An Analysis of the Authenticity of the Zohar

By Rabbi Chareidi
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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The first thing we must appreciate, I think, when approaching sensitive subjects such as this, is our purpose. Why are we doing this? - I think, should be interpreted not only as the first thing a child should be taught, but also that whenever one expounds on קסמים, the first directive should always be קסם - something that will expressed in the context of fear of Hashem, if not directly, then indirectly and eventually. It must be something that could only enhance our חכמה and our relationship with הקב. I believe that the perspective I offer before you today could purify your Avodas Hashem and cleanse it of foreign influences. I bring before you a subject that examines one of the major influences on, and one the major constituents of contemporary Frum Jewish culture. It is something that lies at the very heart of much of contemporary Jewish thought, and today I would like to perform a little heart surgery or at the very least present you with an echocardiograph.

1.2 Mesorah.

Mesorah is the very lifeblood of Yiddishkeit. It is what supports that which is axiomatic in Yiddishkeit. It defends it in dimensions both where logic has no existence and where rationale rules. It is the basis for the continuation of our אמונה - regarding our relationship with הקב, in that the Torah in our hands today is that which was given to ישראל by כל ישראל ע建设用地 סיני at משל עם רבין יד של אמרה.

What is Mesorah? Mesorah, as we know, means "Tradition", "passing down", A Chain Of Testimony. It gives the stamp of approval that novelty must earn before becoming part of Yishkeit.

Yet The Zohar, by all claims - r' Yitzchok dmin acco, the Sefer Yuchsin, the Ari himself, and the Chida, in fact by all accounts until the Radal (r' Dovid luria)'s Revisionist Zohar Theory in the nineteenth century was said to have been discovered as a complete surprise in the thirteenth century, and thus has no Mesorah! No chain of testimony vouching for its authenticity!

It was supposed to be a unique book, of the most sublime secrets ever known to man. Some Sephardim, it would seem, consider it the holiest book in Jewish literature, even holier that the Chumash - the Moroccans make a special feast the day they acquire one and bring it into their home. The Ramchal believed that its very reading without understanding a single word, is an occupation of great spiritual value and could bring one to attain levels of spirituality and holiness and grant heavenly indulgences.

At every junction of life, at every Festival, and celebration, in mourning and at remembrances, Sephardim have the custom to read a relevant part of the Zohar to lend
the occasion seriousness. The whole ceremony of Brit Yitzchak is entirely based on the Zohar.

Mekubalim who toil in the Zohar day and night were long considered to be men of the most unimaginable holiness and ability - the most pious of the population. A belief that was to help catapult Shabtai Tzvi into the role of Messiah. It was also believed - as stated in Shut Tshuva Meahava 26 that a person taking a false oath on the Zohar would die within a short space of time.

Ashkenazim too, while most attributed great holiness to it, felt themselves too removed from the mysterious text and too lowly and unworthy to study it - certainly en masse (hence, in my opinion the many important points of note in its context, that would undoubtedly have shocked some of them, evaded them, and the book rested safe enshrouded in mystery among the normally more critical Ashkenazim, and blindly accepted by the Sephardim until by the time of the Ari it became too late to challenge).

And although many books by famous kabbalists were written on the Zohar, some of which claimed to explain it, nevertheless all of them were written using its own terms and concepts with little simplifications.

The book itself is quoted by well known Talmidey chachomim throughout the generations - Rabeinu Bechayey, the Tashbetz, the Radvaz and Maharshal, the GRA and Rabbi Zalman MiLiady, down to basically all famous Poskim and Darshonim of our day.

How did a book suddenly appear on the Jewish scene and become canonized, and integrated into the very fabric of Yiddishkeit?

What was the process?

The truth is, it would seem is that there was no official canonization.

The book appeared, sustained a few challenges here and there, and rose to unimaginable status, mainly by virtue of its charisma, and the desperate thirst of the Jewish people for a taste of the sublime, mysterious and messianic.

It appears to me that its acceptance came in a kind of snowball effect, whereby the less great accepted it and brought it to the greater who brought it to the greater and it became endorsed by the most prominent leaders of the generations. Having reached the top for so long, it would seem that it's authority stood no risk of ever being challenged.

Almost.
A Brief History of Kabalah

2.1 Origins

To understand the significance of the Zohar, we must first examine a brief history of Kabalah.

I would like to preface that The term Kabalah as a name to the entire body of esoteric Jewish thought has long been a misnomer. R’ Meir abu Sahula was a contemporary of the Rashba is mentioned in Shut harashba 1:180 and he wrote a peirush on sefer Yetzira. The truth, according to his testimony, is that the terms Kabbalah and Mekubalim in reference to the esoterical studies only appeared in the twelfth century, and it was strictly an appellation for the Study of philosophies concerning the 10 Sefiros and some Taamei haMitzvos based on these studies. He writes:

"המייסמים את החוקר לכ hamburg מפומל לדרור בתר הדובר שזכרני זכ-dismiss בדורת שורי לקינו מפורש
מאטיאים של - מקובלים.וקוריאתהלכתה העשרה ספיריםבודורת.setUpועלת המיתוס.

Translation - It is our duty to investigate all things to the best of our abilities, and follow the paths trodden by those who are called, in our generation and for the past 200 years "mekubalim"- and who refer to the study of the 10 Sefiros and some rationales for the Commandments - "kabala".

I have found, though, no references to these terms in any earlier sources than the 13th century, and I tentatively suggest that 200 years is an exaggeration and that the term had its origins in the Hakdoma of the Ramban's Peirush haTorah - see there.

Much later, the use of the name was extended to refer also to Maaseh Merkovo, Maaseh Berayshis, Sidrei Malochim and Sidrei Rekiim and Heicholos, Yetzira beTzirufey Shaymos, Inyonay Gilgulim, Chochmas hapartzuf and basically all Razei Torah, and a lot of Razay not so-Torah. This is a completely false use of the term, a hijack, and may have been done purposefully to give the the original Kabalah greater legitimacy. So let us remember henceforth that Kabalah was a new term for the philosophical study of the mechanism of the 10 Sefiros.

The earliest source we have that mentions the 10 Sefiros is Sefer Yetzira.

Now, although it says in the sefer itself that it was written by Avrohom Avinu, and so believed many Rishonim including Rav Hai Gaon, Rav Yehuda halevi in the Kuzari and the Ramban, nevertheless there is a parallel Mesorah that it was Rabbi Akiva who wrote it, as mentioned by the mekubalim R’ Moshe Cordobero and R’ Yehuda Chayat. The latter view, I feel, would seem to make more sense in the light that sefer yetzira brings pesukim from Tbna, mentions the months of the year by the babylonian names, and calls hashem by the name "tzvokos" which according to the gemara was first given by Chana, mother of Shmuel Hanovi. The book also deals at length with the four Pythagorean elements earth air fire and water (end of First Temple Era), in the Euphratian
contellational GRAups, otherwise known as the signs of the Zodiac, and in the direct influence of the organs on the thought process - with axioms and dogmas which we know today to be completely false.

Yet Sefer Yetzira is mentioned in the Shas as a means of creating life: many of us will be familiar with the the Maamaray gemoro (סנהדרין דב''א): "ברא ברא, שדורי תלמות זבבים ומא. וההוא开发利用 אלה וההוא מקדה וילו, אמר לו: מתי עבר את הדר. לעפריך. בר חלמה ורב אשיערא והיה לכל מעלי שבטי עמש שהרי, והברא והיה עליה תחתא, ואכלי לו." 

Rashi explains:

"מעל אברר לה עגלא תחתא על ידי שמי מפורפם אותיות והם سبحان בני האדם, ايון די מושע מefeller דמששה הקדוש ברוך הוא, לעדי קדושה שלך הוא.

I think it would be fair to suggest that the core alone of Sefer Yetzira is true, and that the letter combinations can truly create, and that was given by Hashem to Avrohom Ovinu, but that R’ Akiva was theorizing on the creation processes, based on the philosophical theses of his day. The Amoraim who created men and animals, needed only know the letter combinations.

Now the book itself was interpreted in many different way throughout the ages.

2.2 Initial Interpretations

Until the mekubalim's publications, it was always interpreted very simply - as speaking of the 32 nesivos of Chochma, which means the elemental constituents (literally - paths) of thought process, both divine, and human - they are the 10 numerals - the Sefiros (this explanation, is icidentally also stated by the GRA at the back of his sefer on chidushey shabbos), and the 22 Oisios - letters of the hebrew alphabet. Combinations of which Hashem used to create the world starting with the four elements Earth Air Fire Water, the constellations of Stars - the goat, the bull, the twins and so on and the different parts of the human body - each of which the book claims affects and influences man's psyche in different ways.

