אין ידוע אם נאמר שמו של הקדוש~~

is a bit too rational for the Kabbala.



rabbis. In the Midrash, the idea of <sup>65</sup> ~~לְבָנָיו~~ <sup>66</sup> ~~וְלִבָּתוּלָתָם~~ <sup>67</sup> ~~וְלִבָּתוּלָתָם~~ is somehow compromised. The entire poem is taken as a dialogue between God and the Knesseth Yisroel<sup>66</sup>, each singing the praises of the other. "In all other songs, either He praises them or they praise Him. Here both praise each other. He sings: Thou art fair, my love. They respond: Thou art fair, my Beloved". (Mid. R. Cant. 1:11) The author of our Commentary, however, reads the poem as a monologue, or to be more exact, a dialogue between God and God, between the ~~אֱלֹהִים~~ and the ~~אֱלֹהִים~~. And a vital point of difference it is. For, according to the author's interpretation, all the numerous bodily descriptions in the song refer to God, whereas in the Midrash, they are understood to refer to Israel's spiritual possessions or leaders. The author realizes the crude anthropomorphism involved in speaking of God's eyes, hair lips, and

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65) Note the device: ~~אֱלֹהִים~~ <sup>66</sup> ~~וְלִבָּתוּלָתָם~~ refers to God while the title, ~~וְלִבָּתוּלָתָם~~, alone, refers to Israel. Mid. R. Cant. 1:12.

66) In the Targum, Israel takes the leading role in the dialogue. ~~וְלִבָּתוּלָתָם~~ <sup>67</sup> ~~וְלִבָּתוּלָתָם~~ is the characteristic opening phrase of many paragraphs.

neck. He therefore tries to explain it away with such phrases as: ~~כל זה זמנים וזמנים ידועים למשכילים המקובלים~~ (Comm. p. 6 b) Be this as it may, the Song of Songs is a dialogue between the ~~הבנות~~ and the ~~שכינה~~, the former frequently echoing the sentiments and thoughts of Israel.

What the author means by ~~הבנות~~ we hardly know. He may refer to the ~~הבנות~~ (Cf. Comm. beginning lines: ~~אשר הבנות מוזק~~). Saadia calls the ~~אמת שכינה~~ by the name ~~הבנות~~ (Cf. N. p. 251) Then, too, the Sefiroth are sometimes designated by that name. Whatever the author might have had in mind, one thing is clear. The dialogue is a sort of reflective communion of God with Himself, voicing as it does, the longings and yearnings of Israel, to rise higher and higher and become attached to the pure essence of God, the reality of all realities.

A free translation of the prologue as understood by the author, may serve as the keynote to the Commentary.

~~The opening of the prologue is in the third person~~

~~because it is addressed to convey a detached reflection,~~

67) Remembering the fundamental teaching of the Adom Hakadmon in the Kabbala, the author's daring view that both ~~אמת~~ and ~~הבנות~~ refer to God, involving as it does the crude anthropomorphism of describing God's limbs, will not seem so strikingly strange.

~~very of 72-73, see later p. 93-94, Y.N. 34~~

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" -

These are the words of the <sup>7122</sup> who longs and yearns to rise and become absorbed in the heavenly light, in the supra hidden light - hardly imaginable. The kiss is symbolic of the intense pleasure which the soul experiences in its cleaving to the fountain of life. <sup>68</sup>

"Kiss me for thy love is better than wine" - Thy love, Thy light floweth ever increasingly, <sup>69</sup> from Thee to Thee, the essence of light and wisdom. <sup>70</sup>

"Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance. Thy name is as ointment poured forth". Even as oil poured forth from vessel to vessel, so doth the abundant light, emanated from Thee, descend upon the tree of life of which Israel is the heart and center, and then returneth unto Thee with increased splendor.

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68) The opening of the prologue is in the third person because it is supposed to convey a detached reflection, arising in the mind. (Explanation of author)

69) <sup>אור</sup> in the sense of kindling (Targum). The abundance of light which breaks, sparkingly, on all sides.

70) <sup>אין</sup> = 70 - <sup>שמות</sup> - 70 names of God. For the mystery of 70-72, see later p. 93-94, F.N. 94

Ex. 30:  
The Targum reads  
אין/אור. The word  
אין/אור is given in  
the text. See also the  
The Clem. in the  
overlooked.



" Therefore do the maidens love thee" - The Kab-  
71  
balists and the wise.

" The king hath brought me into his chambers" -  
It is His will that I ascend and enter the heavenly  
chambers through the thirty-two paths of wisdom, so  
that I may be glad and rejoice in His luminous presence.

" Oh sincerely do they love thee" - Just as the  
suckling young is drawn to his source of nourishment,  
so are the simple souls of the pious drawn to Thee, the  
fountain of all life.

71) ~~עלמות~~ is transcribed in the Midrash - על קות, i.e.,  
the pious who sacrificed their lives for the sanctifi-  
cation of God's name. (See Ya15:98) It is significant  
that the name of Akiba is particularly specified. Cf.  
Bahya, chap. 8, p. 38:

וּבִכּוּשׁ עֲלֻמּוֹת הָיָה שְׁחֻפְשֵׁת הַדְּעוּת הַנִּסְתָּרָה, תִּתְחַבֵּן יוֹצֵר הַמִּסְתָּר.  
מֵאֵד, וְהוֹגֵלָה מֵאֵד, וְאֵין יַעֲלֶה עַל שֶׁבֶל שׁוֹם אִישׁ לִפְנֵי עֲלֻמּוֹת.  
בְּבִתּוּלוֹת וּבְנֹת וְנַעֲלֹת וּבְדַבַּר הַדּוּמָה לֵית, אֵךְ פִּיכּוּשׁ הָיָה אֲחֵבָה.  
הַנִּפְשׁוֹת הַחֲכָמִים אֵת יוֹצֵר יַעֲלֶה, וְשׁוֹרֵקֵן אֵלֶיךָ.

This prologue sounds the keynote of the entire Commentary. The Song of Songs echoes the cry of all that strive to rise through obstacles and obstructions, to the highest and loftiest source of heavenly sublimity. The שיר השירים expresses the wish and desire of the מלכים and the מלכות who in turn express the will of God to rise to the highest degree of Self.

## 2

## A Sketch of Jewish History

Already in the Targum, the song of Solomon is rendered a history of the life of Israel, beginning with Egypt and ending with the day on which the tenth and last song of triumph will issue out of the mouths of the מלכות returning to Zion in heavenly splendor. This view is very prominent in the Midrash, and but with slight variations as to detail, is accepted by commentators such as Rashi and Ibn Ezra. (The latter begins with Abraham) In this survey of Jewish history, the <sup>72</sup> ארבע גלותות (the four periods of captivity, i. e., the Egyptian bondage, Babylonian Exile, Greek Persecution, and the destruction of the Temple by Rome) are particularly stressed. Aside from these outstanding periods, the poem

72) Cf. אבות דרבי נתן פ. 304 - וכל הענין קדוש מאד ונורא

also embodies the important events in the life of Israel, such as, the giving of the Torah, the erection of the tabernacle, and so on.

The author of the Commentary follows the same view. In his first introduction, the author presents the following brief outline of the poem: And he (Solomon through

שְׁלֹמֹה) looked into the future and saw what would happen to Israel, what sanctuaries they would erect, and what sufferings they would endure in the various periods of captivity. The idea of Goluth, he concealed in the prologue so as not to open the poem in a sad vein. Instead he begins with words of praise, descriptive of the throne of glory, of God, His form and appearance, His deeds and attributes. He then surveys all the events that have happened to Israel since their Exodus from Egypt when they were singled out as the people of God. Toward the end of the poem, the final redemption is intimated when the long and trying Goluth through which Israel has passed with unshaken faith in God and His law, in defiance of persecution and persuasion, will come to an end at the opening of the seventh millenium, the day of bliss and eternal life, the sublime Sabbath which knows no sunset.



The following sketch of Jewish history is a synopsis of the Commentary proper, retaining the traditional order, namely, the trilka yark, also including the historical events of paramount importance. At the same time we shall endeavor to trace the interpretations of the author to their sources, the Targum and the Midrash, keeping a critical eye on the Commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

# EGYPT

(Cant. Chapt. I - vv. 5-6 -Comm. 1B -2A)

The Shechinah in Galuth with Israel

"I am black" ... Dejected, fallen, reduced to the rank of the Sarim, the heavenly representatives of the seventy nations on earth.

"Look not at me that I am swarthy,

That the sun hath tanned me;"

For I am with My children in the fields of Egypt where they work rigorously with mortar and brick. I share their shame and misery. I partake of their affliction - I who otherwise beam with radiance and glory - My name, My essence, like the heavens for clearness.

