

The Rise of the Holy Spirit in Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah*

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■ Abstract

This article examines the development and transformation of the holy spirit within Jewish mysticism. It begins with a brief analysis of primary trends concerning the holy spirit in biblical, rabbinic, and medieval Jewish texts that served as crucial material for the holy spirit's ascendance in sixteenth-century Jewish mysticism. Following, it examines the writings of leading Jewish mystics: Moses Cordovero, Elijah de Vidas, and Ḥayyim Vital, who resided in the remote Galilean town of Safed. These luminaries each developed the concept of the holy spirit along a spectrum of pneumatic, fusionary, mystical, and revelatory experiences. Ultimately, they transformed the holy spirit into the peak experience of Jewish mystical life—experienced as prophecy, sanctification, and embodiment. This article highlights an important, yet understudied, Jewish mystical phenomenon.

■ Keywords

Jewish mysticism, holy spirit, *ruah haqqodeš*, pneumatology, Moses Cordovero, Ḥayyim Vital, Elijah de Vidas, Jewish thought

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■ Introduction

The holy spirit (*ruah haqqodeš*) has a lengthy and variegated history within Jewish sources, spanning from biblical to modern kabbalistic literature. It is within rabbinic literature that the holy spirit was developed in two specific ways: 1) prophetic or sub-prophetic inspiration; and 2) divine personified metonym.¹ Importantly, sub-prophetic inspiration, primarily through the holy spirit, was an active phenomenon after the cessation of prophecy within certain rabbinic circles.² Within medieval Jewish thought, both philosophical and kabbalistic, we see a further development of the holy spirit. Similar to many key rabbinic terms, the term *ruah haqqodeš* was reinterpreted by Jewish thinkers in new and innovative fashions—at times—even at odds with its original meaning. A common trend found among various medieval Jewish philosophers is the configuration of the holy spirit as an inspirational, sub-divine, and sub-prophetic phenomenon, incorporated into the various metaphysical and cosmological models that held sway in this period. In contrast, Jewish kabbalists reincorporated the holy spirit into the Godhead. Most importantly, it is within this stage of development that the two distinct rabbinic connotations of the holy spirit are more fully integrated, for within the various schemata the holy spirit is associated with the dynamics of divine or metaphysical overflow, which reaches the individual and induces various forms of inspiration and is associated with the divine or metaphysical power. Early kabbalah marks the shift of the term from prophetic and sub-prophetic inspiration to mystical fusion and embodiment with the divine essence. This development finds its fullest articulation in sixteenth-century kabbalah.

In this kabbalah, the holy spirit was no longer understood as merely prophetic inspiration, but rather as one of the key terms used to articulate a more ambitious ideal of mystical integration with the divine in daily life. This is a very intense, personal religious and moral path, in which one must become purified—transform into a vessel, a chariot, or throne—so that the divine, qua holy spirit, may dwell within the human entity. While much may be said concerning the development of the holy spirit in medieval Jewish philosophy, I will focus in the coming pages on

¹ The holy spirit appears in biblical literature (Ps 51:13; Isa 63:10–11) and Second Temple literature; see at length John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First-Century Judaism* (AGJU 29; Leiden: Brill, 1997); idem, *Of Two Minds: Ecstasy and Inspired Interpretation in the New Testament World* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1999); idem, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009). Concerning its possible binitarian understanding, see Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) 42–54; idem, *Two Gods in Heaven: Jewish Concepts of God in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) 25–32.

² Ephraim E. Urbach, *The World of the Sages: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988) 9–49 (Hebrew); Frederick E. Greenspahn, “Why Prophecy Ceased,” *JBL* 108 (1989) 37–49; Benjamin D. Sommer, “Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation,” *JBL* 115 (1996) 31–47; L. Stephen Cook, *On the Question of the Cessation of Prophecy in Ancient Judaism* (TSAJ 145; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

the Jewish sources, which incorporated various Islamic and, possibly, Christian ideas, that acted as the backdrop for these kabbalists.

■ The Holy Spirit in Medieval Jewish Thought

The holy spirit represented a problem for several medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Saadia Gaon and Moses Maimonides. These thinkers were keenly aware of the possible binitarian connotations of such an entity. This conception of the holy spirit had always been present within Jewish literature, as Daniel Boyarin wrote: “Binitarian thought had not been (nor ever would be) entirely exiled from the religious life of Jewry.”³ Saadia would devalue the holy spirit as a created entity synonymous with God’s glory (*kabod*),⁴ while Maimonides relegated it to the status of another metaphor for the functionality of the metaphysical overflow (Ar. *fayd*; Heb. *šefa*).⁵ While Saadia’s interpretation is more directly in connection to Christian thought, Maimonides’s conception may be applicable as a critique of Christianity, but he was in greater dialogue with Islamic philosophical thought and internal Jewish developments.⁶ The primary interlocutors for Maimonides in this regard were Alfarabi, Avicenna, and al-Ghazālī. It is within their philosophical systems that the holy spirit is reincorporated within a metaphysical framework and that Maimonides finds himself negotiating its meaning within his Jewish context.⁷

In contrast, Judah Halevi, an important medieval Jewish philosopher, was unconcerned with the implications of the holy spirit as a somewhat divine entity. Combining Shīʿī Imām,⁸ Ismāʿīlī, and Sufi thought, Halevi conceived of the holy spirit as enwrapping the individual Jewish person and being in commune with their soul.⁹ Furthermore, Halevi would incorporate the holy spirit into the astral-magical

³ Daniel Boyarin, “Is Metatron a Converted Christian?,” *Judaïsme Ancien/Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013) 13–62, at 52–53.

⁴ See Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2001) 56–90, esp. 70; Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 108–9.

⁵ See Adam Afterman, “Moses Maimonides on the Holy Spirit,” *JR* 100 (2020) 159–88.

⁶ For Saadia, see Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 78. For Maimonides’s criticism of Christianity, see Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (trans. Shlomo Pines; 2 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 1:50, 111.

⁷ See Afterman, “Moses Maimonides on the Holy Spirit,” 168–88.

⁸ See Ehud Krinis, *God’s Chosen People: Judah Halevi’s Kuzari and the Shīʿī Imām Doctrine* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014) 30–31, 119–122, esp. 154.

⁹ See Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi’s Kuzari* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 151–52. Also, see Judah Halevi, *Sefer Hakkuzari* (Kiryat Ono: Maḥon Mishnat ha-RaMBa”M, 2005) 2:4, 4:25. For more on Halevi’s use of various Islamic sources, see Shlomo Pines, “Shīʿite Terms and Concepts in Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*,” *JSAI* 2 (1980) 165–251; Ehud Krinis, “The Arabic Background of the *Kuzari*,” *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 21 (2013) 1–56; Sara Sviri, “Spiritual Trends in Pre-Kabbalistic Judeo-Spanish Literature: The Cases of Bahya Ibn Paquda and Judah Halevi,” *Donaire* 6 (1996) 78–84. Also, of note is the Jewish thinker Bahya ibn Paquda, who incorporated many Sufi elements into his thought; see Diana Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and*

conception of *ruḥaniyyot*—spiritual forces that are brought down from the supernal realms.¹⁰ This conceptualization of spiritual overflow would be further emphasized in kabbalistic discourse.¹¹

Both Judah Halevi's correlation of the holy spirit with a spiritual divine substance (Ar. *al-ruhani*; Heb. *ruḥani*) as well as Maimonides's conceptualization of it as a metaphor for the functionality of the metaphysical overflow (Ar. *fayḍ*; Heb. *šefa'*) were of crucial importance for its later kabbalistic rehabilitation.¹² It is within this context that the holy spirit undergoes the necessary transformation through which it is reincorporated into the kabbalistic Godhead. The Hebrew terms *ruḥaniyyut* (spirituality), *koah* (power), and *šefa'* (overflow), together with their prophetic and sub-prophetic connotations, were incorporated within the kabbalistic systems of thought, becoming central pillars within the dynamics of the Godhead, which interacted with the physical and human world through the divine overflow.

We find that within kabbalistic sources the holy spirit was understood as divine and a central power of the Godhead. Fundamental to most early kabbalistic systems was the idea that the divine overflows and emanates its essence and power into the mundane realm.¹³ The Godhead was understood to be radiating with divine energy, which emanated from its highest persona or divine name, through its various *sefirot* or divine names, until it reached the mundane realm. It is important to note that

Mysticism in Bahya Ibn Paqūda's "Duties of the Heart" (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Elijah de Vidas references this thinker numerous times in his work; see Elijah de Vidas, *Re'šit Ḥokmah Haššaleyḥ* (3 vols.; ed. Ḥayyim Y. Waldman; Jerusalem: Or Hamussar, 2000) 3:386, index, s.v. "Ḥoḥot halleḇaḥot."