This is the way it was explained by R' Shabsay Donolo, R' Yehuda of Barcelona, and R' Yehuda Halevi.

For those of you who don't know who they were:

- Rashi in Eiruvin פ‎. ט calls R' Donolo "י‎שש‎מ‎ ב‎ש‎ב‎ ל‎ב‎ר‎כ‎ה";
- R' Yehuda of Barcelona was the author of Sefer Haitim, a compilation of Geonic Responsa as well as some novellae, quoted by most later Rishonim
- R' Yehuda Halevi wrote the Kuzari, as well as many piyutim the most famous probably being Anim Zemiros.
They all died before the 12th century. So, this was the first generation of interpretations of Sefer Yetzira.

2.3 First Mekubalim

Next came the Mekubalim.

Who was the first Mekubal that we know about?

Some, like the Ramak, and Rav Mair Gabai of the Avodas hakodesh and Rav Menachem Azaria of Fano claim that Rav Hai Gaon was a kabbalist, based on some fictitious teshuvas "quoted" in certain kabala books, and several Kabalah books are also ascribed to him. This seems to be false, since, if you look at those teshuvos, their style is completely different to the Geonic style altogether, and secondly, if you look at Teshuvos Hageonim Imanuel siman קט, there is a very long Teshuva where he writes that anyone who believes that someone today can have kefitzaz haderech or make himself disappear by incantations is naive and gullible. He also says that since he knows what the Shem Ben Mem-Beis Oisios is, he does not know how to pronounce it, since he did not get a masores in it or for that matter in any inyonim concerning the shaymos and only heard whatever he heard - snippets of the subject - incidentally, and I quote:

נהנה פרושי למשועל שאמאי זורע🎥 ויעדז ויהיה מהוונא בקיאנו, ולא מיסר ליידן רפ מי פר יכול ברא גותר רבעא גותי

And as you may recall, knowing the secrets names of HaShem, doesn't make you a kabbalist, but non-involvement in the study of the secret names of Hashem absolutely excludes one from being a kaballist.

2.3.1 Rav Chamai Gaon

The abovementioned mekubalim - Ramak, and Rav Mair Gabai of the Avodas hakodesh and the Rav Menachem Azaria of Fano - also claim that there was a Gaon called Rav Chamai Gaon who wrote sefer HaIyun. This is very strange, since this Rav Chamai Gaon doesn't appear in the Iggeres Rav Sherira Gaon which enumerates all the Gaonic dynasties and anyway, the Sefer HaIyun claims to quote from Rav Hai Gaon - the last of the Geonim - and refers to him as "zal" - zichrono livrocho.

Furthermore, the Radziner Rebbe states quite frankly that the Sefer HaIyun was written by R' Yosef Gikatilla, and the style is clearly identifiable in the Sefer.

2.3.2 The Raavad

Some claim that the Raavad was a mekubal, based on the fact that there is a peirush on Sefer yetzira called peirush haRaavad - yet the Ramak says it was written by r' Yosef haaroch, a mekubal who lived in the generation after the Rashbo, and R' Chaim vital also agrees that it wasn't authored by the Raavad. Others have claimed that the Raavad was a mekubal based on the ommninous statements he sometime makes in his seforim such as "ך"ן
"though I have never come across any evidence to the effect that he had anything to do with Kabbola.

2.3.3 Rabbi Yitzchok Sagi Nahor – Rabbi Isaac The Blind

Maybe the earliest mekubal who became publicly known is Rabbi Yitzchok sagi nahor - the blind - son of the Raavad, to whom is ascribed a peirush on Sefer Yetzira though after speaking to Rav XX, I was under the impression that he is skeptical about whether the Peirush on Sefer Yetzira is really his.

2.3.4 The Ramban

After him came the Ramban, about whom there is absolutely no question that he was a Mekubal, and then, Rabbi Ezra, also known as Rabbi Ezriel, then the Rashbo. Incidentally, the claim that Rabbi Ezra was the Ramban's rebbe in Kabbola is chronologically almost impossible.

2.4 Claims of the Mekubalim

The Mekubalim claimed a secret tradition, that the Sefiros referred to by the Sefer Yetzira were not merely the numbers. The were created entities - somewhat alive, not just ideas. Yet, the mekubalim themselves were divided as to what exactly they were.

Some (such as the Ramban) said they were a kind of separate sub-creators, slaves of God in the Creation process, yet "imparted of his essence", and some (such as the Remak, I believe) say they were a clothing created to shroud (so to speak) God's creating emanations. As these Mekubalim are prone to state - God is the Soul of the Sefiros. These statements are obviously allegorical, to a degree, though what they mean in real terms, I don't know, and I don't believe there is anybody alive today who does.

Their philosophy claimed to answer the question that since God is perfect he cannot bear change. Yet to have created, he must have had an expression of will - this is change. They therefore say that beings of thought and will emanated from him, the Sefiros - chochma bina daas etc. power of examination, power of calculation, power of decision etc. Though it stills leaves the question of what phenomenon caused them to emanate - - - if not the will of God himself! This, to the best of my knowledge, they do not answer.

Their philosophies were to stand in contrast to the Rambam who in the Moreh Nevuchim stated that God's Will and his, so to speak, "thought" are integral to his essence. We cannot understand his essence, and we shouldn't try - in the Rambam's own sharp words: 

רבי יצחק הכהן

The Mekubalim were the ones who introduced the rest of the world to the concept of Atzilus, a term which while in the Tanach means "reserve" as in the setting aside from a stock, the Mekubalim use to refer to the concept of causing to emanate from one's self, the impartation from one's self - I suspect that the term was derived from a loose description of the result of the process mentioned in the posuk in behaalosekha - "
"and Hashem set aside of the Spirit that was on Moshe and placed it on the seventy elders.

They say that material was created in a process of densification of the Divine into the formless High Spiritual (serafim), into the formed low-Spiritual (malochim), into the material universe, and hence the four "worlds" that house these elements - א-entity בבראה, א- ENTITY, ע- PROCESS, יצירה עשייה.

They also defined a course of duty for the members of the world - to reverse the creation process by holy thought and action and restore everything to a pristine divine state. The mitzvos and cavvonos simply activate heavenly mechanisms, they both lend the heavens power and milk them - מעשה ניצוצות, מרדף שפע - they are not really just for fulfilling an order or earning by heavenly grace - they are part of an automatic process.

This very often stood in the way of the indication of the Torah, Nach, and Talmud, that Mitzvos are not a required essence by God, and they do not effect an automatic mechanism that activates functions in the reparation or destruction of the Universe - they are but a code to test our allegiance, and they create angels, whose duty is to testify on the day of grand judgment, when our souls ascend heaven. And while mitzvos are entirely conforming with a definition of Good concurrent with man's view of the world, they, together with the Universe they match, this unit, the Torah and Universe concord, has never been indicated to us by any divine message to seem anything other than arbitrary - this, unrelated to the fact that we believe that all God's action are exact and true and calculated - in relation to this world. But as regards to their standing and the cause for these particular Mitzvos, together with the world they exist in, we have not been revealed the reasons. Chazal tell us:

"בר אאמר לא נתנ תמצות אלא לעזרך בן אד מבת, ויכ מה אשקף לי הלכתיו לימי ששוותון מתרוא, ומי ששוותון."

Said Rav: The commandments were only given to purify the (free-willed) creations, for does God truly care more for slaughter that is done starting from the front of the neck over slaughter that is done starting from the back of the neck?

And as we know from Bereishis Rabba 3:7, God created several worlds before this one. Maybe they used different mitzva mechanisms.

The Mekubalim created a cold, calculated and mechanical divine service, whereby their cavvonos were nothing more than reflections on the supposedly intricate divine mechanical processes that the incantations and thoughts were believed to automatically trigger.

The books of the later Mekubalim are generally written in reams of axioms that can't be proven either way, and in a clearly authoritative tone, in distinction to the writings of the Ramban, who clearly delimits a small axiomatic core within a large philosophical framework often written in a propositional style.
The Mekubalim’s books also spend an enormous portion of their volume in activities of dissecting words - particularly divine names - into single and multiple letter components and correlating them with kabalistic terms and processes.

During the lifetime of the Rashbo (though it would seem un-noted by him), appeared the Zohar - the kabalistic theorems are exploded to massive proportions, and gradually, a huge base of kabalistic ideas become canonized.