"My mother's sons were incensed against me."

They, the Sarim of the various nations disturb Me, annoy Me, interfere with Me. Obligated to supervise over the other nations, to supply their needs and satisfy their

wants, no time is left Me to watch over My own people, to shower upon them My rains and dews, and prepare them even as the gardener prepares the soil for growth and fruitage.

"They made me keeper of the vineyards,  
But my own vineyard have I not kept."<sup>73</sup>

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73) The idea of שכינתא בגלותא is of Talmudic origin. See Hagil. 29A. כל מקום שגלו שכינה עמקן. For a more elaborate discussion of this idea see page 99ff.. For the relation of God to the Sarim, see page 102. In general the Commentary here is in accord with the Midrash which Rashi and Ibn Ezra follow. Cf. Mid. R. Cant. 128.

שכינה אני בגלותא קצתם (The Targum reads into these verses the קעשי תעבא). Note, however, the difference. In the Midrash as well as in the Commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, it is Israel who complains. Here it is the Shechinah.

## EXODUS AND MATAN TORAH

(Cant. Chap. I vv. 9-12, Comm. p. 2B)

## The Kovod to the Shechinah

When Pharaoh started out in his chariots, Israel recognized Thy power and majesty. Even as one identifies an intimate friend, so did Israel gaze at Thy countenance, and with a gesture of sudden recognition, exclaim: "This is my God and I shall glorify Him." Then midst Thou emerge from the Galuth like a bride resplendent, adorned with jewels and ornaments. Thy jewels and ornaments - what were they?

"Circlets of gold with studs of silver" -

The two Toroth, the Torah תורה, emanated from and forever revitalized by the Torah תורה, which even as the vowel in the letter or as the breath in the body, is life-giving and soul-sustaining. Yea, Thy word is life-giving, Thy breath - soul-sustaining.

"When the king sat at his table" -

When God ascended His flaming throne at Sinai, Israel, intoxicated with the Shechinah, exclaimed: "My spikenard sent forth its fragrance."<sup>74</sup>

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74) Here the Kovod speaks, voicing the sentiments of Israel.



למחתי ברכתי מרעה, of course, lends itself to the idea of the Exodus. Cf. Targum — למחתי... כד נפקי ישראל מקצות. The play on the word מחתי is found in the Midrash. Cf. Yal. Cant. paragraph 883. — בתוכים — בתוכה שבכתב ובתורה שבעל פה

On the identification of God derived from the words רמתיק, see Mid. Zuta, Chap. I, paragraph 9, end. The Torah שוכת is compared to silver or milk, i. e., white the attribute of mercy. The Torah שבעל פה is compared to gold, or wine, or money, i. e., red the attribute of justice. Cf. Psalms 119 - v. 72; Haggai, 2:8; Cant. 4:11. Cf. Mid. R. 119. The idea that the נקודות are the spirit of the letters, is taken verbatim from the Sefir Habahir, paragraph 47. The text in the Commentary is corrupt. The full quotation should read חדין נקודה דאורייתא דקשה דאורייתא כולה עיגולה ודמין באתוותא לשמחתא דח"י בגופא דאורייתא

Why these lines were written in Aramaic, and on the general use of Aramaic in Kabbala, see N. 210.

עו שחלקך בקסו is commented upon in the Midrash R. Cant. 1:55. בקסו בקיע in relation to Sinai. Ibn Ezra: ...התחלתי. The eagerness to see the Shechinah is poignantly expressed in Mid. R. Cant. 1:25 -

לחוטים היו ישראל אחרי השכינה

## THE ERECTION of the TABERNACLE

(Cant. vv. 16-17 - Chap. II, vv. 4-5, Comm. 3a-4b)

The Kovod (or Israel ) to the Shechinah

"Behold thou art fair, my beloved, yea pleasant,

Also our couch is leafy."

Enter, then, oh Beloved, into the holy of holies of our  
tabernacle.

Behold!

"The beams of our house are cedars

And our panels are cypresses" -

Enter then, oh Beloved, into the holy of holies of our  
tabernacle.

"He hath brought me to the banqueting house

And his banner over me is love."

Like a bride under the wedlock canopy, so did the She-  
chinah enter under the roof of My tabernacle, the "ban-  
queting house" where the soul feasts on love and light.  
For even as He surrounded His heavenly throne of glory  
with four groups of angels, so did He choose His earth-  
ly abode amidst the four camps of Israel.

Response of the Shechinah

"Stay ye me with Ashishoth, refresh me with Tapuchim,

For I am love-sick."

Abundant is the bliss, overwhelmingly abundant, which descends upon Me from the two Cherubim between whom I abide. Uphold Me, oh ye hosts of heaven and earth. Refresh Me, for abundant is the bliss that descends upon Me, overwhelmingly abundant.<sup>75</sup>

75) חנן יפה ... מדבר בעשית מקשכן והכנסת החופה

This is deduced in Mid. 12:10, from the verse in Numbers,

7:1 ויהי ביום כלות קשה

כלת read כלות ...

אף עכשנו רענוה — זה ביהמ"ק

Mid. R. Cant. 1:66. Various explanations are given for calling the "קשה" - קשכן. The Targum finds here an intimation of a Temple in the Messianic Era.

קורות בתנו אכזים. Cf. Yalkut, Cant. paragraph 985.

Thence did they get cedars in the desert? Jacob urged them to take them along when they would leave Egypt.

בית חנין ...

Ibn Ezra: חנן בית ה' מקום נסוך חנין

The whole picture of the דגלים, analogous to the four groups of angels which surround the Throne of Glory - is taken from Mid. R. Chap. II -8-9. (Numbers)

Comm.: אשיות ... אשיות קעלה וקעה

This is found neither in the Targum nor in the Midrash.



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In both, Ashishoth is interpreted as flames ( אש ). Cf.  
Mid. R. Cant. 2:14.

~~הפסוק - בין שני הכתובים~~ (Comm.)

In Val. paragraph 983, the idea of the הכתובים is brought  
in in relation to Cant. 1:13.

## ENTRANCE INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN

(Cant. 2:10b-13; 3:1-4, Comm. 3b - 4 a)

The Koved to the Shechinah

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

Thou who didst accompany Thy people in their captivity,  
return now with them to the land promised to their fa-  
thers.

"For lo, the winter is past,

The rain is over and gone;

The flowers appear on the earth;

The time of singing is come "...

All the wintry gloom and darkness is vanishing. Bright  
sunny days are coming, bringing with them, peace and  
comfort.

"The fig tree putteth forth her green figs,

And the vines in blossom, give forth their fragrance."

It is the period of budding. Israel is as yet a green  
fruit. But the garden is all abloom. The flowers prom-  
ise fruit.

Reflection of Israel

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth."

In the long night of gloom and darkness in the desert, I  
attuned myself through repentance, to the voice of the

Shechinah. But in vain.

"I sought him but I found him not."

For, throughout the period of forty years in the desert, the Shechinah disappeared from my midst, and the voice of prophecy ceased.

Then did I say unto myself:

"I will rise now and go about the city,

In the streets and in the broad ways."

With supplication and prayer -

"I will seek him whom my soul loveth."

-----  
 "I sought him but I found him not..."

The watchmen" - Moses and Aaron found me. Eagerly did I inquire from them:

"Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?

Scarce had I passed from them" -

Scarce had they passed from me- (for during that period Moses died, and Joshua took his place) -

"Then I found him whom my soul loveth."

"I held him" - through my integrity and uprightness,

"And would not let him go.

Until I had brought him to my mother's house" -  
 Jerusalem,

"And into the chamber of her who conceived me" -  
 The sanctuary.



76) The main idea that the winter stands for the gloom and darkness of the Goluth, is in accord with the Targum, Midrash, and the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra. In the following verses, however, the author of the Commentary frees himself from the forced symbolism of the other commentaries (e.g. הַיָּמִים for מִצְרַיִם, or מִצְרַיִם for Moses and Aaron, and the like. Cf. Mid. R. Cant. 2:27) inasmuch as he interprets the description of spring as a poetic metaphor, conveying the idea of blossoming youth in relation to Israel's early life in the land of Canaan. The entire reflection on the period in the desert is less forced than any other passage. The thought follows in logical sequence throughout. It is not original, however, on the part of the author, for in the Targum and in the Midrash, as well as in the other commentaries, הַיָּמִים is taken as a symbol for מִצְרַיִם, the שְׁמֵי שָׁמַיִם for Moses and Aaron (also Joshua is mentioned there), בֵּית אֱלֹהִים and הַמִּקְדָּשׁ as Jerusalem and the sanctuary. Of all the commentaries, that of Rashi is nearest to the author's interpretation of that particular period.

## THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

(Cant. 3:9, 4:12; Comm. 5b-6a)

The Kovod of the Shechinah

"King Sholomo made himself a palanquin

Of the wood of Lebanon."

A sanctuary He built for Himself - Sholom, the God of peace, a sanctuary woven of the radiant beams of his garment - the embodiment of wisdom.

"A garden shut up is my sister,

A spring shut up, a fountain sealed" -

A blossoming garden of exquisite flowers and trees. Flowers? Yea, flowers - the seventy nations on earth. Trees? Yea, trees - the angels in heaven. And fenced is the garden, yea, fenced with Cherubim. And in its center, the fountain of wisdom floweth around which hover the souls of the pious. For this is the fountain of life, ceaseless, eternal life.<sup>77</sup>

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77) The description of the sanctuary followed by the eulogy of the Shechinah, should be understood with the idea of a heavenly temple analogous to the temple in Jerusalem. (See p. 86. ~~מִקְדָּשׁ~~ is variously taken in the Mid. to mean the sanctuary, the ark, the world, the throne of glory, etc. Cf. Mid. R. Cant. 3:15-19. For the interpre-

## RESTORATION OF BAPTISTIAN CAPTIVITY

(Comm. 12:4-5; Deut. 3:25-26)

tation of "Lebanon" as wisdom, see Mid. R. Numb. 12:4 -

לבנון ... בעצת התורה המלכות בדבריה

Cf. Yal. Paragraph 988-

אמי מלבנון ... מבית המקדש על שם שמלכין צונותיהם של ישראל

Cf. Targum on Deut. 3:25-

התק חטוב והלבנון ... טובא טבא הדין ובית מקדשא

In the meaning of the "shut up garden" the author differs from the other commentaries. In the Targum and Midrash as well as in the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra,

בתולות צנועות של ישראל is taken to mean

For the idea of sacrifices in Chapter 4, v. 16 ff. see later p. 104.



## RESTORATION OF BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

(Comm. 21 a-b; Cant. 5:2-6)

"I sleep" - In the Babylonian exile - I sleep -

"But my heart waketh" - to the day of redemption.

Israel through the Kovod

"Hark, my beloved knocketh".

At the heart portals of the prophets He knocketh. At the window of their souls, He knocketh, stirring, urging them to go forth and prophesy : It is time to rise, to ascend from Babylon to Palestine.

For hearest thou- what sayeth the Shechinah?

"Open unto me, my sister, my love,

For my head is filled with dew,

My locks with the drops of the night."

I am weary, sayeth the Shechinah. I am weary of wandering in loneliness. Enough, enough have I waited outside, my head exposed to the dews of the morn, to the rains of the night. Oh, enough, enough of rooflessness.

Then did I say unto myself:

"I have put off my coat,

How shall I put it on?"

The Shechinah long since has disappeared from my midst.

How will I attune myself to Her presence?

Besides -

I have struck deep roots in the ground. I have built houses for myself, built houses, planted gardens, orchards -

"I have washed my feet,  
How shall I defile them?"

Then,

"My beloved put in his hands by the hole of the door"-  
And a fearful decree I perceived. It dawned upon me -  
this is a punishment for not giving ear to the words of  
the prophets. It dawned upon me - this is a punishment,  
a punishment well-deserved.

"And my heart was moved for him.

I rose up to open to my beloved."

Only few, few of us dared fling the doors open; only few.  
And yet -

"My hands dropped with myrrh."

Only a small community ascended to Palestine, but their  
enterprise was crowned with success.

78

78) Here again there is nothing altogether new in  
the interpretation of these verses. With but variations  
as to detail, the essential thought is found in the Mid-  
rash:

אני יושב... מן הקץ ולבי ער בצלילה

INTERPRETATION OF THE SECOND TARGUM.

(Cant. 5:7 - Psalm 31:7)

In the Midrash, these words refer to Israel, here to the Shechinah. Rashi quotes Psikta:

ולבי עז - זה הקב"ה

קול דודי דופק ...

Ibn Ezra: העיר ה' את כוח כחש סלך פנס

On the idea of God waiting outside, see later p. 99ff.

Interesting is the interpretation of טל (in the Targum, also Yal. Cant. 5, paragraph 1074) as the tears

of Israel. As to the other verses, שמעתי את כננתי

is invariably interpreted in the other commentaries

in the sense, "I have strayed after other gods". (Cf.

Ibn Ezra ). The same trend of thought follows through

the succeeding verses. The author of our Commentary

unnecessarily forces into the verse, כחנתי את רגלי

the idea of complacency, which appears altogether awkward

in the light of the following line:

"How shall I defile thee?"

Closest to the interpretation of the author, is that of

Halevi in his "Guzari" 2:25.



## PERSECUTION DURING THE SECOND TEMPLE

(Cant. 5:7 - Comm. 21b)

Israel through the Kovod

"The watchmen that go about the city,

They smote me, they wounded me.

The keepers of the wall took away my mantle from me."

The Hellenistic kings and princes of Syria, their tyr-  
 annous persecutions, their false persuasions, have wound-  
 ed me to the very soul.<sup>79</sup>

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79) This is in accord with Ibn Ezra who interprets  
 מַשְׁמֵרִים as מַשְׁמֵרִים. In the Targum and in the Midrash,  
 מַשְׁמֵרִים still refers to Babylon. Cf. Comm. 28a on Cant.  
 6:11-12, which the author takes to refer to the persecu-  
 tions during the period of the second Temple. The text  
 there is corrupt, and I could hardly get any meaning out  
 of it.

## GOLUTH AND GEULAH

(Cant. 7:12, 8:1, 8-10. Comm. 28b -29a)

The Kovod to the Shechinah

"Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field,  
Let us lodge in the villages."

Since the decree of Goluth is sealed, why resist? Why protest? Why betake Thyself into the hidden chamber of the heaven of heavens? Let Us go forth with Israel into the Goluth. There, too, they will erect temples and synagogues dedicated to Thy name.

Response of the Shechinah

"Oh that thou wert as my brother."

If this is Thine innermost desire, I heartily yield to Thy supplication.

"When I should find thee without" - in the Goluth,

"I would kiss thee" - And thus cleave to Thee,  
even as Thou wouldst cleave to Me.

The Kovod and the Shechinah regarding Israel

"We have a little sister

And she hath no breasts."

Israel in the Goluth, oh how little and belittled she is. Since she hath departed from the land of life,

the fountain of spiritual nourishment is closed to her,

"What shall we do for our sister

In the day when she shall be spoken for?"

In the day when her very existence will become a matter of dispute - What can We do to preserve her, to uphold her, to vest her arduous life with meaning and purpose, to set before her eyes a goal toward which she may strive and live?

"If she be a wall" - persistent in her faith, fortified against her enemies who tempt her persuasively, to forsake the faith of her fathers,

"We will build upon her a turret of silver" - so that no one will be able to do evil unto her.

"If she be a door" - easily penetrable, easily convertible, for ever revolving, then -

"We will enclose her with boards of cedar" - and leave her to her fate.

Response of Israel

"I am a wall

And my breasts like the towers thereof."

I am persistent in my faith; I am fortified against my enemies. Neither am I without a source of nourishment.

The two Torah, the Torah אברהם and the Torah אברהם -



they are my welling fountains of living water.

### Intimations of Redemption

#### The Kovod or Israel to the Shechinah

"Make haste, my beloved,  
And be like to a gazelle, or to a young hart,  
Upon the mountains of spices."

Stay away from the Goluth. Betake Thyself unto Thy  
heavenly abode - the treasure house of all souls.

### Implication

If Thy will it is to commune with Thyself or  
with Thy heavenly assembly - do even as Thou desirest.  
Near is the day when we shall welcome Thy presence in  
the rebuilt Temple of a rebuilt Zion.<sup>80</sup>

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[80) "The interpretation of the first part, namely נחמ  
as symbolizing Israel in Goluth, is found neither in  
the Targum nor in the Midrash. (In the latter, the war  
of Gog Oomogog is read into the verses) With but very  
slight variations, however, the entire exposition within  
the Commentary is found in Ibn Ezra (All references to  
Ibn Ezra's commentary, refer to the third version of the  
commentary) : אם חוקה היא ... אם שמרה עסקה ולא יצאה  
מחדת ... ואם דלת היא ... שלא שמרה חקצות ענתה היא  
ואמרה ! אני חוקה - שומרת דתי הייתי ... חוקה שוכנת ותורה  
שבעל פה

We have sketched with the author, the fixed historical events and institutions in Jewish life. One thought to have omitted a subject which will shed light on the

In the second part, the intimations of redemption are not at all found in the verses. Instead of having the Goluth concealed and the Geulah revealed, we have the reversed order. My interpretation of these verses rests more on the Midrash than on the Commentary. (Mid. R. Cant. 8:15 )

Interpretation of the text.

