

# **An Analysis of the Authenticity of the Zohar**

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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? ראשית חכמה יראת ה' - I think, should be interpreted not only as the first thing a child should be taught, but also that whenever one expounds on חכמה, the first directive should always be יראת ה' - something that will be expressed in the context of fear of Hashem, if not directly, then indirectly and eventually. It must be something that could only enhance our עבודה and our relationship with הקב"ה. 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 of 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"ה, our אמונה in מתן תורה, in that the Torah in our hands today is that which was given to משה רבינו by כלל ישראל.

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 Yiddishkeit.

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 than 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.

## 2 A Brief History of Kabbalah

### 2.1 Origins

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

I would like to preface that The term Kabbalah 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 harshba 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 esoteric 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:

”חייבים אנו לחקור כל הדברים כפי השגתנו ולדרך בהם הדרך שדרכו הנקראים בדורנו בדורות שהיו לפנינו מהיום מאתיים שנה - מקובלים, וקוראין לחכמת העשר ספירות וקצת טעמי המצוות קבלה”

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 Hakdama 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 Kabbalah greater legitimacy. So let us remember henceforth that Kabbalah 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 Tnach, 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 ס"ה):

רבא ברא גברא, שדריה לקמיה דרבי זירא. הוה קא משתעי בהדיה, ולא הוה קא מהדר ליה. אמר ליה: מן חבריא את, הדר לעפריך. רב חנינא ורב אושעיא הוו יתבי כל מעלי שבתא ועסקי בספר יצירה, ומיברו להו עיגלא תילתא, ואכלי ליה.

Rashi explains:

ממילא אברו להו עגלא תילתא על ידי שהיו מצרפים אותיות השם שבהם נברא העולם, ואין כאן משום מכשפות דמעשה הקדוש ברוך הוא הן, על ידי שם קדושה שלו 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 Eiruvין נ. calls R' Donolo זכר צדיק 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 teshuvos "quoted" in certain kabala books, and several Kabbalah 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"ו, there is a very long Teshuva where he writes that anyone who believes that someone today can have kefitzas haderech or make himself disappear by incantations is naive and gullible. He also says that despite that 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:

הנה פרשנו למעלה שאין אנחנו יודעים היאך קריאתו והגיונו באמונה, ולא מסרו לידינו רב מפי רב שמסרו לו רב אחר מסירה [משולשת, אלא ארעי שמענוהו מפי חלוקים בקריאתו ולא במסירה, והוא צריך מסירה] בכונה שיושב זה ומסור לזה בטהרה ובקדושה מסירת קבע וכונה, וכל מי שאינו מסור לידו כסדר הזה חשוב כאילו [אינו] יודעו תשובות הגאונים החדשות - עמנואל (אופק) סימן קטו

And as you may recall, knowing the secrets names of HaShem, doesn't make you a kaballist, 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 ominous statements he sometime makes in his seforim such as " כך

", 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. They 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: אילו ידעתיו הייתי . - If I truly knew Him I would be Him.

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 - " ויאצל מן "



" 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 - אצילות בריאה - 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 - מעלה ניצוצות, מוריד 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 ascends 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:

רב אמר לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף בהן את הבריות, וכי מה איכפת ליה להקב"ה למי ששוחט מן הצואר, או מי ששוחט " מן העורף, הוי' : לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף בהם את הבריות

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 chayot, 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 (ה'ל"ד) and R' Chaim Vital (שער הקדושה).

The Chida in several places in shem hagedolim states that RY dmin Acco was a Talmid of the Ramban, 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:

ולמען תספרו לדור אחרון אודיעכם מה שמצאתי כתוב. שר' יצחק דמן עכו (תלמיד הרשב"א ומקובל היה) הלך לחקור על ספר הזוהר שכנראה שהיו דבריו מופלאים ישאבו ממקור עליון. ואשר הוא לשון ירושלמי- נראה שדבריו דברי קבלה ואמת. ואשר הם לשון הקודש- הם דברי זיוף. אמר- ושאלתי את התלמידים אשר נמצאו בידיהם ספר הזהר מאין בו להם. ולא מצאתי דבריהם מכוונים. יש מי שאמר שהרמב"ן מצא אותו בארץ ישראל ושלחו לקטלוניא והביאו הרוח לארגון ונפל ביד ה' משה דיליאון. ויש אומרים שמעולם לא היה חיבור של רשב"א, רק שר' משה ידע שם הכותב (=שם משמות המפורשים של הקב"ה שבהם אפשר לקבל כח גדול בכתיבה) ובכוחו יכתוב דברים מופלאים. ולמען יקח בהם מחיר רב, היה תולה עצמו באילן גדול שהוא רשב"א ור"א בנו וחביריו. ואבוא אל עיר ואליאדוליד, ואמצא שם ר' משה די ליאון. וישבע לי שספר רשב"א הנו בביתו (=כלומר נשבע - לא שיש עמו ספר שחברו רשב"א, אלא הנקרא ספר רשב"א הנו בביתו- שכך קראו ר"מ דיליאון בעצמו! ובכך נמלט משבועת שקר, דלא כמו שכתב בעל ההגהות על ספר מגן וצנה שלא ראה נוסח זה) באוילא (=עיר בספרד), שיראהו לי בלכתי שמה. ובשוב לביתו מת (ר' משה) באדיבאל. ואבוא אל עיר אוילא ואמצא שם חכם זקן, ושמו ר' דוד רפאן, קרובו (של ר' משה די לי) ואמצא חן בעיניו. ואשביעהו לאמר אם היה יודע אמיתות ספר הזוהר אם היה אמת או לא. ויאמר החכם, כי נתברר לו בודאי שר' משה בשם הכותב היה בודאם. וסיבת האמיתות היא כי ר' משה הנז' היה כותב סודות ונפלאות לעשירים אשר במלכות ההוא, ולוקח בהם מתנות רבות זהב וכסף. ואותו היום, כל מה שהיה מרויח היה מפזר. עד שביום מותו לא נשאר לו אפילו פרוטה. ואשתו ובניו ברעב ובצמא ובערום ובחוסר כל. וכשמעי מתתו, קמתי אל ה' יוסף די אוילא שהיה עשיר גדול, ובחייו לקח ממנו ממון גדול. ואומר לו- עתה היא עתך עת דודים, תזכה לספר הגדול ותקח את הספר מיד אשתו במנה יפה שתשלח ביד אשתך, שהיא (אשתו של ר"מ ד"ל) כעת ערומה. וכן עשה. וישלח מתנות ביד אשתו אל אשת ר"מ הנז'. ותשבע לה אשת ר' משה הנז' שמעולם לא היה לו ספר לאישי, רק מלבו ודעתו היה כותב. ואומר לאישי- למה אתה תולה עיוןך בחכם אחר (=רשב"א)? הלא טוב היה לך לאמר כי משלך אתה כותב ויודוך כי תיטיב לך. ואישי ענני- שאם הייתי אומר שמדעתך הם, לא יחשיבו אותם ולא יתנו לי מתנות

אמר יצחק- ואסע מאוילא ואבוא עד טאלאבירה. ומצאתי שם חכם מופלא, ושמו ר' יוסף הלוי בן ר' טודרוס המקובל. ואחקרה ממנו לדעת מה שידו מגעת בידיעת ספר הזוהר. ויאמר אלי- דע באמת כי היה ביד ר' משה הנז' ספר הזוהר אמיתי, וסבות אמיתות דברי הוא כי היה נותן לי קונטרסים, ואני לבחון הספק הזה לקחתי קונטרסים אחד מן הקונטרסים ואמרתי לו שנאבד ממני, שיתן לי ממלא מקומו. ויאמר לי- הראה לי אחרית הקונטרס הקודם לו וראשית הקונטרס המתאחר. ויכתוב לי קונטרס, וארא ואין ביניהם שינוי כלל. אפילו תיבה אחת. רק שפה אחת ודברים אחדים. היש נסיון גדול מזה? אח"כ באתי לטוליטולה ואמרו לי שבחינת החכם ר' יוסף הלוי אינה בחינה, שאולי קודם נתון הקונטרסים לאדם, היה מעתיק אחד לעצמו, ואח"כ מתוך אותם קונטרסים אשר בביתו היה כותב לאחרים. (=כלומר אפשר שעותקים היו עוד בביתו אחר מותו, רק ניכרים כולם שחדשים זה מכבר נכתבו) ע"כ.

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 Kabbalist, 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 kabbalists 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:

"אמר רבי שמעון חב"א בודאי קודשא בריך הוא אסתכם עמא עלאין ותתאין למהוי בהאי חבורא. זכאה דרא דהאי אתגלייא ביה. דעתיד כולי האי לאתחדשא על ידא דמשה בסוף יומיא בדרא בתראה"

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 Kabbalistic 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

"הרבה יותר מדאי תקע עצמו הרמב"ן ז"ל להאמין בענין הקבלה ההיא" (שו"ת הריב"ש סימן קנז)

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:

"אך בעצם הספירות...אני אומר, שאין לסמוך בדברים כאלו אלא מפי חכם מקובל, ועדיין אולי"

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 haemunus, 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 haakorim, and a scant reference to the Zoharic concept "חקל תפוחין קדישין" 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 hashkafa, and includes a scathing attack on Kabbala.