¹⁰ See Shlomo Pines, "On the Term Ruḥaniyyot and Its Sources and on Judah Halevi's Doctrine," *Tarbiz* 57 (1988) 511–40 (Hebrew); Dov Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought* (BRLA 20; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 1–9.

¹¹ Concerning this later influence, see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 65–74, 156–60, 179–80; Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism: From Rabbinic Literature to Safedian Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005) 105–107, 176–79, 187–98 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280–1510: A Survey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) 284–85; idem, *Vocal Rites and Broken Theologies: Cleaving to Vocables in R. Israel Ba'al Shem Tov's Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 2020).

¹² Concerning the complicated relationship between Jewish philosophy and kabbalah, especially that of Maimonides, see Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," in *Studies in Maimonides* (ed. Isadore Twersky; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 31–81; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Philosophy and Kabbalah, 1200–1600," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 218–57; Elliot R. Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical "Wirkungsgeschichte" in Different Cultural Contexts* (ed. Görgo K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse; Würzburg: Ergon, 2004) 209–37; idem, "'Via Negativa' in Maimonides and Its Impact on Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008) 393–442; Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (SJJP 18; Leiden: Brill, 2012); Adam Afterman, "And They Shall Be One Flesh": *On the Language of Mystical Union in Judaism* (SJJP 26; Leiden: Brill, 2016) 106–20.

¹³ See at length, Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub, 2005).

pneumatic imagery was not the only one employed by the kabbalists to describe such dynamics; due to Neoplatonic influences, imagery of light and water was also significant.¹⁴ However, pneumatic imagery was particularly employed for discussions of mystical integration between the human and divine, since the spirit was conceived as being mutually shared by these entities.¹⁵ The shift of the term *ruah haqqodeš* in thirteenth-century theosophical kabbalah from an emphasis on prophecy and sub-prophecy to the mystical reception of the indwelling of the holy spirit is no less than a Jewish spiritual revival—the possibility of the divine dwelling within the perfected individual.

A key source for such development may be found within the thirteenth-century kabbalistic readings of *Sefer Yeširah*, especially that of Asher ben David and the Catalan kabbalists.¹⁶ Of note is again the binitarian aspects of this text.¹⁷ Within these writings the holy spirit is understood as being the source of divine emanation and vitality, the overflow that flows through the Godhead, and the sefirotic vessels that hold divinity. Furthermore, a correlation is formed between the holy spirit emanating through and being contained by the divine vessels and the human voice (*qol*) receiving the holy spirit as a sub-prophetic inspiration.¹⁸

Another central source is that of thirteenth-century kabbalist Abraham Abulafia's prophetic-ecstatic kabbalah. Based on Maimonides's philosophical thought, Abulafia developed a strong mystical interpretation of Judaism, in which the reception of the holy spirit was perceived in both prophetic and mystical terms. The reception of the holy spirit is both a moment of mystical fusion with the divine

¹⁴ See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 85–124; Haviva Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind: A Comparative Study in the Writings of the Earliest Kabbalists* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001) (Hebrew); eadem, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub, 2002) 91–113, 163–67 (Hebrew); Adam Afterman, *Devequt: Mystical Intimacy in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Los Angeles: Cherub, 2011) 57–62, 93–101, 200–210 (Hebrew); idem, “And They Shall Be One Flesh,” 79–101; Sarah Pessin, “Islamic and Jewish Neoplatonisms,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism* (ed. Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin; London: Routledge, 2014) 541–58, at 549–50.

¹⁵ See Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, 137–208; Moshe Idel, “Nishmat Eloha: On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and His Schools,” in *Life as Midrash: Perspectives in Jewish Psychology* (ed. Shahr Arzy, Mordechai Fachler, and Batya Kahana; Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2004) (Hebrew).

¹⁶ See A. Peter Hayman, *Sefer Yešira: Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary* (TSAJ 104; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) §10; 80. See also Tanja Werthmann, “‘Spirit to Spirit’: The Imagery of the Kiss in the Zohar and Its Possible Sources,” *HTR* 111 (2018) 586–609, at 597.

¹⁷ See Ronit Meroz, “Between Sefer Yeširah and Wisdom Literature: Three Binitarian Approaches in Sefer Yeširah,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18 (2007) 101–42, at 105–27.

¹⁸ Eitan P. Fishbane, “The Speech of Being, the Voice of God: Phonetic Mysticism in the Kabbalah of Asher Ben David and His Contemporaries,” *JQR* 98 (2008) 485–521, at 517. Also, see Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, 91–136; R. Asher ben David: *His Complete Works and Studies in His Kabbalistic Thought* (ed. Daniel Abrams; Los Angeles: Cherub, 1996) 190–97 (Hebrew); Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary*, 85–99; Efraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature* (ed. Joseph Hacker; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1976) 310–15 (Hebrew).

substance and a moment of prophetic revelation—in the fullest sense.¹⁹ Likewise, Abulafia was influenced by *Sefer Yeširah*, and, as Moshe Idel has demonstrated, his reading of this text emphasized not only the binitarian aspects but even the potential trinitarian readings of this work.²⁰

Last, the *Zohar* focuses on the dynamics of divine overflow (*šefa'*), which carries divine blessings through the Godhead to the mystic.²¹ The holy spirit is contextualized within this greater dynamic, although the *Zohar* also discusses the holy spirit (Aram. *ruḥa' deqqudeša'*) in a specific context. On the Sabbath we are taught that the holy spirit is the additional soul as well as the vitality through which man impregnates his wife and thereby conceives a holy son. This infusion of spirit creates a unique temporal moment in which the eschatological future is experienced in the present;²² conjugal union is transformed into mystical union.²³ Within this discussion it is difficult not to be aware of the Christian undertones. As many scholars have demonstrated,²⁴ the *Zohar* is engaged in a deep encounter with Christianity. The passage described here of the three-person relationship between a man, his wife, and the holy spirit, which begets a son,²⁵ cannot be discounted as oblivious to similar Christian conceptions. However, it remains unclear to what

¹⁹ See Adam Afterman, “From Prophetic Inspiration to Mystical Integration: The Holy Spirit in Medieval Jewish Thought,” in *Prophecy and Reason in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (ed. Heiko Schulz; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

²⁰ See Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London: Continuum, 2007) 315–18; however, it should be noted that this reference is marginal within the Abulafian corpus.

²¹ The gendered rendering of *šefa'* should be noted: see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 45, 63–66, 79–122; idem, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) 69, 269–71, 310–23. For *ruah haqqodeš* in this sense, see Moses Cordovero, *Sefer Hazzohar 'im Peyruš 'Or Yaqar* (23 vols.; Jerusalem: Aḥuzat Yiśra'el, 1962–1995) 3:58.

²² See Elliot K. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) 131–36. See also Moshe Idel, “Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Sabbath: Idea, History, Reality* (ed. Gerald J. Blidstein; Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2004) 57–93; Adam Afterman, “Time, Eternity, and Mystical Experience in Kabbalah,” in *Time and Eternity in Jewish Mysticism: That Which Is Before and That Which Is After* (ed. Brian Ogren; Studies in Jewish History and Culture 48; Leiden: Brill, 2015) 162–75; idem, “And They Shall Be One Flesh,” 162–67, 211–18.

²³ Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 190–260; Afterman, “And They Shall Be One Flesh,” 202–6; idem, “On Mystical Union in the Zohar,” *Kabbalah* 44 (2019) 175–208 (Hebrew).

²⁴ See Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 139–61; Jonatan M. Benarroch, “‘Son of an Israelite Woman and an Egyptian Man’—Jesus as the Blasphemer (Lev 24:10–23): An Anti-Gospel Polemic in the Zohar,” *HTR* 110 (2017) 100–124; idem, “God and His Son: Christian Affinities in the Shaping of the Sava and Yanuka Figures in the Zohar,” *JQR* 107 (2017) 38–65; Ellen D. Haskell, *Mystical Resistance: Uncovering the Zohar's Conversations with Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Elliot R. Wolfson, “Judaism and Incarnation: The Imaginal Body of God,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al.; Boulder: Westview, 2000) 239–54.

²⁵ For more on this type of relationship, see Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, *Holiness and Transgression: Mothers of the Messiah in the Jewish Myth* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017) 123–209.

extent it is polemical with actual Christian doctrine or with imagined Christianity or if it is truly polemical. If polemical, it may be read in a variety of ways, such as: only through the keeping of the commandments—not their abolition—can the holy spirit bring forth a holy son; a child can only be born through human intercourse—while the divine can emanate from itself into the child, the divine alone cannot impregnate a human woman; while Christian religious life calls for celibacy to attain the holy spirit, in the carnal Jewish religiosity it is precisely the opposite;²⁶ or, last, that Jesus being conceived by the holy spirit is not unique, but rather, within Jewish religious life any Jew can be imbibed with the holy spirit in utero.