### 2.5 Rav Yitzchak dmin Acco

The first account we have of the origin of the Zohar and a critical look on its authority, is that of R' Yitzchak dmin Acco, a Mekubal who was a Talmid of a Mekubal by the name of R' Meir, himself a Talmid of a famous Mekubal called R' Yosef Gikatilla (two Halochos in Shilchan Oruch are from him - having to hear Four kadishim with Tefillin, and not saying Kidush levono before seven days) who himself was a Talmid of R’ Avrohom Abulafia a.k.a. the Prophet of Avila; the man who asked the pope to convert to Judaism and was promptly imprisoned for a month.

The Rashba ostracized him for his self aggrandizement and his missionary messianism and referred to him with the suffix "Shem Reshoim Yirkav", and R' Yehuda chayat, a Mekubal, refugee of the Spanish expulsion, called him a madman and a moron. but Abulafia was somewhat vindicated by the Chida in Shem Hagedolim, and is quoted by the Radvaz (י:פ: ה) and R' Chaim Vital (שהר הקדושה)

The Chida in several places in shem hagedolim states that RY dmin Acco was a Talmid of the Rashbo, though himself raises problems with this in the entry in "chelek seforim" entitled "meiras einayim" and from the above account, it would also seem unlikely.

R' Yitzchok dmin Acco's account is brought down in the book "Sefer Hayuchsin" by R' Avrohom Zacuto, who lived during the Spanish Expulsion. It was edited in some editions, and the pro-Zoharists (such as Ascent’s Rav Moshe Miller) prefer to quote from the distorted text. But the original reads as follows:

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Now leaving aside if we do believe his widow and daughter or we don't believe, or we partly believe, or its fair to say he wrote it for money or not, - one thing is absolutely sure:

Moshe DeLeon presented the Zohar to the world. Not one single contemporary of Moshe DeLeon ever claimed to have seen the Zohar before him! Not one elder, not one Kabalist, not one Rabbi! No goy! No King of the East - as the Chida would have us think discovered it - Nothing. The Zohar should have raised a commotion among the people who had "as if" kept it secret all those years or among the people who discovered it. There should have been some kind of statement on the part of the esoterists who centuries later were made to appear as if they had held some kind of tradition regarding the Zohar's existence - After all even according to the most conservative pro-Zohar view, the Zohar had been stashed away at the time of the Gaonim, and surely if holy kabalists were worthy of knowing the most sublime secrets of the creation of the universe, they could just as well be trusted to be told of the existence of this book.

But no!

Only surprise and excitement could be heard from all and sundry at the new discovery that one man brought forward out of nowhere. And that, in my opinion, is the most incriminating evidence in the entire account - and stands true even according to the tampered version.

A point to inquire might be, that it would seem very unusual that an author of an anonymous or pseudo-epigraphical work would not even hint at himself being the author.

I have also seen an article written by a certain Ephraim Rubin who brings a section of the Zohar that would seem to have been written to this end:

Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai said, "It is true that the Holy One, blessed be He, has agreed that the upper and the lower worlds should be with us in this book. Happy is the generation in which this is revealed; and all this will be renewed by the hand of Moses (=De Leon!), at the end of days, in the final generation."

As regards him calling it the end of days - I believe he may have been basing himself on the calculation of the Ramban in Sefer Havikuach that Moshiach would come in the year 1353, though DeLeon himself died fifty years before that.
The truth be told, it would seem that the above account by R'Yitzchok dmin Acco had no major impact on the Zohar- not until four hundred years later when the R' Yehuda Arye deModena would quote it in his anti-Kabbalistic polemic, Ari Nohem.

Now, during all this time, it would seem, there existed a philosophical movement, (which at one point in history was spurred on by the Rambam) that rejected Kabbolo as a whole, from a philosophical point of view.

We know that the Rambam in the Moreh mocks an idea that was central to the Kabalistic dogma - namely, the power of the letter permutations of the Divine Name that the kabalists claimed to have harnessed, and also some peripheral dogmas such as belief in Demons.

From a famous teshuva of the Rivash, We know of the anonymous philosopher quoted by the Rivash that said that just as the Christians believe in the Trinity, the Mekubalim believe in the Decinity - the Ten Man God.
From there too We know to that the Ran once said to his Talmid the Rivash that

The Ramban tied himself down far too much to come to the point of believing in that so called Kabbolo".

And the Rivash himself closes his teshuva:

Just as a side point - the belief in גילגול - reincarnation, it would seem, was not originally seen as a necessary constituent of Kabbola, and we find people who believed in kaballa but not in gilgul - such as R'shem tov ben shem tov of sefer haemunos, and the Abarbanel - but by the time of the Ari, it was entirely integrated into kaballa. I personally don't believe in it, but that's a subject on its own.

So - as the Zohar eased its way into Rabbinic literature, so opposition to Kabbolo died down.

The first three famous people to quote from the Zohar were probably r' Menachem Recanati, in his peirush al Hatorah, Reb Yosef Gikatilla in Sefer Hachashmal, and Rabenu beChayay Talmid of the Rashba, who published his peirush in 1291, all three were contemporaries.

A century later, we find the Rashbatz in tshuvos and R' Yosef Albo in sefer haokorim, and a scant reference to the Zoharic concept "וקול תפווח קדישא" in the Maharil.

Then, in the mid 15th century we have a ripple in the calm.
2.6 R' Elyahu Delmedigo

R' Elyahu Delmedigo of Candia - today known as the Island of Crete, publishes his sefer Bechinas Hadas, a sefer on hashkofo, and includes a scathing attack on Kabbalo.

Who was this R' Eliahu Delmedigo?

His profession was teacher of philosophy in the non-Jewish academies of Italy - a capacity in which he was held in particularly high esteem, and he was also a Talmid Chochom of note. He had a Halachik dispute with mahari mintz, and we have mentions of him in this regard in the Sefer "chief among men" which refers to him as "the wise of note."

and in "the book of the wise" - the who calls him "the wise of note."

It is also noteworthy that this R' Elya lived all of just 35 years.

This is what he writes:

Now, it would seem that he might be describing an anti kabalistic movement in his day, though I have not seen any other mention of such a movement.

Also, I have found no support or praise for his Sefer in any later Rabbinic literature besides the Ari Nohem.

It did though prompt a response from the Me'kubalim, in the form of the Sefer "the great-nephew" by his great-nephew - R' Yashar of Candia, a talmid chochom and Posek and also...
highly knowledgeable in kabbola -, who demonstrated that his great uncle's view of kabbola was highly simplistic and misled, and after all, who could argue?

So Kabbola and the Zohar were under no threat in that generation.

In fact, above mentioned r’ Elyahu Mizrahi and his contemporary r’ Tam ibn Yihye themselves spoke in a respectful but cautious manner about kabbola, as brought down in the first tshuva in Shut Hare’em:

all those who did not believe in kabbala, and therefore, doubted about the legitimacy of the authorities who ruled over them, and who were not yet able to achieve the political power to change the situation. The point is that the mekubalim didn’t yet have the political power to muster a campaign to wrest the power from the poskim.

Yihye knew what the Zohar itself had to say about Talmud study! But more of that later.

So Kabbala and the Zohar were under no threat in that generation.
2.7 The Ari

So it was, until the sudden apparition on the Jewish world scene of a man, not yet thirty, by the name of Yitzchok Luria, otherwise known as the Ari.

An Ashkenazi born in Europe, orphaned at a young age from his father, his family moved to Egypt to live with his mother's Sephardic brother who was a tax collector. He went to the Yeshiva of the Radvaz. Married at 14, to his mother's brother's daughter, he stayed in Yeshiva until he was 16, and then went into commerce in GreenGRAcery - a receipt he wrote during this time has been preserved.

According to the sefer Cavvonos Umaaseh Nissim, still in manuscript, quoted by researcher David Tamar in a small composition-

When he 20 years old, he was sitting in Shul when a Spanish Marrano came in holding a strange sefer. After requesting to see it and leafing through it, the Ari understood that it was a Kabbola Sefer. He asked to buy it of the Spanish Jew, but the latter refused, saying it was an heirloom. After much imploring by the Ari, he finally agreed to give it up if the Ari could persuade his uncle the Taxman to waive a large tax collection that he was owing for an import. The matter was arranged, and the Ari got the book. Apparently, It was not the Zohar but some other sefer, but he studied fervently, and then moved on to the Zohar. He adopted a reclusive lifestyle, spending day and night studying the Zohar in a hut by the River Nile, returning to his family on Shabbos. This went on for many years. During this time his lifestyle earned him a reputation of greatness and holiness. He also wrote, but never published. He used to make the pilgrimage to Meron on Lag Ba'omer, and gave his three year old son his first haircut there.