The text is from the Midrash, and the interpretation is from the Midrash.

The text is from the Midrash, and the interpretation is from the Midrash.

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The text is from the Midrash, and the interpretation is from the Midrash.

We have sketched with the author, the fixed historical events and institutions in Jewish life. One thought we have omitted, a thought which will shed light on the entire trend of the Commentary, that of מלוק הכבוד, the disappearance of the Kovod. The Song of Songs in its literal interpretation, has little or nothing of the sensuous love-complacency, love-satiety. Rather is it the song of love-play, bound up with the painful yearning and craving which knows no fulfillment. This the author has preserved in the allegorical interpretation of the poem. Hardly does Israel gain a firm foothold, then the Shechinah vanishes from its midst. One moment of glory,<sup>81</sup> then long years of longing and yearning. Hence, the

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81) Cf. Comm. 2a תכנין בזהרם...המשל על מלוק הכבוד  
Cf. Comm. p. 5a, on the period in the desert.

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נשתלקה השכינה ונפסקה חובותה

Based on Baba Bathra, 121b. Thus the Shechinah wanders from Sneh to Sinai, from Sinai to the tent of meeting, and is nowhere satisfied, until It will find Its abode in the sanctuary at Jerusalem. Cf. Mid. R. Cant. 2:20-21. Cf. Rosh Hashona, 31a: עשר מסעות נסעה השכינה  
And even from the Temple, the second Temple, the Shechinah



retrogressive reflections which play a prominent role in the Commentary, and somewhat save the unity of the poem.

departs. Comm. p. 21a. Based on Seder Olom Zuta, p. 26. And on the eve of each period of disappearing there comes the ominous foreboding השבעתי אתכם which the author of the Commentary interprets in the sense of

החזרו פן יגרום חטא ותסתלק השכינה  
(Comm. p. 4b) This is a rather novel interpretation of

the verse, for in the Talmud it is always understood in the sense of שלא ירחיקו את הקץ

Cf. Kesuboth 111a.

687 This chapter is based principally on the author's notes on the Zohar, pp. 101-107. In his notes on the Zohar, pp. 101-107. On the Zohar, I, in addition, consulted Gratz, vol. 3, 721. I, 247, pp. 24-25, also pp. 3, 21, 304-307, as well as L. Ginsberg's article on the Zohar, in the J.E. I may also mention "The Zohar" by Martin (S. J. Ginsburg) which I used to a very small extent. Almost all references received from these books, I traced to their original sources.

## Principles and Sources

What a fascinating picture for the poetic eye. Here is man, a little world for himself ( ~~העולם הקטן~~ -microcosm). This little world moves between two colossal worlds, the heavenly realm above and the earthly domain below. What is the relation between these three worlds? Or is there no relation? The latter is hardly thinkable. Look with what lavishness heaven pours down its light and rain and dew upon the earth. Hear with what feverishness cries of the earth mount to the sky. Could man, then, stand, a mere lone isle, between these two mirroring oceans? To be sure, there must be some vital interaction between God,

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82) This chapter is based essentially on Neumark's chapter on the Kabbala, pp. 166-245 plus his notes on the chapter, pp. 246-354. On the Sefiroth, I, in addition, consulted Graetz, chap. 3, Vol. V, Heb., pp. 68-85, also ~~העולם הקטן~~ 3, pp. 355-367, as well as L. Ginsberg's article on the Kabbala, in the J.E. I may also mention "The Kabbala" by Christian D. Ginsburg which I used to a very small extent. Almost all references received from these books, I traced to their original sources.

man, and cosmos.

Hence, the captivating world picture of the Kabbala, based essentially on Biblical, Talmudic, and Midrashic material. In the priestly code, man is spoken of as having been created in the image of God. The rabbis not only cling to the same view as regards man,<sup>83</sup> but go much further. The world of man is only a reflection of the other real world above.

This, fundamentally Platonic, theory of ideas, is crystallized with the rabbis on the subject of the tabernacle. In the Pentateuch (Ex. 25: 8-9, 40) we read: "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them, according to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it. And see that thou make them after their pattern which is being shown thee in the mount." What is meant here by "the pattern which I showed thee"? The rabbis answer: God had shown unto Moses a tabernacle of fire, a Menorah of fire - red fire, green fire, black fire, white fire, commanding: Behold this, and do accordingly - I with My glory and you with

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83) Cf. Mehilta, 6:1

תארום הוא איקון של קרבן



your material. Hence, the idea of a heavenly Jerusalem, analogous to an earthly Jerusalem, a heavenly sanctuary; a heavenly temple analogous to an earthly temple, both of which are dependent upon each other, both of which are situated in the center of the world, both of which are the sanctified abodes of the Shechinah. For thus was the word of God unto Moses: If thou wilt erect on earth that which is in heaven, I shall leave My heavenly assembly and force My divine presence in their midst. 84

the heavenly temple is the tabernacle in Jerusalem, the

84) Cf. Menochoth, 29a: ... הקדש הקדוש למקדש מנורה של אש  
Cf. Mid. R. Numb. 12:10 or Mid. R. Cant. 3:21, where the other quotations occur. See Mid. R. Cant. 3:19-

בית קדש הקדושים של מעלה שהוא מכון כבוד בית קה"ק של מטה  
See also Tosef. Yom Hakip. 3:4 - בין קדש עליון לקדש תחתון  
Sanhed. 37a - Jerusalem believed to be situated geographically in the center of the world. (במרכזו של עולם).  
For the idea of עולם קטן see Aboth d'R. Nathan, chap. 31. On the Mishkan and its vessels, see Sifri - במעלות  
Piska 1a.

Now while the rabbis expounded this theory primarily with a moral aim in view,<sup>85</sup> hardly drawing the logical consequences of Maase Breshith in general, the teachers of the Kabbala accepted it most literally, expounding it at great length, elaborating on it imaginatively, until they could build a whole mystic hierarchy of their own, a unique though not altogether original world picture. As an illustration of Kabbalistic cosmology, we shall translate here an extract from the Commentary: Opposite the heavenly temple is the tabernacle in Jerusalem, the holy of holies where the Shechinah abideth between the two Cherubim. The earthly duplicate of the intermediary world is the tent of meeting which contains the tables, the Menorah, and the golden altar- inner spiritual vessels. For the altar of gold was not meant for sacrifice, but merely for incense offering, which is an ethereal, spiritual substance. Opposite to the altar is the Menorah from whose center, six branches go out, beaten of the same gold. Analogous to the lower world is the altar

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85) This is particularly true of the idea of man having been created in the image of God. Cf. Akiba's statement \_\_\_\_\_

Aboth 3:18

for burnt offerings, situated in the courtyard of the tent of meeting, upon which all other sacrifices are offered.<sup>86</sup> In man, too, we find these three corresponding worlds: the head which is the rational or intellectual world (עולם חכמה), the middle part of the body which is the nutritive or sensible world (עולם חיות), and the lower part of the body which is the natural world (עולם הטבע).<sup>87</sup>

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86) Cf. Cuzari, chap. 26, part 2, where the same distinction between the golden altar and the Mizbach Haoloh is drawn. Also in relation to the Menorah:

למזבח זה שבע ענפים

The six branches plus the center of the Menorah are taken by the author of the Commentary to symbolize the seven lower Sefirot. See later p. 103-4.

87) This is to be taken with the triad division of the Sefirot. See later p. 90f. We may note here that Sabbatai Donola in his חקוני discusses this correspondence between the limbs of man's body and the outer world, the Galgalim and the Mazoloth including their astrological functions, most elaborately. According to Neumark, p. 190, he is the original source from which all drew on the subject.



The most elaborate discussion of ספר יצירה is found in Barzelai's voluminous commentary on the Sefer Yeziroh.<sup>88</sup> In commenting on the Sefer Yeziroh, chapter 4, Mishna 4: "The seven double consonants are analogous to the six dimensions: height and depth, east and west, north and south, and the holy temple that stands in the center which carries them all", he explains:<sup>89</sup> Analogous to the seven double consonants are the six dimensions of the world, of the body of man, and of the sanctuary, their own bodies forming the seventh. The body or center of the

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88) The Sefer Yeziroh (a little book based essentially on the Pythagorean theory, and composed, according to Neumark, in the school of Rav) may be considered as the Torah שכתבה for the Kabbala. Commentaries upon it are numerous. Men like Saadia, Barzelai, Ravad, Azriel, all tried their hands at it. As in the case of Barzelai, however, the commentaries on the Sefer Yeziroh contain valuable material for the Kabbala.