A final note that must preface our discussion of the holy spirit in sixteenth-century kabbalah is the development of a pneumatic worldview among Iberian kabbalists in the fifteenth century, as expressed through such works as *Sefer Hammešib* and *Kaf Haqqeṭoret*,²⁷ as well as the incorporation of older traditions proposed by such works as *Sefer Hattemunah*, *Sefer Happeḥeli 'yah*, and *Sefer Haqqanah*.²⁸ All of these works, but especially *Sefer Hammešib* and *Kaf Haqqeṭoret*, have a renewed focus on revelation through the holy spirit and magiddim.²⁹ As R. J. Zwi Werblowsky noted, this development undoubtedly had ramifications for sixteenth-century Safedian kabbalists.³⁰

²⁶ See Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 307–22. See also Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 31–60, 134–66.

²⁷ Concerning these works, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941) 247–48; Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 126–52.

²⁸ See Moshe Idel, “The Kabbalah in Byzantium: Preliminary Remarks,” in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures* (ed. Robert Bonfil, Oded Irshai, Guy G. Stroumsa, and Rina Talgam; Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Literature 14; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 659–708, at 679–88, and the sources cited therein. On *Sefer Happeḥeli 'yah* and *Sefer Haqqanah*, see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 125; idem, “R. Joseph Karo and His Revelations: Or the Apotheosis of the Feminine in Safedian Kabbalah” (Tikvah Working Paper 05/10; New York: Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization, 2010; <http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/TikvahWorkingPapersArchive/WP5Idel.pdf>) 1–38, at 5–10; idem, “The Kabbalah in Byzantium,” 693–99; idem, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 289–92.

²⁹ Concerning maggidism, see J. H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) 28–29; Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 63–71. Specifically concerning Joseph Karo’s maggid, see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977); Mor Altshuler, “Prophecy and Maggidism in the Life and Writings of R. Joseph Karo,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 33 (2006) 81–110; Rachel Elior, “Joseph Karo and Israel Ba’al Shem Tov: Mystical Metamorphosis—Kabbalistic Inspiration, Spiritual Internalization,” *Studies in Spirituality* 17 (2007) 268–84; Idel, “R. Joseph Karo and His Revelations,” 1–38.

³⁰ See R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, “Mystical and Magical Contemplation: The Kabbalists in Sixteenth-Century Safed,” *HR* 1 (1961) 9–36, at 19. Also of note is Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 83.

■ The Pneumatic Worldview of Sixteenth-Century Safedian Kabbalists

Sixteenth-century Safed of the Ottoman Empire witnessed a renaissance of kabbalistic thought. Due to a variety of factors, many of the greatest kabbalists of the era arrived in the Galilee and formed kabbalistic confraternities to progress their endeavors.³¹ Their members included such luminaries as Joseph Karo, Solomon Alqabes, Moses Cordovero, Moses Alshek, Abraham Galante, Eleazer Azkiri, Hayyim Vital, and Isaac Luria.³² This project was greatly enhanced through the printing of the *Zohar* in Cremona (1558) and Mantua (1558–1560).³³ Although these kabbalists still utilized their own manuscripts, the printed edition of the *Zohar* provided a more rigid framework for their conceptualization of zoharic kabbalistic doctrine.³⁴ It is within this atmosphere that we find the monumental undertaking of Moses Cordovero, who set out systematically to construct kabbalistic doctrine based on earlier traditions and especially that of the *Zohar*.³⁵ Alongside

³¹ See Moshe Idel, “On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 3 (1998) 145–73; Roni Weinstein, “Kabbalistic Innovation in Jewish Confraternities in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” in *Faith’s Boundaries: Laity and Clergy in Early Modern Confraternities* (ed. Nicholas Terpstra, Adriano Prosperi, and Stefania Pastore; Europa Sacra 6; Turnhout: Brepols, 2012) 234–47; idem, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016) 83–91.

³² For more on the Safedian personalities of this era, see Abraham David, *To Come to the Land: Immigration and Settlement in 16th-Century Eretz-Israel* (2nd ed.; Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010) 95–172; Eli Yassif, *The Legend of Safed: Life and Fantasy in the City of Kabbalah* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019). For more on sixteenth-century Safed, see Rachel Elijior, “Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century,” *REJ* 145 (1986) 35–49; R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, “The Safed Revival and Its Aftermath,” in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present* (ed. Arthur Green; London: Routledge, 1986) 7–33; Shaul Magid, “Conjugal Union, Mourning and ‘Talmud Torah’ in R. Isaac Luria’s ‘Tikkun Hazot,’” *Daat* 36 (1996) XVII–XLV; Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); idem, “New Approaches to the Study of Kabbalistic Life in 16th-Century Safed,” in *Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah: New Insights and Scholarship* (ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn; New York: New York University Press, 2011) 91–111; Pinchas Giller, *Kabbalah: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) 62–83; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Asceticism, Mysticism, and Messianism: A Reappraisal of Schechter’s Portrait of Sixteenth-Century Safed,” *JQR* 106 (2016) 165–77; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 126–82, 308–20; Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 1–118. Other relevant secondary literature will be cited in subsequent notes.

³³ See Boaz Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky: Chapters in the Reception History of the Zohar and the Construction of Its Symbolic Value* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute/Bialik Institute, 2008) 84–139 (Hebrew); Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010) 262–64. Concerning the surrounding controversy, see Lawrence Fine, “Dimensions of Kabbalah from the Spanish Expulsion to the Dawn of Hasidism,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Early Modern World, 1500–1815* (ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 437–74, at 452–57.

³⁴ Concerning their hermeneutic practices, see Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of the Kabbalah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁵ See, most recently, concerning Cordovero’s zoharic textual practices, Daniel Abrams, “From

his organizational endeavors, Cordovero, and his students, invested great efforts within a new genre, that of kabbalistic-musar literature.³⁶ This literature was, to an extent, a popularization of kabbalistic doctrine—an exotericization of the esoteric. It was still rooted within kabbalistic thought. However, kabbalistic sources were buttressed by other rabbinic sources, which helped simplify these esoteric concepts. The various compositions focused primarily on how one is to act, without focusing on the theurgic or mystical effects and without discussing the more theoretical and technical details of the theosophical-theurgical aspects of the kabbalistic systems. This is not to say that this literature is entirely bereft of these elements;³⁷ rather, only someone with a kabbalistic background would pick up on those topics, while most readers would see it as closer to conduct literature.³⁸

Alongside the political upheavals of the nomadic Spanish Jews, the technological advancement of the printing press, and the encyclopedic drive of these kabbalists, we would do well to pay attention to the cultural and religious environment of Safed and its inhabitants. In this period and place many *conversos* had begun to come back to the fold. Already in the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had gained a reputation as being more tolerant of Jews than Christian Europe.³⁹ These *ex-conversos* may have brought with them certain Christian sensibilities.⁴⁰ Likewise, Safed itself was not only inhabited by Jews. As is gleaned from Ḥayyim Vital's journal, Muslims not only dwelled there, but there was even dialogue concerning spiritual matters.⁴¹ While these possible influences should not be discounted, in the texts that we will discuss below, it would be more prudent to look for these influences in the medieval Jewish sources discussed above. While medieval Jewry was in close contact with other theologies and philosophies, within the intellectual-cultural milieu of Safed we find these kabbalists to be less concerned with either

Manuscript to Print: The Production of a Standardized Text of *Sefer Ha-Zohar* in Mantua (1558–1560),” *Kabbalah* 44 (2019) 73–116.

³⁶ Concerning this literature, see Patrick B. Koch, *Human Self-Perfection: A Re-Assessment of Kabbalistic Musar-Literature of Sixteenth-Century Safed* (Los Angeles: Cherub, 2015), and the sources cited therein.

³⁷ See especially, Mordechai Pachter, *Roots of Faith and Devekut: Studies in the History of Kabbalistic Ideas* (Los Angeles: Cherub, 2004) 235–316; Adam Afterman, “‘As in Water, Face Reflects Face’: Mystical Union in *Sefer Reshit Chochmah*,” *Daat* 84 (2017) 155–82 (Hebrew); idem, “The Mysticism of the Tetragrammaton and the Holy Spirit in the Book *Reshit Chochmah*,” *Daat* 85 (2018) 341–63 (Hebrew).

³⁸ See Zeev Gries, *Conduct Literature (Regimen Vitae): Its History and Place in the Life of Beshtian Hasidism* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989) (Hebrew).