In the year 1570 he emigrated to Tzfat where he studied for a while under the Remak, and upon the latter's death a short time after, assembled a following of his own. He had a reputation for being able to know a person's previous reincarnation, to see demons and otherwise invisible spiritual phenomena and to divine the future. He claimed to have spoken to Eliyahu HaNovi, and to have ascended heaven while sleeping to attend the heavenly academy where Hashem himself taught kabbola, as did R' Akiva and Rashbi. He appointed R' Chaim Vital to be his prime student, saying he, the Ari, had come to the world only to reveal great secrets to him, and, should he merit it he would be Mashiach ben Yosef. He took him on a boat trip on the kinerret and gave him water of the kineret to drink, saying it was of Miriam's well and would grant him the ability to acquire higher forms of knowledge.

The Ari would get plagued by visitors from all over the world begging him to teach them Kabola and advise them in times of need. R' Chaim Vital, while a loyal scribe and medium of teaching to the Ari's other students, by his own admission, was not the easiest student, and he would often badger his teacher to teach him certain concepts that the Ari refused, or to teach to a greater public.

20 months after coming to Tzefat the Ari died in a local plague.
His own written legacy was a peirush on Sifra deTzniusa, Sefer haHakdomas, and three kabalistic Shabbos zemiros. But his talmid, r’ chaim vital transcribed volumes of his teachings together with wondrous testimonies into what is know as the Etz Chaim. His son R’ Shmuel reorganized them into the Shmone Sheorim and then again into the Shaar Hacavvonos.

Parallel to this, other students of the Ari - r’ Noson Speyre, r’ Meir Papiras, and r’ Isroel Sruk, who had known the Ari even longer than r’ cham vital, were publishing similar collections of the Ari's cavvonos - with discrepancies between their testimonies and r’ Chaim Vital's evident.

### 2.8 Sefer Ari Nohem

Then, at the end of sixteenth century came another sefer by the name of Ari Nohem, by R’ Yehuda Arye deModena, written against all of kabola, claiming that it was just another form of rehashed neo-Platonism and not of divine origin. He even quotes a remarkable statement from R’ Yisrael Sruk - abovementioned pupil of the Ari, whom the author met - boasting how kabola is so consistent with Greek philosophy, and how he would consistently endeavor to explain his Rebbe, the Ari's, teaching, in the terms of the classical philosophers.

R’ Yehuda Arye mocks the whole institution of kabolla as a farce - they never received it - and its all a game - with roshei teivos sofei tayvos, gematriyos ketanos ugedolos that make up so much of later kabolla drashos, you can so to speak prove anything you want: you can rig up any drosha.

He also brings the account of the Yuchsin and a few of the arguments regarding the erroneous chronology that R’ Yaakov Emden was due to rediscover 150 years later.

Again, this does not spur any counter-kabolla movement in his day, despite the book's sharpness, but brought response in the form of books defending the Zohar and Kabolla, to the effect that as r’ Eliyahu delMedigo, the author R’Yehuda did not grasp the finesse and depth of kabolla which led him to such rash statements, since by his own admission he could never focus himself enough on it to internalize it, and also that many of his criticisms of irrational context in the Zohar could just as well have been leveled at the Gemoro, and maybe even the Chumash. [ed: !!]

By the mid 1600s the stories surrounding the Ari, particularly as circulated by Shlomo Shlumil - an ashkenazi visitor to tzefat and admirer of the Ari, who culled together various legends from the local population, created a spirit of fervor and messianic heat in many communities in Europe and elsewhere, and copies of the assorted Cavvonos collections spread rapidly among the communities - despite the Vitals' absolute opposition to their circulation.

Sefardim readily acquired all the Ari's literature and adopted most of his customs.
And even among Ashkenazim - particularly the simple minded people of the generation there was the adoption of many practices advocated by the Ari in his cavvonos. It was during this time that the "اتحاد לעם" incantation became popular among the masses as might appear from a Teshuvas Chavas Yair (where he says he was reprimanded by a Balabos in his own community for refusing to say it since he didn't know what it meant) so too the practice saying "הלדו וישעי אורי" flew out of the Ari's kabalistic maelstrom. These practices and others were circulated by the Mogen Avrohom and also in two other books popularizing practices of the kabalists - the one - קטן טוב שם by r' Binyomin Beinish ben r' Yehuda haCohen, who might be the author of pseudoepigraphed prayer said at the kever at the completion of the mishanyos in the name of Rabbi Yishmael cohen Godol, and the second book called ספר זכרון.

All this together with a prediction in the Zohar that the Messiah would appear around the year 1648 would pave the way for world Jewry's joyous initial acceptance of Shabbetai Tzvi, who spent all day learning Zohar, as the Messiah. Great men such as the Taz and his sons, and r' Yaakov Zak, father of the Chacham Tzvi, heralded Shabtai Tzvi as the true messiah. R' Yaakov Zak even ostracized the Gabbai of his Shul for refusing to make a MiSheBerach for Melech Hamoshiach Shabtai Tzvi.

Fortunately for the Jewish world, Shabbetai Tzvi went too far too fast, and everyone soon got a rude awakening upon his defiant violation of Torah and Mitzvos and his eventual conversion to Islam.

As a result, R' Yaakov Zak abdicated from the rabbinate, deeming himself unworthy for having so profoundly fallen for the atrocious hoax, and commanded his descendants to forever hunt out and destroy any remnant of Shabtai Tzvi's legacy.
2.9 Nechemia Chayun

Yet pockets of adherents remained, justifying Shabtai Tzvi's every ill by kabalistic explanations and luring many ignorant masses to a new false religion based upon the Zohar and Shabtai Tzvi. Shabtai Tzvi's many apostles still wandered the world unopposed for decades, and one - Nechemia Chayun - ended up in Amsterdam, home of two communities, one Sefardi and one Ashkenazi. The first headed by Rav Shlomo Ayllion (an apparently repentant ex-follower of Shabetai Tzvi) and the other, headed by R' Yaakov Zak's famous son R' Tzvi Hirsch Ashkenazi - the Chacham Tzvi.

At the time of his arrival it was not yet ascertained if Chayun was a follower of Shabetai Tzvi or not.

Chayun took the pose of a pious kaballist and spent his days studying Zohar in the Shul. Shabetai Tzvi was suspicious of the newcomer, and upon examining his published writing, discovered evidence of his allegiance to Shabetai Tzvi.

With the Chaham Tzvi's public defamation of Chayoun and the public's subsequent frenzy directed at him, Chayoun fled to Ayllion who gave him refuge. Ayllion then went on to publicly decry the Chacham Tzvi's stance as nothing more than an attempt to denigrate the Sefardi community.

The Chaham Tzvi then went on to excommunicate Chayoun, whereupon Ayllion promptly reported him to the Authorities for upsetting the peace, and had the Chacham Tzvi banished from Amsterdam.
2.10 R Yaakov Emden

It was in these turbulent times that r' Yaakov, son of the chaham tzvi, was born. He didn't see much of his father - he was sent away at age seven, to Europe. R' Yaakov's youth was pleasant enough, though shattered upon his coming of marriageable age, when his father, upon hearing that his son desired to marry a daughter of one his hosts during his years at yeshiva, promptly made a reappearance in his life and whisked him off to marry the daughter of a famous talmid chochom. R' Yaakov did not love his wife and spent many years in depression, wandering around central Europe, before settling in Altona to make his living from a printing press he acquired. He was widowed twice, before in his forties marrying his young niece. From then on he was a much happier man.

He entered many quarrels in his life, taking on awesome foes such as the Town Wealthy, fighting the cause of the poor and oppressed and taking these rich folk to task for transgressing the prohibition of usury, besides great miserliness.

And of course, the Rov of the "Three Communities" - Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck - r' Yonasan Eybeschitz, with his famous quarrel that forced him into exile.

As we know, a troubled life is very fertile soil for reflection and innovation, and R' Yaakov became a very prolific writer.

He was a very astute thinker, and his many works reflect a vast knowledge base, a highly critical method of analysis, and a daring pen.

His learning spanned all compartments of Jewish thought - Halocho Parshonus Aggodo Kabbolo, several polemics and documentaries and even an autobiography. He rose in essence to the status of both Posek and Mekubal. I say in essence, because he wasn't considered an address of consultancy, and he only ever took a public rabbinic post once for a short time in life - four years in Emden the town whose name he would forever be called by, because of this tenure. After he quit he used to joke "ברוך שלום עליך אתרי" with aved standing for Av Beis Din - the official title of the community Rov in those days.