Who was this R' Elyahu 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 שו"ת מהרי"ק who refers to him as

"מצרף לחכמה וכו' לתבונה, ויהי ידיו אמונה, כל אמרתו צרופה מנופה בשלש עשרה נפה, ה"ה הוותיק ידיד נפשי המשכיל" "הר"ר אליה דלמדיגו יצ"ו (ישמרהו צורו ויחיהו)

and in שו"ת אליה מקאנדיא "the ר"ר who calls him "מר"ר אליה מקאנדיא". It is also noteworthy that this r' Elyah lived all of just 35 years.

This is what he writes:

כי הנה כת אשר יחשבו אנשיה שכל דברי התורה בכללם ואותיותיהם להם רמזים וענינים נעלמים זלתי לאנשי הכת ההיא, ואנשי הכת הזאת ייחסו אלה הדברים לקבלה, ויפליגו לדבר על מי שיחשוב לחלוק אתם בבאורם ובדעותם. וכת רוב הנמשכים אחר דברי התלמוד וכן גם בעלי הפשט וכת המתפלספים מאנשי אומתנו יתאמצו נגד אלה, והאחרונים יטענו עליהם כי אנחנו נמצא כל הגאונים או רובם לא הלכו בדרך ההיא, ואמנם, דבריהם בלתי מסכימים אתם. הנה תמצא הגאונים כולם או רובם לא ידעו דבר מזה, אבל רצו להמשך אחר הסברא, ואמרו בענין בעלת אוב כי אין ראוי שיאמנו הדברים כפשוטם כאשר להם מכחישים מהשכל. ונמצא גדולי המפרשים לתלמוד לא ידעו דבר מזה אבל רצו להמשך אחר הסברא כאשר הראה דברי הראב"ד נגד רש"י בביאור המלך הקדוש...

- ויטענו מנגדי זאת הדעת כי אשר יאמרו אלה המתייחסים בקבלה שהמה דברי רש"י בן יוחאי בספר הנקרא ספר הזהר אינו אמת, וזה יראה מפנים רבים: ראשון שלו חיברו רש"י, היו מזכירין ממנו אי זו ברייתא או אי זו אגדה בתלמוד כאשר עשו מספרי ומשאר חיבורים תלמודיים, וזה לא ימצא, ויטענו עוד ששמותהאנשים ההמה אשר הוזכרו בספר ההוא היו אחר רש"י שנים רבות כידוע לאשר ראה שמות האנשים ההם וראה גם כן בתלמוד ואם כן לא יתכן כלל שיהיה מחבר הספר הזה ר' שמעון בן יוחאי.

- ויטענו עוד כי הספר ההוא לא התפרסם באומתנו כי אם קרוב לג' מאות שנה  
- ויטענו עוד שלו היה ר' שמעון אב המקובלים ויודע סודות הדינים ורמזיהם בדרך אמיתית היה ראוי שיהיה הלכה כמותו, ואין הדבר כן. ועוד כי אנחנו נראה פעמים רבים יאמרו המקובלים שכפי הרמז ראוי שיהיה הדין כך ומי"מ נראה הפוסקים וגדולי התלמוד יפסקו להפך

- ויטענו עוד כי הדבר המקובל אין ראוי שתמצא בו המחלוקת אנחנו נמצא מחלוקת בה בין אלה המקובלים בשרשי התורה היותר גדולים, וזה כי יש מהם מי שאמר כי העשר ספירות הם האלהות עצמן (רבינו בחי) ושאין הנה עלה

(cause) יותר גדולה כלל - וזאת הדעה היא כפירה בדת וכ"ש כפי המפורסם אצל כלל חכמי ישראל ויתר העם, אלא אם אולי ירצו לומר שהם ענינים או תוארים מה נמצאים באל, אם בבחינת השכל ואם באופן אחר, וזה רחוק משרשיהם ומדבריהם באלה הספירות ויאמרו גם כן שתפלותינו כלם רומזים על עלה ולא לה נכוין. ויש מהם מי שאמר שהנה עלה עליונה על אלה ויקראוהו אין סוף, ואלה כאשר יובנו דבריהם כראוי לא יהיה מחלוקת רבה ביניהם ובין המפורסם אצל העם כלו מענין האל. ואם כן, איך נאמר שהדברים האלה קבלה?...וכ"ש כאשר נמצא רוב הדברים ההם בלתי מסכימים כלל למה שהתבאר בהקש השכלי - ואבל רובם נאותים לדברי קדומי הפילוסופים אשר התבאר ביטולם אצל היודעים. ואשר ראה דברי קדומי הפילוסופים וגם קצת דברי אפלטוניים ודברי אלה, ידע שהאמת כן.