³⁹ See Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos*, 20–21.

⁴⁰ Weinstein, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity*, 142–65.

⁴¹ See Chajes, *Between Worlds*, 101–15. Concerning possible Sufi influences, see Paul B. Fenton, “The Ritual Visualization of the Saint in Jewish and Muslim Mysticism,” in *Entangled Hagiographies of the Religious Other* (ed. Alexandra Cuffel and Nikolas Jaspert; Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019) 193–231, at 213–24; Avraham Elqayam, “Nudity in Safed in the Sixteenth Century: Between Hasidism and Deviance,” *Kabbalah* 30 (2013) 303–20 (Hebrew), and the sources cited therein.

endeavor. Following Moshe Idel's panoramic approach,⁴² we may discern that the more adjacent sources of influence were not necessarily the most immediate.

The ascendancy of the holy spirit in sixteenth-century kabbalah comes about through the unprecedented crystallization of disparate, scattered notions found in various medieval Jewish philosophical and mystical texts—reflecting Islamic and Christian influences—transforming it into a full-fledged mystical path. The holy spirit was exemplary for the promotion of both the ideals of mystical fusion and revelation. Its rabbinic understanding as inspiration and prophecy was combined with medieval conceptualizations of embodiment and fusion. Within this new amalgamation, the holy spirit was now a religious path leading an individual to a state of mystical fusion with the divine and, consequently, mystical revelation within the human being through the overflowing divine “spirituality” and the indwelling of the holy spirit.

In Cordoverean kabbalah—especially within the kabbalistic-musar (ethical) literature written primarily by Cordovero's disciples⁴³—we find an emphasis on the process of conjunction (*debevyqut*) through the drawing down of divine influx (*šefa'*), spirituality (*ruḥaniyut*), and the holy spirit (*ruaḥ haqqodeš*), thereby leading to a pneumatic life of ongoing integration of the individual and God. Indeed, as R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Mordechai Pachter have demonstrated, it is within kabbalistic-musar literature that the mystical values of *debevyqut* and living a pneumatic life are highlighted.⁴⁴ In contrast, the more advanced literature investigates the complex theosophical structures and their relation to each element of sacred theurgy.

The cleaving of the human to the divine influx—conceptualized as a pneumatic divine substance—was configured as the height of religious and human existence, ultimately leading to the ontological fusion of the human with the highest powers of the divine.⁴⁵ The rise of pneumatic mysticism ultimately developed into a mystical path focusing both on the spiritual and the corporeal, for the spirit becomes incarnated and embodied within man.⁴⁶ Accordingly, this is a very complex process of both mystical and ritualistic performance, in which commandments and Torah

⁴² See Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 9–15.

⁴³ See Koch, *Human Self-Perfection*, 1–45.

⁴⁴ See Werblowsky, “Mystical and Magical Contemplation,” 9–36; Pachter, *Roots of Faith and Devequt*, 235–316.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that alongside pneumatic imagery, Cordovero and others also utilize that of light. Interestingly enough, the image of water is not utilized, unless we submit that the term *šefa'* itself is such an image; see Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism*, 73–104. This pneumatic power is referred to by Cordovero through a variety of images, of which the holy spirit or spirit of holiness is but one.

⁴⁶ Concerning the turn to the self, see Jonathan Garb, *Yearnings of the Soul: Psychological Thought in Modern Kabbalah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) 22–46. Also see Eitan P. Fishbane, “A Chariot for the Shekhinah: Identity and the Ideal Life in Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” *JRE* 37 (2009) 385–418; J. H. Chajes, “Accounting for the Self: Preliminary Generic-Historical Reflections on Early Modern Jewish Egodocuments,” *JQR* 95 (2005) 1–15. Concerning the incarnational aspects, see Wolfson, “Judaism and Incarnation,” 239–54; idem, “The Body in

study have extraordinary purpose and meaning. This path usually includes some forms of mild to intense asceticism meant to transform the harsh material body into a translucent vessel for the indwelling or incarnation of the spirit. In the following sections, I will be focusing on the function of the holy spirit in the teachings of Moses Cordovero, Elijah de Vidas's *Re'šit Hoḳmah*, and Ḥayyim Vital's *Ša'arey Qeduššah*.

A. The Holy Spirit (Ruah Haqqodeš) and Spirit of Holiness (Ruah Haqqadoš) in Cordovero's Thought

While we find in Cordovero's kabbalistic thought a highly developed pneumatic system—spanning from a pneumatic theosophy to a pneumatic anthropology—in which the terms *šefa'* and *ruḥaniyut* are used widely to refer to “pneumatic continua” spanning between man and the Godhead, thus facilitating a powerful mystical system of pneumatic fusion, there is a slightly different picture concerning the role of the term “holy spirit.”

Cordovero explains that the sefirotic theosophy is paralleled by one of divine names. These divine names serve as “palaces (*heḳalot*) for the *ruḥaniyut* (spirituality) of the *sefirot* and this *ruḥaniyut* is a garment (*lebuš*) for their inner *ruḥaniyut*, which is hinted within the tetragrammaton that is in every single *sefirah*.”⁴⁷ The entire Godhead contains an inner stratum of spirituality—housed in palaces and divine names. The letters of the divine names act in a talismanic fashion, in which they can hold this pneumatic substance.⁴⁸ We find a similar role played by *šefa'*.⁴⁹ The overflow is what enlivens and vitalizes the entire chain of being perpetually at every moment. This overflow is understood as a vital link to which the mystic can cleave in order to draw down the hidden gnosis.⁵⁰

Needless to say, within Cordovero's kabbalistic mystical system the divine overflow plays a key role in the inner dynamics of the Godhead and its relation to the sub-divine realms, including the human. These pneumatic entities of *ruḥaniyut* and *šefa'* allow for peak fusionary mystical experiences for the devotee. By the close of the sixteenth century the practice of drawing down the divine pneumatic power and integrating the holy spirit into one's corporeal flesh had become one

the Text: A Kabbalistic Theory of Embodiment,” *JQR* 95 (2005) 479–500; idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, 190–260.

⁴⁷ See Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Cracow/Nowy Dwor: Isaac ben Aaron Prostitz, 1591) 1:10;10b. References are as follows: gate, chapter, and folio. Concerning the physical world, see idem, *Sefer Hazzohar 'im Peyruš 'Or Yaqar* 12:180. For more on the *sefirot* in Cordovero's thought, see J. H. Chajes, “Spheres, *Sefirot*, and the Imaginal Astronomical Discourse of Classical Kabbalah,” *HTR* 113 (2020) 230–62.

⁴⁸ See above, n. 11. See Cordovero, *Sefer Hazzohar 'im Peyruš 'Or Yaqar* 8:107: “This is the science (*hoḳmat*) of lowering the stars and this is the science of talismans, and it is also foreign worship (*'avodah zarah*).”

⁴⁹ See Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* 6:8;38b.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31:10;209a.

of the most advanced forms and goals of mystical Jewish religious life.⁵¹ While Cordovero, more than any other kabbalist of the time, developed pneumatic kabbalah, he was careful not to use the term “holy spirit” as its primary term of reference. Instead, he employed the terms spirituality and spirit of holiness, possibly due to the prophetic overtones associated with the term “holy spirit.” I suggest that he purposely did this so as not to equate his pneumatic mysticism exclusively with prophetic mysticism. While some kabbalists were drawn to its sub-prophetic undertones, others were aware of its overtly strong prophetic overtones and were hesitant to give the term primacy in order not to identify their mystical path as “prophetic.” Maimonides’s famous typology of the holy spirit was critical in this respect, since it provided a framework in which this term is on the border between prophetic and sub-prophetic phenomena. Interestingly enough, we may witness within Cordovero’s work both an indebtedness to Maimonides concerning the term *šefa*’, which he highly expanded, and to the holy spirit, which he seemingly situated as Maimonides did in *Guide* 2:45.⁵²

In *Sefer Ha’ellimah* Cordovero creates his own typology of prophecy.⁵³ The highest level is that of Moses,⁵⁴ the next level is that of the other prophets, and the third is that of the holy spirit.⁵⁵ This list clearly echoes that of Maimonides—situating the holy spirit as the lowest form of prophecy, even on the verge of sub-prophecy. Furthermore, within his section defining kabbalistic terms, he writes, “*Ketuvim* (Hagiographa) are in [the *sefirot*] of *mal’kut* and *yesod*, for they are not the Prophets, as [the *sefirot*] *nešah* and *hod*, rather they are lower than them in the holy spirit, and above all of them Torah in [the *sefirah*] of *tif’eret*.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ See Idel, *Kabbalah*, 58; idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 126–40.