89) Barzelai, p. 231 -ff.

heavenly temple, as well as of the earthly temple, is the holy of holies which is really the body or center of the world. The holy of holies being the abode of the Shechinah, it follows that God is the body and center of the world, that is to say, He embraces the world-space, but the world-space does not embrace Him. ( הוא מקום עליה ואין עליה מקום ) . From this heavenly temple, according to Barzelai, flow all the ontological powers in creation and all providential powers in history, i. e., through the lives of great personalities who incarnate through corresponding virtues, the Sefirot, the channels that conduct the heavenly good. (See later p. 92 )

We shall now interrupt the discussion on Barzelai to which we shall return later, and inquire into these channels, the Sefirot, their order and significance. The Sefirot are ten in number, <sup>90</sup> each emanating from the

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90) Based on Sefer Yeziroh , Chap. 1, Mishna 3 -

עשר ספירות בליקוח, עשר ולא חשע, עשר ולא אחת עשרה

The number "10" proves quite disturbing, especially in the triad division of the Sfirot. Yet do all the Kabbalists cling to it persistently. The reason for this is quite evident. "10" is a convenient symbol - the Ten Commandments, the Ten Maamorothe with which the world

preceding one on the ascending scale up to the first which emanates from the En Sof, identified with God. Together with the En Sof they form an absolute unity, their varying aspects being as the variations of color in light. The ten Sefirot are then grouped accordingly, in triads. The first Sefiroh is called Kether, crown, or Rum Ma'alo, inscrutable height (also Kether and Adom Kadmon).<sup>91</sup> From Kether come two parallel principles: Hochmoh, wisdom (masculine, active) and Binah, intellect (feminine, passive). This first triad constitutes the head (Rosh-Moah), which is surrounded by a halo of mystery ( חלום חסידות ).<sup>92</sup>

was created, the ten Galgalim etc. There is no clear conception among Kabbalists as to the character and essence of the Sefirot. We can hardly tell whether they are to be considered as principles or substances or mere designations. The primary reason for the theory of the Sefirot is to be able to cope with the problem: How could evil come directly from God, the source of absolute goodness and perfection? The Sefirot as intermediaries somehow afford an answer to the question.

91) Some do not count Kether and have Da'ath instead. Those who do count Kether, somehow illimitate Da'ath by some such phrase as אין דא'א'ת Aziluth, par. 14.

92) These Sefirot are concealed and are not to be spoken of freely. Cf. Aziluth, par. 11-14. (Hag. 13a)

האמת נקרא בזה ואלו אמרו במקום אחר על תוכו וזוין לך עסק  
בנסתרות.



This triad forms the intellectual realm (corresponding to Olom Ha-sechel or Olom Muskal ) and implies that knowledge, knower, and known are identical in God. The second triad consists of Chesed, mercy, (masculine, active ), and Din, justice, or Pahad, awe, or Geburah, strength , (feminine, passive) which combine in Tifereth, beauty. This triad constitutes the moral world (corresponding to Olom Hanefesh or Olom Murgosh). The third division counts Nezach, triumph (masculine, active) , and Hod, glory (feminine, passive ), which produce Yesod, foundation ( " Zadik Yesod Olom " ) . The last triad represents dynamic nature (Olom Hateba or Olom Mutbo ). The last of the Sefirot is called Malhuth, dominion. This is the last and all-inclusive channel," the sum of the permanent and immanent activity of all Sefirot.

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93) The Sefirot are also related to great personalities in Jewish history. That is to say, each one of these personalities has a particular Sefiroh incarnate in him, a Sefiroh which corresponds to his most outstanding virtue. The patriarchs, for instance , are denominated " the chariot throne of the Lord" . Cf. Aziluth, paragraph 14. See above p. 13. Cf. Gen. R. 47:8-

מלכות ה' , ה' המלכות

For other Talmudic and Mid. sources, see N. p. 177, f.n. 1.

In relation to the Sefirot, two Kabbalistic principles of paramount importance may here be mentioned, symbolism of letters ( Zerufe Othiot ), and the mystery of sex ( Torath Ha-zivug ), which we shall take up accordingly. By symbolism of letters is meant the combination of letters in the names of God. One of the most important phases of this type of symbolism deals with the seventy-two names of God, a theory to which frequent references are made in our Commentary.

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94) Cf. Comm., second introduction, p. 1a, p. 1b, 2b-3a, 20a, 27b. This theory is based on the three verses from Ex. 14: 19-21.  $\text{וַיִּמָּחַר יְהוָה אֶת-יָם סוּף בְּעָנָן וּבִלְבָּנִים$ , each one of which consists of 72 letters. Through the following combination of the letters in the name, Yhwh, we also obtain the number " 72 " :

$$\begin{aligned} (\text{י} = \text{י} + \text{ו} + \text{ו}) \quad (\text{ה} = \text{י} + \text{ו}) \quad (\text{ו} = \text{ו} + \text{י} + \text{י}) \\ (\text{י} = \text{ו} + \text{ו} + \text{ו} + \text{י} + \text{ו}) \end{aligned}$$

Ibn Ezra in Sefer Ha-shem, p. 10a.

Aside from the number 72, the Kabbalists obtain through various combinations of the letters in the verses of Ex., 72 names of God. For the table of 72 names, see Eisenstein - Ozar Yisroel, Article Shemoth.



Another phase of symbolism of this type is the Torath Ha-shemoth, not letters but names, names that inter-

Cf. Suka, 45a - אני ואלה שמות where Rashi makes reference to the 72 names of God in relation to the three verses in Ex. The author of our Comm. vacillates between the numbers 70- 71- 72- 73 . This may be accounted for by the fact that in the Midrash, only 70 names of God are referred to. Cf. Mid. R. Ex. 28:4 -

קול אחד נחלק ל' קולות והם נחלקים ל' אותות

The seven voices (based on psalm 29) are taken to refer to the Yesod Habinyon, i. e., the seven lower Sefirot which when multiplied by 10, give the number 70. The counting, then, of 70, 71, 72, 73 will depend on the inclusion or exclusion of the three hidden Sefirot. Cf. Comm. 2b -3a on the Torath Ha-koloth. For source in Saadia, see Neumark, p. 172 . Cf. Ba'al Ha-turim on Num. 17:11 -

אמפה לו שבעים איש כנגד שבעים אותות ושבעים שמות  
שיש לו להקב"ה



change symbolically. As a result of this symbolic interchange of names each Sefiroh may be called by various names, or various Sefirot by the same name, thus opening new avenues for mystical interpretations of Biblical passages, especially in relation to the Ta'ame Ha-mizvoth.<sup>95</sup>

The Torath Ha-zivug constituting as it does the very foundation of the Kabbala, cannot be discussed fully within the scope of this paper. Broadly speaking,

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95) Some examples of symbolism of names within the Comm.:

Second introd. p. 5b-

לבנון - חכמה

p. 2b

תורה שבכתב - חלב = כסף

p. 2b

תורה שבעל פה = זרח - יין = דבש

p. 3a

צור חמור - מצולות שהם בכבוד

p. 6a

עמודיו עשה כסף - זה ימינו של הקרב"ה

p. 6a

כפידתו זהב - זה שמאלי

Azriel made extensive use of this type of symbolism. His commentary on the Sefer Yeziroh is based exclusively on the Torath Ha-shemoth. According to Neumark he was the first to relate it systematically to the Sefirot. See Neumark, p. 270.

it is the conception that everything in the world is composed of masculine and feminine elements, the desired union of which is both the aim and the goal of all life.

" All passions good and evil, have their source in sex, for through sex one may either purify and sanctify himself, or defile and contaminate himself - all according to his own will." (Ma'arecheth Shemoth Ha-shovim, p.181)

For the union of sexes is primarily a union of souls, which leads to a still higher union, that of the soul with the Shechinah ( the aim and purpose of all the Mizvoth in the Torah ). In relation to the Sefirot, this teaching is of great significance (only that we will have to change the name of Torath Ha-zivug to Torath Ho-atorah<sup>96</sup>).

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96) Synonyms of which are Maor, Taba'ath, Tifereth, Kav Ha-emzoi , Amuda de Emzoitha . The Torath Ha-atorah is based on Sefer Yeziroh chap. 1, Mishna 3:

עשר ספירות בלימה, חמש כנגד חמש, וברית יחיד מבורה  
במצע, במלת הלשון ובמלת המעור

The term "Atorah" is based by Kabbalists on Cant. 3:11 -

עטרת תפארת לעמו or on the phrase

עטרת תפארת לעמו in Kidush Lebonah .