He was another person responsible for the introduction of many kabalistic components into popular Tefilla, due to the wide circulation of his kabalistic siddur "עמורד ספני".

That is what makes it so ironic that in his old age he published a highly controversial work, unique and daring, the first of its kind: a methodical and comprehensive critique of the texts of the Zohar. This was the Mitpachas Seferim.

The amazing thing is that despite the earth-shattering consequences potent in its publication, no-one came out to publicly oppose it. People like the Chida were shocked by it and in later times, responses to the many questions it raised were offered; but no outcry, no emotional response like the bechinas hadas and the Ari Nohem had triggered. This was remarkable, as it could have buried the Sefer in infancy.
I think that two elements played in preventing this, though in no way could one have worked without the other.

The first, was R' Yaakov's reputation both as a Gaon and a Mekubal. He couldn't be suspected of simple-mindedness, laxity in belief or of seeking a personal interest.

The second is that he prefaces and epilogues his book with statements to the effect of granting the Zohar immunity against total desecration, and throughout his onslaught of the text he perpetually raises it from the dead with pseudo-defensive counter-arguments.

So let us now, finally examine the arguments brought in the Mitpachas Sseforim.
3 Problems with the Zohar
3.1 Introduction

The Zohar, as we know, purports to be the accounts of events, and the transcription of mystical philosophies of first or second generation students of R’ Shimon Bar Yochai with quotes from Rashbi and many other Tannaim and Amoraim in there too, intertwined with much fantastic sounding narrative.

Of course it wasn't new to point out that post Rashbi personages are mentioned - even R’ Chaim Vital mentions that in his Hakdoma to the Hakdomas, and posits, as I have mentioned earlier, that later rabbis also contributed to the text.

But the first thing that jolted r' Yaakov to investigate the flesh of the Zohar was a strange Drosha in the Raya mehemna - part of the Zohar that it is claimed was said by the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu descended to r' Shimon bar Yochai's assembly, and was traditionally believed to have been written by him while in the Cave. The drosha is also repeated in the Hakdomas Tikuney Zohar. the quote is:

meaning the third light surrounding the Godly form in Yechezkel's vision of the (Merkovo is as the appearance of a fire, surrounding it as a compartment ) (literally house)

(this is the Shechina)

(Because this is how the Rabbis established it)

That souls in contrast to the shechina are as candles

(before the bonfire)

this is the heavenly synagogue. Esh Noga - literally a fiery glow, and an manipulation of the phrase - venoga losysh - also in that same account of the merkovo in yechezkel, but here the author has placed quotes in the text, meaning the pronunciation of the words without their meaning are the desired effect here (for my house shall be a house of prayer)

Now, in much of Western Europe, in the middle ages, it would seem that the common pronunciation of the letter Shin was as an S. We see this from Rashi, who invariably transliterates the French S in his Laazim as a shin, and we see it from the names Sasportes and Benveniste - both spelled with a Shin and from the fact that Manasheh ben Israel spelt his name Manasseh with "S"es. This would make the above Esh Noga read Esnoga. For those of you who don't know Spanish, Esnoga is the Spanish word for synagogue, hence the connection in the above passage in the Zohar to - and the Large centre of mekuballim of the 13th century, of which Moshe DeLeon was part, was in Tulaytulah - known today as Toledo - in Spain.

And although we know the Talmud to quote words from other languages, nevertheless when they are neither in Greek nor Latin, we are invariably told which language they are being said in. Esnoga is a corruption - peculiar to the Iberian region - of the Greek word "synagoga". To the Zohar it seemed to just be so obvious that Esnoga is a Beis Tefilla.
Let me just share with you another discovery of Spanish word in the Zohar, spotted by Gershom Scholem I think, and brought down in Ephraim Rubin's article, though this one appears about forty times throughout the whole Zohar (and not just the Tikunnim and raya mehemna), the word "Gardini" - literally, guardian or guardian-angel - in the Zohar a reference to angels -

R' Yaakov's next discovery was the following in the Tikunay Zohar:

The passage claims to explain where each constituent of Gemoro discussion emanates from in the body of the so-called Odom Kadmon - a Godly emanation.

Except that the Zohar's enumeration can be found in R' Shmuel hanagid's Mevo HaTalmud - introduction to the Talmud, and I quote:

Amusingly enough, in the 1950s, R' Reuven Margolies, as part of his effort to defend the Zohar against critic professor Gershom Scholem, published an article listing many phrases and concepts jointly unique to the Rambam and the Zohar - hence (posits Rav Margolies) the Rambam (the same who mocks kabolla) must have seen and drawn wisdom from the Zohar! This in distinction to the Ari's and Chida's claim that the Rambam did not see any of the Zohar and only the Ramban did.

Yet, there is a concept - Kovod Nigleh, a manifestation of the Shechina - regarding which there is a Machlokes Rambam and Ramban, and he demonstrates that the Ramban got it right because that's they way the Zohar explains it!

Incidentally I thing this is a very strong argument against the hypothesis that the Zohar was a way of preserving some unique ideas of the kabalists that were being overrun by the philosophers such as the Rambam. - I think it was an eclectic work, with many ideas inserted whimsically, whose main purpose was to generally be a politically manipulative tool by kabalists.

R' Yaakov writes that he had already starting collecting anomalies in the zohar, forty years before, and had been afraid to publish them due to possibility of people turning against him, and due to the possible side effects of people stopping to believe in the authenticity of the whole of Kabolla :- seeing Mekubalim readily accept a book full of new kabalistic doctrines of dubious origin without any of them contradicting any previously accepted ones would cause the whole study of kabbola to look like one big farce.

The reason why he eventually did publish them, he writes, was in order to cut down the resources of the followers of Shabtai Tzvi who used the Zohar to prove their doctrines.
This incidentally clearly disproves the bewildering thesis of the Chida put forward in his Shem HaGedolim, in the entry on the Zohar, that R' Yaakov Emden had only composed his whole book as a gimmick to counter the Sabbatean forces though he himself didn't really mean what he said when it wasn't Rashbi who had composed the Zohar.

False.

He had composed it as a mission of truth, but he hadn't published it until he felt urgent need. I am also amazed that the Chida would believe that Rav Yaakov would bring 300 critical points that all in all destroy the image of inviolability of what is supposed to be the Holiest (or according to others almost the Holiest) of all books, only as a gimmick.

In his book, R' Yaakov first presents the above two anomalies, and then we have a systematic analysis going right down the whole Zohar. Let's look at some of the more remarkable comments he - and occasionally some other critics - have to make:

Throughout the Mitpachas he brings many quotes in the Zohar that he says are clearly taken straight out of Seforim like the Kuzari (who died a hundred and fifty years before the discovery of the Zohar) and the writings of the Rambam (a hundred years before the Zohar).

But my favorite, found by Gershom Scholem, is a poetic phrase in Tikunay zohar straight out of the poem Keser Malchus by r' Shlomo ibn Gabirol (11th century):

Says the Zohar:

\[
\text{דאית נשמתא בלא כגופה ואשתארו נהורייהו דאסלק ושמשא דסייהרא בלקותא מאוריהם\\nnבתקות דסיפורים ישמאמו מחשיך עליהם אדון\\nולא ישלמו מעין מאורהויסתיר רואיה ל\\nוחיליהם השמים לצבא המלכות אין כי רואיה\\nכל ידע למען למשמנים יהלומים\\nויוכלו ית redeemed נמשכים\\nולא ישלמו מעין מאורהויסתיר רואיה ל\\nוחיליהם השמים לצבא המלכות אין כי רואיה\\nכל ידע למשמנים יהלומים\\nויוכלו ית redeemed נמשכים.}
\]

and here is the original, from keser malchus:

\[
\text{החמה עם החדש בסוף\\nבתקות\\nלבתקות\\nוכטב\\nכל ידע למשמנים יהלומים\\nויוכלו ית redeemed נמשכים\\nולא ישלמו מעין מאורהויסתיר רואיה ל\\nוחיליהם השמים לצבא המלכות אין כי רואיה\\nכל ידע למשמנים יהלומים\\nויוכלו ית redeemed נמשכים.}
\]

We have already mentioned that the claim of two famous anti kabalists that the many quotes in the Zohar from amoraim much later that Rashbi indicate fabrication.

Came along the mekubalim and countered that this should be true for the Talmud too. We have mention in the Talmud of Rav Ashi's death even though he is supposed to have been the author.