⁵² Cordovero’s philosophical orientation did not go unnoticed in scholarship, as Gershom Scholem famously wrote, “[Cordovero] is essentially a systematic thinker; . . . a mystical philosopher”; see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 252. Concerning Maimonides’s influence in sixteenth-century Safed, see Moshe Hallamish, “On Maimonides’ Status in the Writings of the Safed Kabbalists,” *Daat* 64/66 (2009) 219–34 (Hebrew).

⁵³ See Moses Cordovero, *Sefer Ha’ellimah* (Jerusalem: Nezer Shraga, 2013) 8:1:10;667, 12:1:21–25;846–50. When referencing *Sefer Ha’ellimah* the pagination is according to ‘Ein, Tamar, chapter, followed by pagination. This may also be found in his *’Or Yaqar*; however, there it is not gathered in one place for discussion, and there are inconsistencies concerning the number of gradations.

⁵⁴ Also, see Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* 24:2;176a; idem, *Sefer Hazzohar ‘im Peyruš ‘Or Yaqar* 8:195, 9:107. Concerning the complex relationship between the biblical Moses, Shimon bar Yoḥai, and Moses Cordovero, see Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero*, 34–54; Boaz Huss, *The Zohar: Reception and Impact* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016) 22–46.

⁵⁵ See Cordovero, *Sefer Ha’ellimah* 12:1:21;846–47, and compare 8:1:10;667, which discusses the existence of angels and implicitly criticizes Maimonides’s allegorizing position, while maintaining his distinction between prophecy and inspiration through the holy spirit. See Yoed Kadary, “The Angelology of Rabbi Moses Cordovero” (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2014) 91–104, 217 n. 847. Other Maimonidean influence can be found in Cordovero, *Sefer Hazzohar ‘im Peyruš ‘Or Yaqar* 4:158; 9:83; 11:261–62.

⁵⁶ See Cordovero, *Sefer Ha’ellimah* 6:4:11;585, and also 6:4:20;636, under the entry for *ruah*. Likewise, see idem, *Pardes Rimmonim* 23:11;152a, 23:20;170a.

Alongside the Maimonidean conception of the holy spirit, Cordovero refers to the holy spirit as a specific channel of divine overflow or power running from the vessel of divine wisdom: “The spirit emanating from the supernal holy—*ḥokmah* (wisdom)—and although the holy spirit is lower than prophecy, the referenced holy spirit here is higher than prophecy.”⁵⁷ Thus, there is a higher holy spirit, which is linked to *ḥokmah*, and a lower holy spirit, which is linked to *malkut*. This may also reflect a certain gender hierarchy, in which *ḥokmah* is engendered as masculine and *malkut* as feminine.

Alongside these two trends, culled from Maimonides and *Sefer Yeširah*, Cordovero, as a foremost commentator on the *Zohar*, was also inspired by zoharic passages concerning *ruḥa’ deqqudeša’* (Aram.), which Cordovero translates as *ruaḥ haqqadoš* (Heb.), spirit of holiness, not *ruaḥ haqqodeš*, the holy spirit. This “spirit of holiness” is constructed in light of his general understanding of the pneumatic overflowing Godhead and the many different spirits that emanate from it. For example, in the *Zohar* we find a discussion of the lifespan of the biblical figure Jacob. The *Zohar* writes, “The holy one, blessed be he, returns his spirit to him,” to which Cordovero comments:

Meaning, that the spirit of holiness (*ruaḥ haqqadoš*) that is within man is retrieved (*nišlaf*) from on high and drawn down (*ništarbeḥ*) within man for his existence, and when his time arrives, the holy one, blessed be he, desires (*roseh*) to enter the same spirit that filled (*šennafak*) man to the supernal place from which it was retrieved.⁵⁸

The spirit of holiness discussed here should not be confused with the holy spirit, and it is clear that Cordovero is well aware of this difference; rather, it is referring to the general substratum of a divine, spiritual system, which is conceived in pneumatic terms.⁵⁹

This is further illustrated by Cordovero’s comments on *Zohar* 3:169b concerning the pneumatic body in which the righteous are clothed. This clothing was likened to the royal (*malkut*) garb of Esther. He wrote:

“*Malkut*—spirit of holiness (*ruaḥ qudša’*),” meaning that it garbed itself (*šennitlabšah*) in the secret of the holy spirit (*bessod ruaḥ haqqodeš*), [which is] the atmospheres of the Garden of Eden . . . which is the atmosphere of the land of Israel, which is the secret of *malkut*, and thus the righteous garb spiritual subtle garments, and thus Esther who refined herself and so too Mordecai, merited that the refined spirit of holiness rested upon them, and they engarbed (*nitlabšu*) themselves in it.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ See Moses Cordovero, *Sefer Tiqquney Hazzohar ‘im Peyruš ‘Or Yaqar* (6 vols.; Jerusalem: Aḥuzat Yiśra’el, 1972–2009) 6:25. Also see idem, *Sefer Hazzohar ‘im Peyruš ‘Or Yaqar* 23:155; idem, *Pardes Rimmonim* 12:3;80a, 3:4;17b–18b.

⁵⁸ Cordovero, *Sefer Hazzohar ‘im Peyruš ‘Or Yaqar*, 6:185.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 9:64, 11:45.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 14:108.

In this passage Cordovero extends the spirit of holiness, when it is acting through the “secret of the holy spirit,” beyond its confines within *mal'kut* and prophecy; the spirit of holiness envelops human beings and is embodied within them. If the spirit of holiness is synonymous with the holy spirit, then this passage is quite enigmatic. Rather, it is clear that Cordovero conceived of different types of pneumata, which exist within the supernal and mundane worlds. The spirit of holiness is a broader term referring to all types of pneumatic divine power, while the holy spirit refers specifically to a movement of spirit inside the Godhead. These passages demonstrate that the spirit of holiness is a manifestation of the holy spirit. These spirits emanate from the Godhead and ultimately are embodied within the individual.

Within Cordovero's conception of the holy spirit there are clearly three different and intertwined traditions—Maimonidean, kabbalistic, and zoharic. These three sources may contradict one another to a certain extent, as they each come from different discourses. However, through his monumental efforts, Cordovero attempted to synthesize these disparate trends by making distinctions in the different types of spirits that are active in the mundane and supernal world. Thus, Cordovero could retain the holy spirit within his complex pneumatic worldview, while infusing it with new meanings and negotiating its exact placement.

B. Envitalized Holy Spirit in Elijah de Vidas's Re'šit Hokmah

Elijah de Vidas (1518–1587) was Cordovero's foremost disciple. His primary work, *Re'šit Hokmah* (“Beginning of Wisdom”), was meant as a primer to his master's work.⁶¹ Within it we find an anthology of classic rabbinic texts, musar literature, such as Baḥya ibn Paqudah's *Hobot Hallebabot*, and mystical literature, such as the teachings of Isaac of Acre and, especially, the *Zohar*, concerning the subjects of fear and awe, love, repentance, holiness, and humility. While scholarship has generally focused on the role his work played for the dissemination of Cordoverean influence in later kabbalistic doctrines, especially that of Hasidism,⁶² recently scholars have begun to take interest in this work on its own terms.⁶³ De Vidas presents a manual for mystical transformation, which leads to the perfection of the individual—defined in terms of sanctification through the indwelling of the divine and holy spirit. This mystical transformation contains two phases. In the first phase, found in the “Gate of Love,” the individual, through mystical transformation, arrives at a state of full

⁶¹ Vidas, *Re'šit Hokmah Haššaleyem*, introduction, 1:19. Citations are as follows: gate, chapter, volume, page number. This specific example does not follow this formula due to its placement within the introduction of the book.

⁶² See Tsippi Kauffman, “*In All Your Ways Know Him*”: *The Concept of God and Avodah be-Gashmiyut in the Early Stages of Hasidism* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2009) 183–85, 224, 270 (Hebrew).

⁶³ See Koch, *Human Self-Perfection*; Afterman, “‘As in Water, Face Reflects Face’”; idem, “The Mysticism of the Tetragrammaton.” See also of note, Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, 31–75; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 312–15.

mystical fusion of his soul and the divine soul. In the second phase, found in the “Gate of Holiness,” the individual is sanctified through the embodiment of the holy spirit and the tetragrammaton within their body and mind.

The concept of holiness within this work, just as the concept of the holy spirit, is charged with mystical overtone. Sanctification occurs on an ontological and substantial level; the entire human being—body, soul, and mind—is understood as undergoing mystical fusion. This holiness is attained by refraining from prohibited behavior and engaging in righteous behavior. Thus, the human being is transformed into a vessel or chariot for the divine influx,⁶⁴ which causes the mystical fusion to occur between the divine and human.