Cf. Comm. p. 6b, where Atorah and Kether are taken as synonyms. This is found nowhere else, according to Neumark. Cf. p. 198, f.n.



The Atorah is a Sefiroh for itself, i. e., the sixth Sefiroh, Tifereth. Because of its function common to all Sefirot, each Sefiroh is related to the Atorah, and therefore may be called by all the names of the other Sefirot. A common grouping of the Sefirot in relation to the Atorah is: Kether, the first, Tifereth, the sixth, Yesod, the ninth, and Malhuth, the tenth, which together form the middle pillar, Kav Ha-emzoi, through which all the heavenly blessings are conducted to the world.

In our Commentary there is nothing new as to the order and arrangement of the Sefirot. The function of the Sefiroth, however, especially in their relation to the Kav Ha-emzoi, is much stressed throughout the Commentary. The central thought is that of Yenikoh, the drawing forth of life and nourishment to the progenitors (Aboth), the first three Sefirot, which in turn, will transmit them to their offsprings, the seven lower Sefiroth, and they will distribute it through the twelve channels to the entire world. (Comm. 1b, 6b.) "For this world in its entirety is attached to the name of God". (Comm. 4a) "There is not a blade of grass which does not cling to a higher power through which it exists, sprouts,



and grows". (Comm. 26 a ) " All vegetation, all life depends upon a primal source from which it obtains its vitality." (Comm. 12a ) "For just as the garden soil must needs be watered, tilled, and cultivated, so does a people need care and supervision from on high, if it is to live, thrive, and grow." (Comm. 2a)

The general principle is this: When the Kav Ha-emzoi receives nourishment, all the branches of the tree of life are provided for. For that nourishment will be carried to them just as all the vital juices are carried from the brain to the spinal column, and thence distributed to the entire nervous system <sup>97</sup>. (Comm. 4b)

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97) The source for the last idea is the Sefer Habahir, paragraph 37 -   
 ללמוד שחם עיקר חוט השדרה הוא, ומשם   
 שוצב הדור תדיר. ואלמלא חוט השדרה לא יתקיים הדור ובלית   
 לא יתקיים הדור ג. על כן חוט השדרה מביא לכל חיוך מן חמם.

This is interpreted by Neumark to mean that emanation is an eternal and necessary function. For, just as in the human, the body cannot exist without the brain, and inversely, the brain cannot function without the body, so it is with the Adom Ha-kadmon. N. 183

With Graetz we may complete the mental picture of the Sefirot in relation to the universe by summarizing some descriptive phrases as found in the Kabbala: The universe resembles a giant tree with a wealth of branches and leaves whose roots are the Sefirot; or, it is a closely wrought chain the last link of which, hangs on the high world; or, it is a great sea which is constantly filled from an eternally flowing source. These, the Sefiroth - and this, their function, the bridging of heaven and earth.

We may now return to the theory of a heavenly Temple analogous to an earthly Temple with which we started our discussion. We have seen that this theory is of Talmudic origin. Now there is another aspect to this teaching, and it, too, has its source in the Talmud and Midrash. We refer to the idea that since the destruction of the Temple, the heavenly Temple is vacant, so to speak. For God accompanies Israel in Goluth and will not enter the Yerushalayim shel Ma'alo until the Yerushalayim shel Match will be rebuilt.

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98) The chief sources for this idea in the Talmud and



Barzelai who has elaborated in general on the idea of Mikdosh Ma'aloh, has also Kabbalized the idea of Shechintah Be-golutha. After the destruction of the Temple, the channels through which the abundant riches of heaven are conducted to the world, these channels have become obstructed. Hence, the difficulty of receiving heavenly blessings in the Goluth. The same idea is elaborated upon in the Sefer Ha-bahir ( פרק צוונות עמדות לפני Paragraph 37) . As long as Israel is in Goluth, the heavenly good conducted through the first three Sefirot (the Moah), does not reach directly to the seven lower Sefirot.

the Midrash are:

Ex. R. 33:3 (on Cant. 5:2): פתח לי... עד מתי אתה מתחלק בלא בית שראשי נחלא טל... אלא עשו לי מקדש שלא אחיה בחוץ

Lev. R. 31:6 - בין שחבר בית המקדש כביכול מועט הקדש בכך הוא ממלאו שלו

Shohar Tov 122:4 - לא אבוא בירושלם של מעלה עד שאבוא בירושלם של מטה

Cf. Ta'anit 5a on Hosea 9:11 - בקרוב קדש ולא אבוא בעיר  
Also on Psalm 122:3 ירושלם חבנויה...

99) For this particular interpretation of Barzelai and Sefer Ha-bahir, see Neumark, p. 177 and 182.



The same idea occurs within our Commentary. On page 23b we read, "In the days of Goluth when there are no sacrifices, the spiritual elements are drawn to their original sources." This thought shades off into another phase. The Shechinah in Goluth is somehow hampered by the heavenly representatives of the seventy nations. As to what way the Sarim interfere with God, the author is not clear. On page 2a we read בני אמי נחלו בי... שאר השמים  
הממונים על כל אומה ואומה חתקצמו בי ותניעוני ממך (ממלך) (המלכים)  
 Here, then, the Sare Umoth Ha-olom are contesting with God, interfering with His power. On the same page, however, another idea is expressed, namely, that since God is obliged to take care of the other nations, He is unable to watch over Israel. The Sarim, then, would seem to be submissive to God (only urging Him to provide for the peoples they represent). Not only are they submissive, but dependent, that is, the peoples whom they represent are dependent on Israel for their very life. <sup>100</sup> The first notion is repeated,

100) On p. 4b, the author quotes Yeb. 63a -

ונברכו בך כל משפחת האומה (Gen. 12:3) צפילו משפחות  
הדמים באומה אינן מתברכות אלא בשביל ישראל.  
ע' פנים כנגד ע' אומות - אמרת' יוחנן -  
או להם לאומות שאבדו ואין יודעין מה שאבדו בזמן שביקח'ם  
קיים מובח מכפר עליהן ועכשו מי מכפר עליהן.

however, on page 5a - ונסו הצללים ... בפל שר שלחם

This is preceded by the line - עד שיפוח הים ... ושולם  
עון האמורי ויסתלק כחם ועצם גבורתם

This seemingly strange thought, that God should have to contest with and be in fear of the Sarim, occurs in Aziluth, paragraphs 7, 8: כל מקום ששכינת הולכת הולך  
הקדוש ברוך הוא עמה, כדי שלא יבוא כוח הצומות חס ושולם  
יכלה את כונת ישראל

Be this as it may, the Goluth seems to annoy and disturb the heavenly realm. Hence it is necessary to endeavor to draw forth the heavenly blessings, through the obstructed channels.

Here we come to the Kabbalistic view of the Mizvoth. The practical Mizvoth, according to the Kabbala, are not dry abstract formulas, but are full of meaning and purpose. It is through the performance of the Mizvoth that Israel is privileged to affect the Sefirot and make them yield the good of heaven to the entire world. Through the six hundred thirteen Mizvoth, two hundred forty-eight commands of which, are analogous to the two hundred forty-eight organs of the human body, and three hundred sixty-five prohibitions directed toward the three hundred sixty-five veins in the human body, the Adom Ha-tachton becomes intimately attached to the Adom Ha-kadmon and draws from

his analogous body, life and nourishment.<sup>101</sup>

This idea opens up for the Kabbalists, a new avenue in the interpretation of the Mizvoth, i.e., to render them symbolic of the Sefirot. With the application of a little ingenuity, this scheme may accomplish wonders. The priests lifted up their hands during the recitation of the priestly blessing - Why? To direct the ten fingers toward the ten Sefirot.<sup>102</sup> The six branches that go out from the center of the Menorah, plus the center,

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101) Cf. Ma'arecheth Sha'ar Ha-odom , p. 200 ff. Rabbi Simlai's ( Macoth 23b ) well-known enumeration of the Taryag Mizvoth with the symbolism of the two hundred forty-eight commands directed toward the organs of the human body, is accepted by the author. The symbolism of the prohibitions, however, is changed by the author of the Ma'arecheth. Instead of the Yemoth Ha-hamah, he inserts the שֵׁם הַיָּדִים. This is also the view of the author of our Commentary. (Cf. page 19b, correct pagination )

102) Cf. Comm. p. 12a - This is taken from the Sefer Ha-bahir, paragraph 48, 50. The interpretation of the verse וְהָיָה כְּאֵשׁ יָרִים מִשָּׁם אֵת יְדוֹ וּבְרָכָה יִשְׁמַע

also occurs there. Cf. Sefer Yeziroh, chap. 1, Mishna 2 - וְהָיָה כְּאֵשׁ יָרִים מִשָּׁם אֵת יְדוֹ וּבְרָכָה יִשְׁמַע

Cf. Yalkut, Cant. 2: paragraph 985 -

מִזֵּן מִבֵּן הַחֲכָמִים - מִבֵּן אֲזוּלֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁל כְּהֹנִים



point of course to the seven lower Sefiroth (Comm. 4a) , while the four Batim of the Tefilin shel Rosh, point to the four upper Sefiroth (Comm. 10a). Similar hidden meanings can be read into almost every Mizvoh.