Therefore, said the mekubalim just as the original author of the course of the Gemoro is Rav Ashi even though later authorities contributed, so too, the principle speaker of the Zohar is Rashbi, yet the work was edited and added to by later rabbis.

Well, although they are right about the Gemoro, there is one ridiculously obvious response to the mekubalim to the observing eye: the Zohar's chronology is completely wrong! Let's demonstrate with some classic examples.
3.2 Erroneous Chronology in the Zohar

We have R' Pinchas ben Yair, son-in-law of Rashbi, as mentioned in Gemoro shabbos (ל), appearing in the Zohar countless times as - his father in law! and dying before him too, as mentioned in the Idra Zuta.

There have been some pathetic responses to this argument:

One was to be Magiha in the Gemoro text to instead of חותניה.

There are two problems with this. Firstly, there is no such word as חותניה in Aramaic, since its a confusion between aramai c yud hay ending, and the hebrew world חתמן. The correct word would have been חמוהי.

Secondly both r' Shrima Gaon's letter, and the Seder haKabbalahh of the Raavad, state that r' Pinchos ben Yoir was a member of the Generation after Rashbi.

Another response is that it is the Zohar text that should be emended - from חתנך to חתנך.

This is impossible since the Zohar clearly states that r' Pinchas ben Yair was father of Rashbi's wife, and grand-father of his son, and I quote from the Zohar שמיי לי.

Another proof is from Zohar מ: "שמעון רב - לקב ברי בריך בריך! אתמר עלך (כג) משלי (יولدתך ואמך אביך ישמח)." קה לני נמי, שכיון רבן ימייהו ומייהו, ומי אמייהו שṁ נמי אמייהו אבהו אמייהו ברי איש:" But most importantly, neither of these two feeble attempts deal with the fact that the gemara implies that rashbi died before r'Pinchos Ben Yair as demonstrated by R' Aharon Heiman in his Toldos Tanoim vAmoraim. Since it says in כפ: "יסייר בחתוך מליה: אחיה, ויהי ויי וביר רב שמעון בר ממלכא קרין היושב ביהלーム ובירי חסידא. שמעון רב א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prueba א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prueba א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prova א prueba הるもの הامة פיך כי היא ויהי ויי וביר רב שמעון בר ממלכא קרין היושב ביהלーム ובירי חסידא. So we see that Rashbi, but not Rebbi's own father - Raban Gamliel - had already died whilst Rebbi was still a young student.

Yet in כפ it says that Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair came to Rebbi to contest an enactment concerning Shviis that he had decreed on the Jewish community in his capacity as Nasi - This implying that his father had died by then and that he was already an authority in his own right. So, R' Pinchas ben Yair clearly died after Rashbi.

The other example of erroneous chronology:

Rav Hamnuna Sava and Rav Yayva Sava - Talmidim of Rav (see pesachim כ, רכ).
They lived approximately 150 years after Rashbi but make an appearance in the Zohar as... Rashbi's Rebbeim! Even Dying before him as mentioned in the Idra Zuta - the Zohar in haazinu recounting Rashbi death.

There are many more examples of Tanaim and amoraim clearly conversing together, even though they couldn't possibly have seen each other such as rav Yaakov bar Idi, contemporary of r' yochanan, going to meet Rashbi in Teverya even though he lived 150 years later.

Similarly, for a book supposedly written in the First century c.e. there are some anomalies that really give it away, such as saying that the Arabs' religion is similar to our own, whereas as we know (from historical records such as r' Sherira Gaon in his iggeres) Muhammad only weaned the Arabs from dualistic zoroastrianism to Monotheism in the mid Sixth century!

Also he says that the Arabs currently occupy the holy land - which they did - not in the 1st century when Rashbi lived, but at the turn of DeLeon's thirteenth century.

The zohar brings the phrase "הוית מקדיש" whereas Tosafos (on Menachos 34b s.p. "Vehakoreh") explicitly tells us it was a phrase coined by Rav Hai Gaon.

### 3.3 Elementary Mistakes in the Zohar

Another point is the number of elementary errors that the Zohar makes in dinim, quotes, pesukim and drashos-

- such as saying that the Shtay Halechem were burned on the Mizbayach, even though the posuk clearly says that they were given to the Cohen,

- or that the Omer offering was brought of flour of barley, even though its explicit in the posuk that it was brought of whole kernels.

- or such as saying (in five different places in the Zohar!) that the Kinneret is the source of the chilazon, even though the posuk in Yehoshua says that the chelek of zevulun was in the north east, and chazal tell us that "shedim tsmei hodi" that Moshe Rabeinu in Vezos HaBrocha blessed him with refers to the chilazon that he would get in abundance from the Mediterranean.

- or that Elisha purified the deadly waters of Yericho with Eliyahu hanovi's cloak, whereas the posuk in Melochim says he did it with some salt - it was Eliyahu who used his cloak to split the Yarden.
• or that Shmuel Hanovi was a Cohen (he was a levi - as it says in Bamidbor Rabba 14:1 and Yerushalmi Brochos 31a (vilna ed.))

• or that it was Ezra who said the words "אֵין לְסַעֲדָה" whereas everyone knows it was Nechemia.

The truth is on this last one we know why he made this mistake. The author lived before sifray Ezra and Nechemia were split into two by Protestant publishers in the 15th century, so opening a book of Ezra, he found the above possuk.

The Zohar also often brings the Targum on different pesumim from Divrey Hayomim by introducing it sometimes as "אֵין לְסַעֲדָה" and sometimes as "חָנַן יָדַע" - not realizing that the Gemoro in megila (ב) says that neither Unkelos nor Yonasan ben Uziel translated any of the Kesuvim.

### 3.4 Misquoted Pesukim in the Zohar

Staggering also is the number of complete misquotes of pesumim sometimes building whole droshos on the misquotes:

Such as this classic:

אֵין לְסַעֲדָה-

This is one example among dozens.

Now, on this issue R' Yaakov Emden himself rushes to defend the Zohar against his own argument and says that not all pesumim in all mesoros are exactly the same. Even in the Gemoro we have pesumim which are different to our mesorah.

To my opinion, this argument does not hold water, since any discrepancies between our masoros and the one in the gemoro invariably rest purely on single letters which never affect the reading of the word like a yud or a vov added or subtracted - see a list of all of them in r' Akiva Eiger's gilyon hashas on Shabbos (פינא).

I've heard people argue in defense of the Zohar and quote the medrash that says:

Ah! here we see a whole word different!

The answer to them is: read the rest of the Medrash!: 
It was only a drosha, and not that this is what was actually written.

I've heard others quote the Medrash from Masseches Soferim:

So we have the discrepancies Zaatuti and Naaray maon maona hu hi - so why didn't they just look in the Famous sefer Torah of Ezra hasofer (which by mesores we had until several hundred years ago) to check the right?

Says the Megaleh Amukus - this is the Story of the Sefer torah of Ezra! He found the three seforim and that's how he got his Sefer Torah which was reference for later generations! The added letters that didn't change pronunciations of words were not noticed until the Sefer was lost!
3.5 Fraudulent Droshos in the Zohar

Then, there are the fraudulent Droshos. The Yaavetz brings some examples of which this is one:

The Yaavetz points out that the first posuk is in mishpotim, and the second quote "" is in the beginning of Vayikra after the Mishkan was built ten months later! So why is he saying that Moshe was still on the mountain when Hashem called him to the Mishkan?

Another is:

The Zohar says that at matan torah they heard only the pleasant parts of the torah, but they didn't hear of any of the punishments until they got to Moro. But, points out the Yaavetz, Moro was not after matan torah - it was after krias yam suf before matan torah

I have found, by personal research as well as in seforim other than the Mitpachas some more examples of erroneous chronology and droshos:

The Zohar speaks in the name of Rashbi regarding the order of Tekiyos - whereas we know it was R’ Avahu in Caesaria who was invented the order

Well, the Ramban - who by everyone's standards was supposed to have been the Master of Kabbolo and according to the Ari (though not Rav Yehuda Chayat) knew of the Zohar - clearly states, in his "Droshoh for Rosh Hashono" that Rav Avahu entirely invented and even goes on so far as to ask - how could r' avahu be cholek on the Tanoim of the Mishna who say that one only blows a shvarim and a truah? His answer, in a nutshell, is that since it was only a variation and combination of the existing din it was ok.

The Zohar says that there are always two days of Rosh Hashona. Well, in the time of Rashbi in Eretz Isroel, by the testimony of Masechtos beitzah and rosh hashono, in the proximity of the Beis Hamikdosh and the Beis haVaad there was always only one day.