The element of fusion is critical as it emphasizes the embodied and internalized aspect of mystical experience in De Vidas’s thought. The individual strives for fusion with the holy spirit not only to become prophetically inspired, rather the prophetic inspiration is a consequence and outcome of the mystical fusion, in which the corporeal flesh of the human being is sanctified. It should also be noted that this prophetic inspiration is also dependent on the kabbalist being physically situated within the holy land of Israel—the terrestrial plane is sanctified and transformed into a site for prophetic revelation.

As mentioned above, De Vidas culled passages from various rabbinic writings, but of central importance for his worldview was the *Zohar*. It is from this source that De Vidas drew his most profound teachings concerning the holy spirit, and where we see a divergence from his master, Moses Cordovero, whose opinions we discussed above. Utilizing *Zohar* 3:68a—“‘In the night’: for out of love for the blessed Holy One, a person should rise every night”⁶⁵—De Vidas discusses the nocturnal study of Torah and the subsequent overflowing of the holy spirit, stating:

When he awakes at night, he will awaken with desire for her love and will rush to carry out the marital duty to the king’s daughter who is the Torah . . . by studying Torah they cleave to the upper life and to the *Šekinah*, and She comes and pours forth on them of her holy spirit (*mi-ruah qodešah*). And the love of the *Šekinah* for us does not require proofs . . . for the prophet calls the *Šekinah* “my soul,” and he craves (*mitaveh*) for her, for she is the holy spirit (*ruah haqqodeš*) that comes and rests upon him.⁶⁶

This conceptualization of Torah study as coupling with the *Šekinah* is well attested to within Jewish mystical literature. For our purposes, what should be noted is the double embodied character of this act. The first embodiment is that of the *Šekinah*, the divine presence, within the Torah itself,⁶⁷ while the second embodied

⁶⁴ See at length, Fishbane, “A Chariot for the Shekhinah,” 385–418.

⁶⁵ *Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (ed. Daniel C. Matt with Joel Hecker and Nathan Wolski; 12 vols.; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003–2017) 7:452.

⁶⁶ Vidas, *Re’šit Hoqmah Haššaleyim* 2:3;1:314. Translation up to “her holy spirit” is from Pachter, *Roots of Faith and Devequt*, 305.

⁶⁷ See Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 45–79; Wolfson, “The Body in the Text,” 479–500.

action is that of the overflowing of the holy spirit, expressed as the essence of the divine, flowing out from the *Šekinah*, through the study of Torah, upon and within the kabbalist.

A similar embodied conceptualization may be found in De Vidas's correlation of the perfected human somatic form and the supernal ethereal form, in which the human body is transformed in a pristine vessel for the reception of the divine essence. Expounding upon *Zohar* 3:183b, "We have learned: whoever guards his mouth and tongue is worthy of being clothed in the holy spirit,"⁶⁸ De Vidas writes:

"Whoever guards his mouth and tongue is worthy of being clothed in the holy spirit" . . . as the holy spirit emanates from the higher mouth . . . "and for that reason the spirit that dwells in the prophets of truth is called 'the mouth of god'" (*Zohar* 3:134a) . . . from here you can understand the significance of guarding the vapor of your mouth, that hints to the supernal place, and thus he merits to be clothed in the holy spirit.⁶⁹

As we saw in Cordovero's zoharic sources, the *sefirah* of *Hoḳmah* is referred to as *godeš* (holy) and the spirit that emanates from there through the sefirotic chain is referred to as the holy spirit. The spirit is embodied by the kabbalist who has purified his mouth in order to receive this supernal breath.

Perhaps the most advanced forms of the embodiment of the holy spirit may be found in De Vidas's zoharic influenced conceptualization of the additional soul received on the Sabbath and likewise the holy soul created on Friday night through the union of man, wife, and the holy spirit. As De Vidas quotes:

The main practice that one should perform on the Eve of the Sabbath in his body to acquire the holiness of Sabbath and the additional soul is to immerse in forty *še'ah* [a halaḳic unit of dry measure], in order to unclout himself from the garment of the mundane spirit and garb [himself] in the spirit of the holy Sabbath, which is "a spirit that overflows from 'Atiqa' [*Qadiša*]" (*Zohar* 2:205a), which requires immersion. And perhaps the holy spirit will rest upon him. . . . "As Sabbath enters, the Holy People must wash themselves of weekly functioning. Why? because during the weekdays another [foreign] spirit goes roaming and settles upon the people, and when a person wants to leave that spirit and enter another, holy supernal spirit, he should wash himself so that the supernal holy spirit may settle upon him" (*Zohar* 2:204a).⁷⁰

The holy spirit emanates from the uppermost point in the Godhead—'Atiqa' *Qadiša*' (Holy Ancient One)—overflowing through the different gradations and vessels to be eventually embodied by the individual. The supernal holiness of the Sabbath, combined with the ascetic weekly life, allows for the kabbalist to conjugally unite with his earthly wife in order to arouse the supernal feminine

⁶⁸ *Zohar* (ed. Matt) 9:222.

⁶⁹ Vidas, *Re'šit Hoḳmah Haššaleyim* 4:10;2:192–93.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:7;2:106. The quotation of *Zohar* 2:204a is based on *Zohar* (ed. Matt) 6:162, except for a slight variation in the original Aramaic text.

element and thus receive the holy spirit within the holy seed that enters the female's womb. As De Vidas writes:

Our holy Torah has commanded us, "You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44); and our sages, may their memory be blessed, explained that this holiness refers to sexual (*tašmiš*; lit. use) holiness. . . . And so, it was interpreted in the *Zohar* (3:81b), that about this it is also stated, "You shall be holy" (Lev. 19:2). . . . "When male and female join, they become one body. So, they are one soul and one body, a human being called one. Then the blessed Holy One dwells with one and emits a spirit of holiness in that one. And these are called the sons of the blessed Holy One."⁷¹

Likewise, De Vidas discussed the significance of the unification for the upper realm and lower realm, through which they facilitate the creation of a holy soul that embodies the holy spirit of the infinite. He wrote:

As it is in the supernal reality, that the infinite (*'eyn sof*), blessed and exalted be he, does not rest upon a blemished throne, rather in his being all is united as one [on the Eve of Sabbath], then the supernal lights illuminate; so it is in the lower reality, in their [man and his wife's] union with the mentioned intention, they merit a holy soul (*nešamah*), and this is as they stated, "a holy spirit" (*ruḥa deqgeduša*).⁷²

In general, we find a development of pneumatic mysticism that is focused more than ever on receiving the holy spirit as mystical embodiment. In De Vidas's work we see an intensification concerning the holy spirit, whose focus is almost purely on embodied aspects and betrays an almost sole reliance on the zoharic conception of the holy spirit. In this manner we see a slight difference between his emphasis on the embodied aspect of the holy spirit and Cordovero's systematic treatment of the concept, in which he is working with multiple models of holy spirits and not only that which is found in the *Zohar*.

C. Embodied Holy Spirit in Ḥayyim Vital's Writings

The final thinker that we will investigate in this article is Ḥayyim Vital (1542–1620). Vital began his career as a disciple of Cordovero, but after Cordovero's passing, he became the leading disciple, and disseminator, of Lurianic kabbalah. This shift in Vital's intellectual allegiances may be demonstrated in the difference between his rendering of Isaac Luria's teachings in *Ša'ar Ruḥ Haqqodeš* (Gate of the Holy Spirit) and his own *Ša'arey Qeduššah* (Gates of Holiness). When the latter work was compiled is a matter of scholarly debate, for while it is heavily influenced by ecstatic kabbalah, which appears in Cordovero's thought,⁷³ it also contains Lurianic

⁷¹ Vidas, *Re'šit Hoqmah Haššaleyim* 4:16;2:353–54. Translation based on *Zohar* (ed. Matt) 8:12.

⁷² Vidas, *Re'šit Hoqmah Haššaleyim* 4:16;2:364–65.