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 Mekubalim, in the form of the Sefer "מצרף לחכמה" by his great-nephew - r' Yashar of Candia, - a talmid chochom and Posek and also

highly knowledgeable in kabbala -, who demonstrated that his great uncle's view of kabbla 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 Mizrah 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:

כל דבר ודבר שלא הוזכר לא בתלמוד בבלי ולא בתלמוד ירושלמי ולא דברו בו הפוסקים אשר מפייהם אנו חיים ועליהם אנו סומכים כל עניני הדת בכלל אין אנו יכולים להכריח בו אע"פ שבעלי הקבלה דברו בו מפני שדבריהם אינם [אלא] על צד הרמז שמרמיזין הם לעצמן שהיו בקיאים על זה אבל בזמנינו זה שבעונות הרבים אין אנו מכוונים בתפלותינו להרמיז במה שראוי להרמיז והלואי שהיינו מכוונים על פשט דברינו היוצאים מפינו אין אנו יכולים להכריח העם בדבר מהדברים הרמוזים לעליונים ולא שמענו בזמנינו לשום אחד מבעלי הקבלה הגדולים והמפורסים /והמפורסמים/ שיכריחו את העם באותן הדברים הרמוזים לבעלי הקבלה לדברים עליונים כשלא דברו בהם חכמי התלמוד והפוסקים הבאים אחריהם... שאע"פ שמנהג מבטל הלכה וכמה דברים הניחו החכמים דלא כהלכתא כדי שלא לבטל המנהג כל שכן בדברי חכמי הקבלה אשר חכמתם בזמנינו מציאותה קשה ואין אדם יכול לרדת לסוף דעתם ואין כח באדם לבטל מנהג או הלכה ע"פ גזירתם וכבר ידוע שהנחת תפילין בחול המועד כתוב בספר הזוהר שהוא אסור ומאן דמנח להו מדחי חותמא דמלכא עילאה דשרא עלן בגין דיוקנא דאינון עבדין וכו' והאריך בזה הרב כמו שכתוב ועכ"ז לא מצינו הפוסקים אסרו זה מצד דברי רבי שמעון בן יוחאי והרא"ש היה מניחם ומברך עליהם ואין ספק שהרא"ש וכיוצא בו מה ידענו ולא ידע הגם כל רז לא אנס ליה ולכן הפוסק על ראשי עם קודש לחלוק על האמת ולקיים דבריו פורץ גדרו של עולם וראוי ליעצו שלא לחלוק על הרבים וזהו הנראה לע"ד.  
נאם אליא הלוי זעיר שם