The very book of the Zohar is split into the parshos as we know them, and also the Zohar itself states that shmini atzeres is always simchas torah - yet at the time of Rashbi all the way up to the Rambam, In etrez Yisroel the Minhag was to finish the torah once every three and a half years! They did not even acknowledge the Parshos we use today, let alone celebrate Simchas Tora on Shemini Atzeres every year! see Sefer minhogay mizrach umaarav authored by the geonim and the Rambam in his Yad Hachazoko.

Then there are some very remarkable droshos:
Why didn't he ask about the "והיה" too?

I'm sure it's fairly obvious why there is really no question here, since the "והיה" is the malach and the "أخرיו" means after, or behind, the door.

**3.6 Malevolent Intent In The Zohar**

Then there is another grade of anomaly, implying malevolent intent. One which might be termed "כהלכה שלא בתורה" Ein Modim, which is heresy, such as:

- The obligation to wear Tefillin both in the style of Rashi as well as Rabi Tam,
- The prohibition of walking 4 amos without washing the morning Netilas Yodaim and being liable to death if one does,
- That a motzi shichvas zera levatolo has no atonement whatsoever (renegade mekulalim claiming to know secret tikkunim for this one have ammassed fortunes based on this zohar. I know a few who fell for it).
- The yud of the tefillin shel yad not leaving touching the bayis.
- One who wears tefillin on chol hameoded is liable to death.
- Prohibition of learning Torah Shebiksav at night.
- Prohibition of giving tzedoko at night.
- That the final day of the sealing of the individual's yearly judgement - and I mean the personal din of the individual (not the din on rain as the Mishna Brura associates) - is really hoshana rabbah not Yom kippur.
- In Zohar of Pinchos, that an Eishes Ish is מותר only if her husband allows.

and many many more.

**3.7 Blasphemy In The Zohar**

And then another even lower level of anomaly. One which seems downright blasphemous:

The zohar darshens "מתא פניו והאדוונ קדש" and R' Yaakov writes seemingly lividly:

Yet then proposes amending the text of the zohar by adding the word "את" to read את כי אם פניו והאדוונ קדש such that the "דק" is from the word את ana not by logical inclusion into המדור התא.

Nevertheless he concludes his comment by saying:
Yet I have found in the Zohar a very similar drosha, which amazingly the Yaavetz doesn't mention, that does not leave the same room for tweaking:

ואמרי אבריה רהטי הוו שמעון לרב חמאן ובריה ואבריה אבריה (הושע יא) אריה ייך ייל ידרי ישא. אכילה.

And even if we were to overlook all of the above somehow, there is one dogma of the Zohar that is paralleled only by the Christian message of Salvation in terms of willful attempt to uproot basic tenets of Judaism.

But first I must diverge a moment to focus your reflection on the following mystery. How is it that R' Yaakov Emden wrote a book with three hundred critiques on the Zohar, in a language which at best is derogatory, with some incredibly convincing arguments, and yet in his preface he writes - he who doubts the authenticity of the entire Zohar - Osid Liten es HaDin?

Similarly at the end when he clearly states that none of the work could possibly have been authored by Rashbi, and the Rashbi mentioned couldn't possibly have been the one we know from the Mishna, he still maintains the holiness of the Sefer.

The question poses itself - Why? What is the argument he brings for us having to believe in the authenticity of the Zohar? - R' Yaakov Emden brings us only one - the Ari.

To quote him –

"וג תמר הוה ברה ויה ומקובל עלי הכתוב שיהי יושב עליל הראוי יי, שיהי אוש קדוש ואליפי והיה ישור".

Ulil, אלעם עליל בנויה על חכמה, בחינתה והנראתה, חילל法庭יות אתר דבורה.

Chalila lenarher achar dvorov.

Remarkably enough this is the same argument the Chida in Shem Hagedolim brings against Rav Yaakov himself for saying that the not the entire Zohar is from Rashbi.

What is so powerful about this argument?
4 Problems with the Ari

4.1 The Authenticity of the Ari

It would seem that to say that the Zohar is fake would be tantamount to calling the Ari a liar. After all, he only ascended the ladder of holiness and fame by virtue of his continual study of the Zohar. All his books bring nothing but combinations and analyses of the Zoharic dogmas. All his energies were spent only on this.

He received revelations from Elyahu Hanovi to explain him the Zoharic concepts, and for this end he ascended the Heavenly academy. He claimed to have perceived and communicated with the souls of the Tannoim and Amoraim mentioned in the Zohar and spoken to them about the ideas that they are recorded as having expressed. He even went up to heaven to hear Hakodosh Boruch Hu himself give shiurim on the Zohar.

To touch the holiness of the Zohar and the Ari might be in effect exposing the entire gamut of Jewish sages of the previous half-millennia as superstitious, naive and cowardly. After all, are we not the perfect people?

Yet R’ Yaakov Emden himself clearly states that the Raya mehemna part of the Zohar was unmistakably entirely of 13th century origin - despite clear statements of the Ari to the contrary!

4.2 Fundamental Mistakes of the Ari

What's more the Ari clearly can be caught on many other points in his writings:

- He gives a kabalistic explanation for why the availability of Techeles is dependant on the Beis Hamikdosh, even though the Talmud in Brochos and in Menachos records that Techeles was still in circulation 300 years after the Churban Habyis.

- He claims to know the processes of Gilgul and describes the Gilgul of a certain r’ Dostai Gaon. According to the Iggeres r’ shrira Gaon - such a Gaon never existed.

- He claims to have discovered the burial spots of Neviim, Tannoim and Amoraim by his Ruach Hakodesh, among them the tomb of Rabbi Meir in Teveria, this, despite the fact that there is an extant tomb in Iraq already mentioned in the 11th and twelfth century by r’ Binyamin of Tudela and r’ Yaakov of Regensburg (talmid of r’ Yehuda Hachasid) respectively.

4.3 Strange Practices of the Ari

Even stranger are the accounts of the Ari seemingly practicing two forms of augury - ornithomancy (divination by birds) and pyromancy (divination by fire), and remarkably it seems that r’ Yaakov Emden already hinted the Ari's strange practices when he write in the mitpachas as follows, first quoting from the Zohar:
and says:

Well, first, he is right that this is meonen according to R’ Akiva, as it says in the Gemoro:

And he is also right that such is to be found in Kisyay hoAri, though not regarding meonen, but menachesh, and I quote from the words of R’ Vital:

"All that is decreed above, is publicized in all the worlds etc. and the thickening of the air prevents this voice reaching Earth, nevertheless, when the birds thin out the air by flapping their wings, then the voice can pass there etc. for by his flapping and flying, he leads the voice for at times...(birds) tell us (future events) by their flight."

Says the gemoro in sanhedrin (כג): "This is the famous art of soothsaying described by the Greek poet Hesyos in his poem Ornithomantaia - the greek for othinomancy.

Another instance of this practice by the Ari can be found in the book Eleh Toldos Yitzchak also by r’ Chaim Vital, and I quote:

And in the book Shivchay haari by Rav Shlomo Shlumil, an account of him actually divining by the flame movements can be found, and I quote:

Now, let me read you a section from Sefer Chasidim (siman 59) that deals with this practice:

The Ari, though, explains all his strange practices with various kabalistic explanations.
4.4 Blasphemous Claims of the Ari

Yet as serious as the implications of all these accounts are, there is one claim that his Talmid R’ Chaim Vital makes (and he was essentially the Ari’s mouthpiece by all accounts) that in my opinion dwarfs all others in gravity, and he brings support from the Zohar, and this is where we left the critiques of the Mitpachas earlier on, and it is this:

That a person gets no schar olam habo for learning toras ha nigeleh! No schar olam habo for learning Chumash or Gemara!

Naturally this is a very serious accusation to make against the Zohar or the Ari. But if you don’t believe me, then let me read you r’ Chaim Vital’s introduction to the sefer hahakdomos. It’s long but its crucial evidence:

We see that clairvoyance is a talent that has nothing to do with a persons genuineness and piety, and as is also implicit from the above quote from Sefer Chasidim.
here he is very clearly saying that people who just deal in so-called "nigleh" they get their reward only in this world in the form of riches and honor since "nigleh" only deals in terms of this world.