⁷³ See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 96; Shaul Magid, "Jewish Kabbalah: Hayyim Vital's *Shaarei Kedusha*," in *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer* (ed. Louis Komjathy; Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015)

influences. We may postulate that Vital may have written the work in his youth and then later added Lurianic elements to align his work with his new master's thought, but it is also possible that Vital "returned" to his former teacher's path.⁷⁴ For our purposes here, it is less important when the work was compiled; instead, we are interested in its phenomenological value and depiction of the holy spirit in this work, in contrast to that which is found in the Lurianic composition *Ša'ar Ruah Haqqodeš*.⁷⁵

Ša'arey Qeduššah is one of the most popular kabbalistic manuals to be printed.⁷⁶ Although its actual composition is somewhat obscured,⁷⁷ most agree that, as a whole, it is an authentic work of Vital. This manual is perhaps most famous for its infamous fourth part, which was not brought out in print until the 1980s. It is presumed that the reason it was not printed was its focus on "letter kabbalah," i.e., Abulafian kabbalah, commonly referred to as ecstatic-prophetic kabbalah.⁷⁸ This kabbalah was deemed dangerous, to the extent that it was viewed as a form of "practical kabbalah." Regardless, for our purposes the fourth part is of less interest, for Vital heavily discusses the holy spirit and prophecy in the first three sections of the work.⁷⁹ It could be said that the entire manual is focused on the dynamics of *deḥeyqut* and the indwelling of the holy spirit. This work signifies the ultimate expression of the rise of the holy spirit both as a mystical and prophetic ideal in sixteenth-century kabbalah. Within it, the ideal of receiving the holy spirit is developed as the most advanced form of mystical life; fusion with the spirit leads not only to mystical revelations but to sanctification. It is important to note that for Vital these goals are attainable in the present and not only in some eschatological state.

In this work we find perhaps the apex of pneumatic mystical life: being focused on living in and through the holy spirit by drawing on the Neoplatonic tradition of a bifurcated self.⁸⁰ As Vital writes:

197–264, at 201, 206–8; Lawrence Fine, "Techniques of Mystical Meditation for Achieving Prophecy and the Holy Spirit in the Teachings of Isaac Luria and Ḥayyim Vital" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1975) 144.

⁷⁴ See Ronit Meroz, "Aspects of Lurianic Doctrine of Prophecy" (Master's thesis, Hebrew University, 1980) 114–15. However, Avishai Bar-Asher, "'This Fourth Part Shall Not Be Transcribed or Printed': The Problem of Identifying the Final Part of *Shaarei Kedusha*," *Alei Sefer* 23 (2012) 37–49, at 44, suggests that parts may be from before his encounter with Luria. Idel, *Hasidism*, 298 n. 266, states that he does not consider it to be a Lurianic writing.

⁷⁵ See Meroz, "Aspects of Lurianic Doctrine of Prophecy," 19, who already noted the difference concerning the holy spirit in these works. Although I am unable to delve into the differences in this study, I plan on exploring the Lurianic conception of the holy spirit and the maggidism that preceded it, as well as that which proceeded from it.

⁷⁶ Magid, "Jewish Kabbalah," 211.

⁷⁷ See at length, Bar-Asher, "This Fourth Part Shall Not Be Transcribed or Printed," 37–49.

⁷⁸ See Magid, "Jewish Kabbalah," 211.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁸⁰ On the bifurcated self in kabbalah, see Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: Anthology of Texts* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989) 770–71; Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (ed. Jonathan Chipman; New York:

This is the secret of that which is written about the righteous whose names have been doubled, Abraham Abraham, Jacob Jacob, Moses Moses. The first is against the aspect of the root that remains above conjoined to the [God-head] tree (*'ilan*), and this is called man's sign (*mazalo*) . . . for from it the influx flows to the branch that descended and enclothes itself in the body.⁸¹

Vital's understanding of revelation is better understood as "self-revelation."⁸² Importantly, the "higher" self is still to be found within one's soul, for it is drawn down through the continua connecting a person with the divine.⁸³ In this model there is a complete fusion between the human being and the divine. It is this divine aspect, i.e., "the higher self," that reveals the divine wisdom within a person's being. Thus, the soul is envisioned as spanning the entirety of existence, connecting below to above and above to below. Yet, the goal is to embody the divine essence—overflowing in the form of the holy spirit through the channel formed through the elongated soul—and not to ascend mystically and leave the body.⁸⁴

This quality should be understood in the same vein as self-sanctification—the transformation of one's self into a vessel or chariot for the indwelling of the divine. As we saw with *De Vidas*, a new emphasis was placed on ontological transformation of one's self in order to bring down the divine into this world, particularly the human being. While *deḥeyqut*, the ascending element of the fusion dynamic, remained important within this scheme, it is the descending element—the embodiment of the holy spirit—that became more pronounced. The following passage demonstrates how Vital connects *deḥeyqut* with that of the holy spirit:

He will lovingly cleave to God, may he be blessed, with a great desire, and through this he may merit the holy spirit in one of the following ways that will be mentioned: The first is that he will draw down upon his soul a super-

Schocken Books, 1991) 251–73; Daniel Reiser, *Imagery Techniques in Modern Jewish Mysticism* (SJ 101; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018) 262–66. See also Andrei A. Orlov, *The Greatest Mirror: Heavenly Counterparts in the Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017). On the Neoplatonic sources of this theory, see Charles M. Stang, *Our Divine Double* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁸¹ Ḥayyim Vital, *Ša'arey Qeḏuṣṣah* (ed. Amnon Gross; Tel Aviv: Aharon Barzani and Son, 2005) 3:5;113; references are as follows: part, gate, pagination. Notice should be made of the Hebrew word *mazal*, which correlates this passage with the aforementioned astro-magical model.

⁸² For more on self-revelation, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 66, and the sources cited above in n. 80.

⁸³ Although analytically it is possible to distinguish between the lower and higher aspects of the soul, see Meroz, "Aspects of Lurianic Doctrine of Prophecy," 6–7. Also see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 209–47, at 232.

⁸⁴ While the imagery utilized may be that of an out-of-body experience, further inspection demonstrates that the intent is for the spirit to be embodied in this world. For out-of-body experience in kabbalah, see Shahar Arzy and Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: A Neurocognitive Approach to Mystical Experiences* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) 35–84; Reiser, *Imagery Techniques in Modern Jewish Mysticism*, 302–11.

nal light from the root of his supernal soul, as was mentioned above in the fifth gate, and it will reveal itself to him, and this is complete *ruah haqqodeš* (holy spirit).⁸⁵

The element of *debeyqut* will prove to be a decisive difference between Vital's *Ša'arey Qeduššah* and his Lurianic works mentioned above. Within the Lurianic work the term *debeyqut* is nonfunctional, whereas in *Ša'arey Qeduššah* it is of central importance. Furthermore, within Lurianic kabbalah the fusionary element is only utilized for revelatory purposes, which occur outside of the body through its airy extensions, while, as we have seen, in this current work Vital sets the complete fusion of the individual as the mystical goal itself—the human being is sanctified through mystical fusion and consequently receives revelatory infused visions.⁸⁶

This mystical understanding of human transformation may be understood as a two-staged fusion with the divine: the human soul cleaves to the root of its higher soul, which cleaves to the light at the core of the Godhead, which in turn simultaneously is incarnated within the individual. In order to cause this mystical fusion an individual must take upon themselves mild forms of asceticism, which consequently cleanse the self of its (false) self. This act of self-negation, later to become an integral aspect of Hasidism,⁸⁷ is actually an act of self-realization and revelation.⁸⁸ The negation of the false self is done through the detachment from the more corporeal elements, such as the body and the imaginative faculty,⁸⁹ yet this negation is not to be understood as a separation from these elements, but rather their complete transformation into “finer” materials. As Vital writes:

Behold, when someone prepares himself to cleave to the supernal root, he will be able to cleave to it. However, despite the fact that he is worthy to achieve this [achievement] he should divest his soul in a complete manner, and separate it from all matters of matter, and then you should be able to cleave to her spiritual root. And, behold . . . a real divestment [in which] the soul exits from his body really, as it happens in sleep, because if it is so this is not a prophecy but a dream like all the dreams. However, the dwelling of the [h]oly [s]pirit upon man takes place while his soul is within him, in a state of awakenedness. . . . But the matter of divestment is that he should remove all his thoughts whatsoever. . . . Then the imaginative power transforms his thought so as to imagine and conceptualize, as if he ascends to the supernal

⁸⁵ Vital, *Ša'arey Qeduššah* 3:7; 125. For more on the branch-root imagery, see Wolfson, “Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent,” 232–33.

⁸⁶ See Adam Afterman, “The Doctrine of *Debeyqut* in Hayyim Vital's *Sha'arei Qedushah*” (forthcoming). It is likely that Vital was influenced by the Spanish fifteenth-century kabbalist Shem Tov ibn Shem Tov, who correlated *debeyqut* with the drawing down of the holy spirit, causing prophetic inspiration. The connection between *debeyqut* and the holy spirit is fundamental in the Spanish kabbalistic tradition.

⁸⁷ See Piekarz, *Between Ideology and Reality*, 55–103.

⁸⁸ See the detailed study by Fishbane, “A Chariot for the Shekhinah,” 385–418.