The most significant of all the Mizvoh are sacrifices and prayer. Sacrifice was the most effective means of drawing forth heavenly blessings. The very name, Korban, bespeaks its significance, for Korban means to bring near ( Korab ). Through the Korban, the Ruah Hakodesh descends by way of the sacred channels to the world, and thus an intimate tie between the human and the divine is established.<sup>103</sup>

With the destruction of the Temple, the great institution of sacrifice ceased, and prayer took its place. Within the treatise on the Taryag, we find the following brief discussion on the significance of prayer from the standpoint of the Kabbala. Tefilah, synonymous with Avodoh, is defined by the author as the absolute concentration of pure thought on other-worldliness. The great principle of prayer is to become attached to the higher world through the harmonization of

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103) Comm. 20b- 21a - נִיחֻם לְשֵׁן יְכִידָהּ. מִבְּרֹחַ, וְיָכַד וְנָחַת.  
ע"י הַקֶּרְבֵּן חַיָּה קָרַב "יֹכֵל" וְחַמִּימִים בְּצִיּוּרֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְהַקֶּרֶב  
ע"י הַקֶּרֶבן וְחַיָּה דְּאֶקְרִי קֶרֶבן.

Shugart. And it recalls their war, the Zorath, Sakwioth  
(25-34), the semicircle variant (35-44), the principle of  
clarity of matter (45), a reduction of the four square  
base on which, Chapter 5 (45-52), the Diabolical  
and (53), the Diabolical Semigroup of prime 104 in re-  
lation to the six days of creation (55-60), and finally  
a Diabolical Semigroup (61-62) - 105

## CHAPTER IV

## Structure and Value

(A few critical remarks)

The Commentary before us is a book of מגן חסד מגן חסד. It is indeed amazing how much concentrated material the author has embodied within some sixty pages. Before we touch upon the מבנה of the book, let us consider the מבנה, so as to get an idea of its entire structure.

The book as already mentioned, opens with a general foreword in which the author gives a survey of the historical background of the Kabbala. This is followed by three brief introductions, the first two devoted to the Commentary proper, and the last, to the Kabbalistic principles involved within the Commentary (based on chapter 28 of Job). The Commentary proper which then follows, is so inseparably interwoven with the Kabbalistic principles that digressions hardly seem to interrupt the thread of thought. And digressions there are: the Torath Hakoloth (2b-3a), the analogous worlds (3b-4a), the principle of eternity of matter (6a), a discussion of the four empires based on Daniel, Chapter 8 (21b-22a), the Kabbalistic tree (22b), an elaborate discussion of psalm 104 in relation to the six days of creation (23b-27b), and finally a Messianic computation (29a - to end ).



We have omitted the treatise on the Taryag since it forms a separate book within the Commentary (8b-19b).

This treatise is connected with the Commentary proper through the verse - תרי"ג מ"ג (Cant. 4:11). מ"ג suggested the idea of the Talith with 32 threads in its fringes, analogous to the 32 paths of wisdom. (Yeziroh 1:1) The number 613, Taryag, is then obtained through the following combination: The Torah, synonymous with Hochmoh, is based on the 32 paths of wisdom. These paths divide in two (directed toward the positive and negative Mizvoth), and become in all, 64, each of which is then multiplied by ten (Sefirot?), thus yielding the number, 640. By subtracting 27, i.e., the 27 letters of the alphabet, we get the number 613. All the 613 Mizvoth are included in the Ten Commandments, the positive under the term אור, which symbolizes the attribute of love, and the negative under the term שחור, which stands for the attribute of fear. The positive

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105) Based chiefly on Dan. 12:11-13; Zech. 9:9 ff. Because of the involved subject, coupled with the corrupt text, we shall not enter into a discussion of the problem. The date set for the opening of the Messianic Era seems to be 1440.

Mizvoth are superior to the negative, since the attribute of love is higher than the attribute of fear. And yet, the attribute of fear is not to be slighted since it not only leads to love, but is frequently the direct outcome of love. Through the observance of the 248 commands, analogous to the 248 organs in the human body and the 365 prohibitions directed toward the 365 veins within the human organism, man is enabled to subdue the Yezer Ra to the Yezer Tov, and thus becomes purified and sanctified, worthy of bearing the image of the creator. <sup>106</sup>

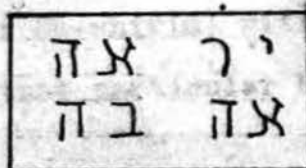
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106) Comm. 7b-8a, 19b-20a. The two attributes of love and fear, attributes of the human as well as of the divine, and their proper relationships, are the keynote to the entire treatise on the Taryag. From these attributes the author derives practically all the Mizvoth, the love of God leading to righteous and pious deeds, and the fear of God guiding the temptations and the passions and the ambitions of the individual in his relation to God and man. This idea is of fundamental importance in Kabbalistic liturgy. It is embodied in the Kabbalistic prayer, "שְׁמַח וְיִרְאָה", composed in the post-Zoharic period (ברכתנו ודחילו ודחילו ודחילו ודחילו). To represent

This is the structure of the book in broad outline. And, now, a few remarks as to its value. By value, we do not mean stylistic qualities which can hardly be estimated due to the extremely corrupted text, but originality on the part of the author. Does the author contribute in any way to the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs? Of what value are the Kabbalistic principles expounded within the Commentary? To what extent is the author original in his treatise on the Taryag? And finally, what are the main sources from which he drew? Not that we can here give a thorough answer to the questions raised - only that we are loathe to pass them without any answer.

Midrash Targum (22)

this union graphically, the words יראת and אהבה are divided, and so placed above each other that they may be read either across or down, as follows:



Cf. Chr. D. Ginsburg, The Kabbala, 122

The symbolism in connection with יראת ואהבה is greatly stressed in the Zohar, especially in relation to the Torath Hazivug.



The Commentary proper, from the standpoint of allegorical exegesis, is not new. The author, himself, lays no claim to originality here. In his introductions, he explicitly states that he bases himself primarily on the various Midrashim, those inexhaustible sources for allegory, and symbolism, and mystic beauty, and depth.<sup>107</sup>

107) Gen. foreword -

ועל עמודי דבריך העמדתי ועל אדני תבואה סמכתי.  
 ויש מהם קבלנו תבואה ויש -  
 מהם מצאנו בגדות ומרשים מפוארים בדברי חכמים.

The latter we may take as an implicit statement by the author that he made use of other Midrashim besides the Midrash Hozith (All the Midrashim are designated by the author under the general name "Midrash Shir Ha-shirim"). That the author had before him the Midrash Zuta or Agadath Shir Ha-shirim, as Shechter calls it, can easily be ascertained by the fact that two quotations (in the name of Midrash Shir Ha-shirim) within the Commentary, come directly from that particular Midrash:

Comm. 1b

Mid. Z. 1:4

{ תביאנו חמלך חרות - אל חרות אן עדן

There is no doubt that the author drew a great deal from the Targum, for the latter is quoted within the Commentary more than once.<sup>108</sup> We may also safely assume that the author consulted the Commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra though neither of them is mentioned within the Commentary.<sup>109</sup>

Comm. 7a

Mid. Z. 3:10

Ag. Shir Ha-shir.

p. 151, Vol. VII

תוכו כצוף אחרת - אלו נפשות של  
צדיקים שהן נמוגות עמו במחוס שלשה  
נכנסו זה לפניהם מזה

Cf. Mid. Zuta -XIII, where the author points out that the same passage is quoted by Nachmanides in his תורת האדם. The Mid. Shir Ha-shirim was most likely, also seen by the author of the Commentary, for the already referred to passage אלו שכי האומות

occurs with slight variation, in that Midrash: וכמו הצללים - יום שאין בו צל לאור"ך כד"ר מר צלם מעליהם (Numb. 14:19)

For Nach. use of the same passage, see above p.