Yet Chazal say:

And when R' Eliezer, Rebe of R'Akiva was about to pass from this world, what did he discuss with his students? says in Gemoro Sanhedrin:
רב נכנסו אליעזר רבי לבקרוכשחלה וחבריו עקיבא י... אחד למקום כלן נתקבצו. לו אמרו: מшибка והקמיע והאמוס הכדור מהו קטנה ומשקolta המרגליות? להן אמרו: לשון במה וטהרתן טמאין. מהו האموس גבי שעעל מנעל? להן אמרו: הוא טהור. בטהרה נשמתו ויצאה - he spent his last moments discussing which Kelim are mekabel tumah and not these so called סידור!

And anyway, so we need to prove the claim of personages of dubious reliability that Talmud Torah of the Torah that all of Klal Yisroel hold in their hands - the Chumash Mishna and Gemoro - does not give us heavenly merit when we study it, When our Mesorah is that it does, as too imply all of Chazal?

### 4.5 History of The Mitpachas

The mitpachas never made it too big. The Chasam Sofer, it seems, liked it and held of it, and it also seems from a slightly cryptic Teshuva "שנה חסידים ימי", agreed with it.

R Eliezer Fleckeles, prime Talmid of the Noda biyehuda, inheritor of his Prague seat, and author of Shut Tshuva me Ahava also mentions the Mitpachas, and declares his own opinion in that sefer siman 26 - One leaf of the Talmud is holier than the entire Zohar!

This remarkable Gaon also succeeded in having all kabolla literature banned form the the Czech lands by King Joseph the Second (ruled 1780-1790) and later by Francis the Second (ruled 1792-1835) and this is what he writes:

In effect, even about all kabola he is absolutely right. Even if we don't accept the Ran's statement that Ramban too readily believed that kabola was true, nevertheless, by all accounts - mekubalim, non-mekubalim - we have no massores extant today of the Ramban's kabola.

When the Ari made the statement that after the Ramban, transmission of kabbola ceased, it was never challenged by any mekubal who laid claim to a Mesora leading up to the Ramban. All kabbola we have today is entirely based upon the Zohar and Ari. Therefore any kabalsitic concept circulant today, I personally feel has absolutely no relation to us, whether in thought or practice.

And when he says that kabbalistic propagation caused Gufani - physical harm besides Nafshi - emotional harm, history would seem to suggest a fearful statistic - the record of famous rabbis who expended great efforts in spreading the kabalistic word and were cut down by Hashem in one way or another - whether it was the Ari who died at 34 or shabtai tzvi who became a mumar, or the Magen avrohom, who incorporated much of the Ari's practices into popular halocho, and died aged 46, or the Ramchal who was chased out of Europe and died before he was 40, or, in our day, Rav A, Rav K and Rav P who...
propagated a lot of Zohar and kabolla publicly on a large scale and who all died in the prime of their life.

But (as pointed out to me by Rav S) more than anything are noteworthy the communities that adopted kabalistic practices at large and reared generations of Amay ho'oretz.

In the last century the existence of the Mitpachas Seforim was generally just swept under the carpet. **There is a currently a pan-chareidi ban on its re-publication.**

4.6 **Other Anti Zohar Works**

Everything that came after it both pro and anti zohar pales in comparison.

R’ Yitzchok Isaac Chever's work - Mogayn veTzina is a very passionate work defending Kabolah against R' Yehuda Arye DeModina's Ari Nohem, with arguments mainly resting on the greatness of the Ramban, and in my opinion lacking the distinction between kabola and Razay torah that I made earlier. It addresses none of the hard-core criticism directed against the Zohar.

The Radal's defence of the Zohar - Kadmus Hazohar, also deals with very peripheral issues - he reflects on whether the argument that Moshe DeLeon wrote the Zohar is a convincing one, and if there are traces of literature similar to the Zohar style in earlier sources.

Even the damning anti-Zohar book Milchamos Hashem of Rabbi Yihye Gafah - Av beis din Saana, Yemen, at the end of the last century who claimed the zohar was a pagan work - I find is missing the critical evidence to sustain his thesis, since the anthropomorphisms of God's attributes, which he claims were really intended to be considered as independant deities, have already been explained by the Ramban al Hatorah and the Ephodi in his anti-Christian polemic "גבעות הסתר" in a way which I find ceratinly pulls the rug from under Rav Gafah's thesis. It is very clear from his writing that he could not possibly have seen this, since he defends classical kabola and sets it apart from Zoharic kabola, whereas in fact Zoharic kabolla is an elaboration on and derivation from classic kabolla and clear roots for it are present in the writings of the Ramban.

And Gershom Scholem's works, although vastly expanded on the Mitpachas, nevertheless the originality rights are certainly the Yaavetz's. Him not being a religious figure also served to undermine the value of his research.
5 Conclusion

5.1 Contemporary Gedolim’s Opinions
I went around some talmiday chachomim with my conclusions, and got mixed responses.

5.1.1 Rav M
First I approached Rav M with a few simple arguments. He told me you can say everything that looks late in the Zohar can be said to have been known earlier by Ruach Hakodesh. Today I realize why this answer is so unconvincing. Firstly it ignores the more serious facets of the critique - namely the errors in the Zohar. Secondly it is clearly disproven from the Spanish words and the unique quotes from the Rishonim's books.

5.1.2 Rav A
I approached Rav A with some of the questions on the Zohar, and he responded to me - "and what about nikud? Nikud is also mentioned in the Zohar despite the fact that it from Geonic times!" he said. I later found this comment in the Mitpachas Seferim. I would just add that not only is nikud mentioned, but only the Tiberian Nikkud - the norm in Europe of the middle ages - is mentioned and not the Yerushalmi nikud or the Babylonian one - which was used then in the Middle East, and is still used by Yemenites today. Also the Taamay Hamikrah - the trop - are referred to in the Zohar - only by their Sefardi Names. Rav A told me a remarkable piece of testimony: "My rebbe (this is how he generally refers to Rav E) accepted the possibility that the Zohar was written sometime in the 13th century."

5.1.3 Rav K
I then went to R’ K. I told him my arguments, and also Rav A’s testimony. He told me that he didn't believe Rav A’s testimony, and also, since the Rabim (majority religious population) accepted it we too must believe it just like we accepted the Talmud. I countered that's it Mezuyaf Mitocho (it is inherently noticeable that's it's fabricated). He asked me if I want my wine to be Yain Nesech! I would have countered that the Rabim also accepted Shabtai Tzvi and the fake Yerushalmi Kodoshim - what right did Klal Yisroel have to change their minds and decide months and years later that these two were fake, once they had already been accepted? Well, he cut me short before I could open my mouth he gave me a brocha that I should stop be Osek in Chakiros in all these things and I should just sit and learn.

5.1.4 Rav G
Rav G told me that he was still unsure as to the origin and status of the Zohar, but told me it was my absolute right to draw any conclusions I saw fit regarding both the Zohar and the Ari.
5.1.5 Rav S

Most recently I approached Rav S with my findings.

He definitely agreed that the Zohar is entirely pseudo-epigraphical, but he believes that it still holds a true esoteric core that kabalists of the 13th century wished to preserve in writing and to be taken seriously by the public, hence the ascription to Rashbi.

He was also very apologetic about the Ari, saying that all the strange things he said and did were innocent errors or miscalculations.

In addition, he said that the claims made by the Zohar to undermine the rest of the Torah are an exaggeration to encourage study of kabbala that was maybe losing popularity.

What forces him to say this, he tells me, is the fact that the GRA took the Zohar and the Ari so seriously. Now I believe that the GRA is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant Talmiday Chochomim in the last 800 years though by his own admission, less so than either the Rambam or the GRA's own contemporary, the Shaagas Arye.

Rav S says that the GRA surely must have seen the problems in the Zohar, but nevertheless accepted a holy core in the Zohar which must have been because he must have seen parallels and patterns in existing Torah literature that reflect in the Zohar as being their continuation, since no others exist.

I countered that the question on the GRA, is no more than a question - on the GRA, but not on us, for while it may be true that there are some parallels nevertheless there is an enormous amount of novellae and novelty for which the only source is the Zohar, and what a wretched vessel the Zohar is, to hold the most sublime secrets of the Universe.

5.2 My Conclusion

The ideas in the Zohar are just so intertwined with the falsehoods, and so far stretched past their connections to known literature that I feel they completely lose any reliability.

The Mekubal or Mekubalim who have created this concoction have set these ideas among purposeful distortion of Torah texts, dinim, misleading statements, and some remarkable displays of ignorance and possibly blasphemy, all with a clear attempt to undermine what we have always believed is Torah and earns us our world to come - and we must trust these Mekubalim to be the bearers of the holiest ideas known to man? For them we must change our thoughts beliefs and practices?

I think not.