⁸⁹ Concerning the imaginative faculty's semi-corporeal essence, see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 162, 322; and idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, 238, 241.

worlds, to the roots of his soul that are there, from one [root] to another, until the concept of his imagination . . . arrives to his supernal source. . . . All this is the divestment of the power of imagination from all the thoughts of matter in a complete manner.⁹⁰

Alongside the act of self-negation, the imaginative faculty is transformed so as no longer to think of frivolous matters; rather, it is transformed into a visionary apparatus for the divine realm. While the individual's thought contemplatively ascends to the Godhead, the holy spirit is drawn down and integrated into the individual's consciousness and their faculties are translated into various forms of revelatory content.⁹¹

We may state that just as the self is negated and becomes a more refined and truer self, so too the imaginative faculty is negated and transformed into a more refined and truer version of itself. This fusion has cognitive consequences as well, for the lower mind can process the content drawn into the lower faculties of the mind in the form of prophetic experience. As is well known, the imaginative faculty was understood as playing a very important role in the medieval conception of prophecy, especially that of Maimonides. In this context, the imaginative faculty also plays an important prophetic role for Vital, which he understood in a more visionary manner. It should be noted that within Vital's system the holy spirit is divine and is drawn into the individual through the mediation of their own "twin" soul, which sanctifies the individual and causes revelatory experiences. This contrasts with the conception of the holy spirit as a sub-prophetic phenomenon, as it was for Maimonides and within aspects of Cordovero's system.

Last, in the following passage, we witness how the holy spirit is not only an essence sanctifying the individual, but it is also simultaneously a vital medium that connects a person to their higher divine soul. Following the *Zohar*, Vital states:

When the flow of [h]oly [s]pirit becomes aroused to descend to the person, to dwell upon him—if he sins, behold the evil urge causes a dark veil [to separate] the intellectual soul . . . from the source of the [h]oly [s]pirit. . . . Therefore, one who comes to be purified must have all of his rungs . . . be like clear glass, cleansed of all the filth of the evil urge that is mixed in with all the rungs of the soul. . . . [B]e purified, with no dross or foul materiality whatsoever . . . and none of the filth of the evil urge (*hayyešer hara'*) will remain in him at all. . . . Then there will be no obstruction that will separate between the powers of the soul and its source in the light of the quarry of souls . . . , that is joined to the source of the [h]oly [s]pirit, that is in the light of the ten *sefirot*.⁹²

⁹⁰ Vital, *Ša'arey Qeḏuššah* 3:5;114–15. Translation from Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005) 52–53. Also see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 69–70; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 320–23; idem, "Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent," 232.

⁹¹ See Werblowsky, "Mystical and Magical Contemplation," 31–32.

⁹² Vital, *Ša'arey Qeḏuššah* 3:3;112–14. Translation from Fishbane, "A Chariot for the Shekhinah," 410.

A vital aspect of preparing oneself to receive the holy spirit within Vital's system is that of *hitbodedut*, which may be best understood as contemplation, and not seclusion.⁹³ This mild form of asceticism is one of the purifying activities mentioned above that allows an individual to become who they truly are. By practicing this anomian technique, religious Jews were able to close the gap between the two levels of the soul. In *Ša'arey Qeduššah*, Vital describes this meditative technique at length:

He should shut his eyes and divest his thought from all matters of the world as if his soul has departed like a dead person who feels nothing, and then make an effort and be strengthened with a strong desire to contemplate the supernal world and to adhere there to the roots of his [higher] soul and the higher lights, and imagine himself as if his [lower] soul has departed and ascended above, and picture the higher worlds as if he is standing in them. And if he performs a *yihud*—he should contemplate it, to draw light and influx with it in all the worlds. . . . And he should concentrate mentally . . . , as though the spirit had rested on him, until he awakens somewhat and if he does not feel anything it would seem that he is not worthy and ready as yet, . . . and after a few days he should return to concentrate in this fashion, until he merits having the spirit reside on him.⁹⁴

Again, we see the development of Vital's understanding of *debeẓqut* and the holy spirit, in which a person progresses in their connection to the supernal realm and consequently cleaves to the divine realm and receives the holy spirit.

This manual represents an advanced development of fused and pneumatic mysticism of the holy spirit. Its primary purpose is to prepare the practitioner for the ultimate mystical experience in which one resides in the holy spirit, gradually becoming a living embodiment of the spirit and participating in the inner life of the Godhead. Vital draws upon various kabbalistic doctrines, in order to create a guide for attaining the holy spirit in the present.

■ Conclusion

The rise of the holy spirit in sixteenth-century kabbalah marks an intensification of the pneumatic mystical path planted in thirteenth-century kabbalah—particularly in the *Zohar* and ecstatic kabbalah. The kabbalistic interpretations of the term *ruah haqqodeš* merged two separate rabbinic vectors: the holy spirit as a device of divine communication and inspiration and the hypostatical understanding of the holy spirit as divinity. This synthesis offered a new understanding of the holy spirit as an ontological extension of the Godhead that overflows and fuses with the individual. This embodied fusion of the divine in the mystic was the final stage of a gradual process of integration into the Godhead—simultaneously sanctifying the human person and inducing a variety of mystical revelations.

⁹³ See Koch, *Human Self-Perfection*, 165–95; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 103–69.

⁹⁴ Vital, *Ša'arey Qeduššah* 3:8;127–28. Translation from Jonathan Garb, *Shamanic Trance in Modern Kabbalah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 54–55.

In this study, I have charted the internal development of the kabbalistic conception of the “holy spirit.” While being attuned to possible external influences upon these understandings of the holy spirit, of which many may be found in the medieval corpus that these kabbalists had at their disposal, I have not found evidence to suggest any direct influence on the rise of the holy spirit in sixteenth-century Safedian kabbalah. In fact, we may suggest that the remote town in the Galilee served as a somewhat isolated location, in which kabbalists, descended from Christian-controlled Iberia, were able to develop—outside the sphere of Christendom—an advanced Jewish mystical understanding of the holy spirit. Thus, the holy spirit could flourish in the Holy Land, and perhaps in a way that would be inconceivable in Western Europe.⁹⁵

The holy spirit in Jewish thought has undergone numerous developments and transformations. Some of these transformations led to its marginalization, while others highlighted its important role traversing the divine and human realms—transfusing both. Within the philosophical tradition it lost its hypostatical nature and was employed as a metaphor for the functionality of the metaphysical overflow,⁹⁶ while in the kabbalistic tradition it was elevated back into the Godhead and, as I demonstrated, in the sixteenth century was privileged by leading kabbalists within their mystical pneumatic paths.

Highly influenced by his reading of *Sefer Yeşirah* and Maimonides, Moses Cordovero attempted a grand synthesis of various traditions, in which the holy spirit is a specific strand of ethereal divinity. In his discussion of this phenomenon, he was careful not to identify the holy spirit with the general pneumatic divine power; rather, he referred to that power with the term “spirit of holiness.” In contrast, his disciple, Elijah de Vidas, conceptualized the holy spirit primarily through the prism of the *Zohar*, in which he identified the holy spirit with the spirit of holiness. Through this identification, these same zoharic passages are now describing the holy spirit as a vital element of the divine—bringing new life into this world. Last, Ḥayyim Vital placed the holy spirit at the center of his pietistic manual, transforming it into the ideal of religious life while emphasizing its ecstatic qualities.

These three positions employ a certain pneumatic worldview that allows forms of mystical fusion to occur, leading to various types of revelations and advanced stages of sanctification. This had a decisive impact upon later Jewish mystical trends exemplified within Hasidism.⁹⁷ Although we did not discuss in these pages the important place of the holy spirit within the confines of Lurianic kabbalah, it was also echoed in later Jewish mystical trends, specifically that of Sabbateanism and the kabbalah of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto.⁹⁸ Through these different trends the

⁹⁵ Cf. Shaul Magid, *Hasidism Incarnate: Hasidism, Christianity, and the Construction of Modern Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015) 4–5, 9–11, 34, 68, 80, 108, 160, 169, 176.

⁹⁶ See Afterman, “Moses Maimonides on the Holy Spirit,” 159–88.

⁹⁷ See at length, Idel, *Vocal Rites and Broken Theologies*.

⁹⁸ Ada Rapoport-Albert, *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi, 1666–1816* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011); Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy: Essays in*

holy spirit was elevated to previously unheard of heights—becoming a central component of Jewish mystical religiosity. No longer was it demoted to mere inspiration; instead, living in the holy spirit and sanctification through the holy spirit were to be sought after as the peak experience within Jewish mystical life.

Kabbalah and Sabbateanism (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982) 81–107 (Hebrew); Jonathan Garb, *Kabbalist in the Heart of the Storm: R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2014) 101–71 (Hebrew); Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 206, 218–26.