108) 2nd. introd. וגם המתרגום אחז בדרך הזה

P. 1a בהטיבו את הניר' תרגומי' באדלוקות'

P. 21a תרגום ויכר ונחת

109) The few references to Rashi, p. 1a, 7a, are made by the glossators. Why Ibn Ezra is not mentioned by name

And yet, there is something in the Commentary proper which stamps it with a distinct character of its own. The author apparently was very careful and critical in choosing his material. The fact that he frequently deviates from the Midrash and the other commentaries in the interpretation of a verse or passage, part of which he accepts in accord with these commentaries, would psychologically substantiate the inference. For, had he taken his material haphazardly, he would have quoted by "total recall"...For instance, the *ḥayy ḥayy* is mentioned nowhere within the Commentary whereas in the Targum, for example, frequent references are made to it, especially in the first chapter.<sup>110</sup> In general, the Commentary proper is brief, concise, and to the point. Were it not for the peculiar and disturbing form of the dialogue (i.e., between the Kovod and the Shechinah) on account of which a great many descriptive passages of Canticles remain uninterpreted, the

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can easily be surmised in the light of the author's polemic against him. See above p. 26.

110) Why the author omits the *ḥayy ḥayy* is hard to tell, especially since it plays such an important role in Kabbalistic literature.



whole Commentary would appear more logical and more unified. For it is in this respect that the allegorical interpretation has an advantage over the literary or critical interpretation of the Song of Songs. While the latter admits of no unity in the poem, considering the Song of Songs a collection of ancient wedding songs, the former affords an opportunity to unify the various fragments into one fine whole.

Approaching the Kabbalistic principles within the Commentary, we are confronted again with the problem of authorship. If we should persistently cling to the view that the Commentary is of pre-Zoharic origin, its value for the history of Kabbala would be enormous. For, though no one Kabbalistic principle is fully and adequately expounded within the Commentary, the range of principles touched upon is only surpassed by the Zohar. There is hardly a fundamental Kabbalistic principle which is not somehow intimated within the Commentary. To give an example: The מלוא המים, theory of colors, though it has its origin in the Talmud,<sup>111</sup> developed rather late in Kabbalistic literature (It is

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111) Hag. 14a - In the attempt to harmonize the two

greatly stressed in the Zohar). Within our Commentary, this theory is quite frequently referred to (2b, 3b, 5a, 5b, 6a, especially in relation to Shoshanoh - Cf. N. p. 244). Of course there is no such thing as absolute

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contradictory verses of Daniel, 7:9 and Cant. 5:11, in relation to the color of the hair of the Godhead, the rabbis suggest: כאן בישור, כאן בחלקות

which means that the rabbis considered black as the symbol of Din and white as the symbol of Rahamim. We could also mention the תורת אלהים found in the Comm. p. 22b-23a - אילן יש לו לחקרה

This, however, would not prove so much the maturity of Kabbalistic principles within the Comm., for it is only the אילן in its full relation to the Sefirot that came into prominence even later than the תורת אלהים. General reference to the אילן occurs already in the Sefer Ha-bahir from which the author took verbatim, the quoted passage. Cf. Bahir - paragraph 42.

originality. From the discussion of principle we can readily see that the author drew a great deal from almost all preceding Kabbalistic sources, and with special fondness and frequency, from the Sefer Ha-bahir. And yet, that wide range of principles within the Commentary indicates a certain alertness on the part of the author, in the comprehensive grasp of the subject, a certain alertness which amounts to originality.

In relation to both commentary and principles, we wish to call attention to the keen homiletical ingenuity of the author. Certain Biblical passages lend themselves easily to Kabbalistic interpretation, and as such, have gone down as traditional material in the Kabbalistic literature. For instance, some verses of the twenty-eighth chapter of Job are quoted by nearly all writers on the Kabbala. The same is true of psalm 104. The author of our Commentary is the first, to my knowledge, to interpret the entire chapter of Job as well as the entire psalm, Kabbalistically. The ingenuity lies not in the attempt but in the achievement. Barzelai makes the following criticism on a quoted extract from Saadia in which certain Biblical verses are taken in analogy with the days of creation: "The difficulty here is that the Biblical verses are not logically related and have no connection at all with the days



of creation". (p. 93) Not so with our author. The entire psalm is apropos to the story of creation, and the interpretation thereof is so ingenious that unconsciously, a thought suggests itself: "Indeed these verses convey something beyond their literal meaning". Not less ingenious is the interpretation of the entire twenty-eighth chapter of Job into which the author reads a great many Kabbalistic principles without any distortion of the literal content. Indeed, if there is such a thing as Kabbalistic homiletics, the author is one of its exponents.

How about his treatise on the Taryag Mizvoth? Here again, there is no absolute originality from the standpoint of approach. Let us consider the method of approach from three angles: first, the relation of the Taryag to the Ten Commandments; second, the relation of the Taryag to Canticles; and third, the relation of both to the Mizvoh of Zizith. As to the first, already in Philo we read: "Still we must not be ignorant of this fact either, that the ten commandments are the heads of all the particular and special laws which are recorded throughout all the history of the giving of the law related in the sacred scriptures." (On the Ten Commandments, p. 170-paragraph XXIX ) Of Kabbalistic works, Saadia's commentary on the Sefer Yeziroh contains the clearest for-

mulation of this theory: "Analogous to the ten Sefirot are the ten categories of Aristotle, the ten names of God, and the ten commandments." The ten commandments comprise all possible conceptions in the world. The Taryag are related to worldly matters. This being so, it follows that all the 613 Mizvot fall within the ten commandments." (Neumark, p. 172, 252) The same idea is obtained by Saadia through symbolic computations. The letters of the ten commandments are 620 in number. Eliminating from them the two words, לֹא יִשָּׁחַד (i.e., 7 letters) which are superfluous to the understanding of the content, we will obtain the number 613. Hence each letter of the ten commandments stands for one Mizvoh of the Taryag. Following this principle, Saadia groups the Taryag into ten divisions in accordance with the ten commandments.<sup>112</sup>

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112) In the Sefer Ha-bahir, paragraph 48, the same symbolic computation is somewhat modified. Instead of eliminating the words לֹא יִשָּׁחַד, the letter "ו" is not counted throughout the ten commandments (ו because of the word וְ) which gives the same result, i.e. 613 letters.

We hardly need to trace in detail the relation of Taryag to Shir Ha-shirim. The entire Midrash on articles is full of symbolic insinuations as to the Torah, its various synonyms and relations. <sup>113</sup> In the Sefer Ha-bahir, the Torah is spoken of as being the betrothed of God (paragraph 55) . "For whenever man studies the Torah for its own sake, the Torah shel Ma'alah unites with God." (p. 55 <sup>מקושט</sup> of Deut. 33:2 read <sup>מקושט-מקושט</sup>) It is for this reason that Shir Ha-shirim is Kodesh Kodoshim.

As to the emphasis on Mizvath Zizith, we need only mention the Talmudic statement -

שקולת מצות זיזית כנגד כל המצות (29a)

A rather elaborate discussion of Mizvath Zizith especially in its relation to the 32 paths of wisdom, is found in the Sefer Ha-bahir, paragraph 41 - our authentic <sup>114</sup> convenient source.

113) Mid. R. Cant. 1:11

שיר = תק' כנגד שנות אבות ועשרת הדורות

114) In one of the Kabbalistic books the name of which I cannot recall, Zizith is symbolically connected with Taryag as follows:

זיזית = 600 + ת' חושין + ה' קשרים = 613



The method of approach then, is not entirely new with the author. Neither is the idea of interpreting the Mizvoth Kabbalistically, altogether original with him. That has been done before to a great extent, by Sabbatai Donolo in his \_\_\_\_\_ חכמון and also in the Sefer Ha-bahir. And yet we may with Neumark, consider our author the first to treat the subject in a comprehensive and systematic way (Neumark 280). Holding to our assumption that the Commentary is of pre-Zoharic authorship, the influence of the treatise on the Mizvoth upon the \_\_\_\_\_ כע"א מהימנא section of the Zohar is evident. Even the original feature of the \_\_\_\_\_ כע"א מהימנא, namely, the treatment of the laws governing damages and all other money matters in a symbolic manner (Neumark 222), could be traced to the Commentary. (Cf. Comm. 9a

ובגלל ואחבת לבעך כמון - ו"א מצות להרחיק מן

הנזיקין

We shall conclude with the opening sentence of this chapter. The Commentary before us is a book of \_\_\_\_\_ מעט חכמות ורוב חציבות. From the standpoint of Kabbala, it is a mature book; from the standpoint of exegesis, it is an ingenious book; and from the standpoint of the reader, it is a difficult book.

הפך בה והפך בה - דרכי בה