הלא טוב אמנה כי הקבלה היא חכמה רמה איומה כנגלות בה סתרי תורה ליודעי פשר דבר וממנה יפרד טוב טעם ודעת למשכילים המזהירים כזוהר הרקיע. אך בזמנינו זה אפס המדע הזה וסתרי תורה נעלמו מעיני כל רז לא ידע אנוש ערך החכמה הנשגבה כזאת וכל המחזיק בה יקרה לו מההיזק והסכנה חלק רב ועל כיוצא בזה הזהירונו ז"ל במופלא ממך אל תדרוש ובמכוסה ממך אל תחקור ודי לנו במה שהורונו חכמי הקבלה האמתית המסכמת מכל צד בפירוש התורה ומצותיה ע"פ המסורה לאיש איש עד ימות משה והיא הנקראת תורה שבע"פ אשר בגללה עלה משה למרום ועמד מ' יום ומ' לילה ללמוד כלליה ופרטיה במדות הנמסרות לו מפי הגבורה ובדברים אלו אנו מחוייבים להתעסק כי הם חיינו ואורך ימינו ואחרי דבריהם לא נשנה אחת דתו להמית כל אשר ימרה את פיהם וכל העובר ע"ד חכמים חייב מיתה אך יתר הרמזים אשר בהם בלו ימיהם חכמי הקבלה עם היותם מסתרי ומעניני המושכלות לא צוינו עליהם כי אלו נשאר להתעסק בהם יחיד סגולה ואשר חננו ה' יתר שאת ויתר עז וזה בזמנים אשר היו לפנינו אשר נשאר ב' ג' גרגירים בראש אמיר שטו ולקטו בהם א' מעיר ובי' ממשפחה ולא כל הרוצה ליטול את השם יטול כי דברים הם שכבשם כבשונו של עולם. ובזמנינו זה תם זכות אבות ואין מחזיק בצדק בחכמה הזאת אדרבא הם הורסים פינות התורה ועמודיה יתפלצון מקול מחצצים הם העברים העורים לא ידעו דרך ישכון אור ימששו כעור וילאו למצוא הפתח ובמקום שחשבו להרויח פתע ישברו ואין מרפא ורבים מעמי הארץ מתיהרים באמורם סוד ה' לנו מורשה לנו המים העליונים לא לכם בעלי התלמוד ההולכים בחושך ולבם בל עמם טח מראות עיניהם והדבר אין בהם חכמים המה להרע לנפשם כי החזיקו במה שקצרה יד שכלם ורוצים לעלות במעלות אין בידם ספק להגיע אל תכלית ויעלו חרס בידם להתגרד בו והיה להם למוקש ואם איש מבני ישראל ירצה לעיין בקבלה ראוי לעשותה כלי חמדה לעצמו יבין מה שיבין באימה ביראה ברמת ובזיע כאיש המהלך על הגחלים לא יחזיק טובה לעצמו להורות לזולתו ליחיד וכ"ש לצבור כי תצא מזה תקלה להרוס חומת התורה ולפרוץ גדר יתפאר במה שלא יבין ויטעה בהתחלות התורה ושרשיה יבוא לידי מינות ויתרחק ממחוז חפצו והיא קרבת אלהים נוו לו שלא נברא כל שכן וכל שכן לשנות מדרש ולבטל הלכה חלילה וחס.  
נאם העבד הקטן תם במהר"ר דוד ן' יחייא זצ"ל  
(שו"ת רבי אליהו מזרחי (הרא"ש) סימן א)

So what we see until now is an uneasy acceptance by the Poskim of the Mekubalim. Too bad it couldn't be said that the reverse was true. If only r' Elyahu Mizrahi and r' Tam ibn Yihye knew what the Zohar itself had to say about Talmud study! But more of that later.

The point is, that the mekubalim didn't yet have the political power to muster a campaign to wrest the power from the poskim.

Not even the Beis Yosef with his heavenly maggid, who along with imparting many kabalistic teachings to the beis yosef, quotes the zohar by name. He did not bestow upon the kabalists the power to change Judaism.

## **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 kinerret 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 known as the Etz Chaim. His son R' Shmuel reorganized them into the Shmone Sheorim and then again into the Shaar Hacavonos.

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' Chaim Vital, were publishing similar collections of the Ari's cavonos - 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 it's 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 Cavonos 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 cavonos. It was during this time that the "לשם יחוד" incantation became popular among the masses as might appear from a Teshuvah 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 "לדוד ה' אורי וישעי" 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 - שם טוב קטן - by r' Binyomin Beinsh 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 הזכרון.

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 Shabbetai Tzvi as the true messiah. R' Yaakov Zak even ostracized the Gabbai of his Shul for refusing to make a MiSheBerach for Melech Hamoshiach Shabbetai 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 Shabbetai 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.

## **2.10R 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 שלא עשני אב"ד" 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 "עמודי שמים".

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 Seforim.

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 Droscha 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:

תליתאה ( 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)

ודא שכינתא (this is the Shechina)

דהכי אוקמוהו רבנן (Because this is how the Rabbis established it)

דנשמתינ דומין קדם שכינתא כנרות לפני האבוקה )  
(That souls in contrast to the shechina are as candles )  
(before the bonfire)

ובגין דא כמראה אש בית לה (Therefore the third light is as a fire surrounding like a house)  
ואיהי בי כנישתא דלעילא איש נגיה )  
this is the heavenly synagogue. Esh Noga - literally a fiery )  
glow, and an maniputlaion of the phrase - venoga loasysh - also in that same account of  
the merkovo in yechezkel, but here the author has placed quotes in the text, meaning the  
(pronouncement of the words without their meaning are the desired effect here

כי ביתי בית תפלה וכי (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 - כי ביתי בית תפלה - 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 guradian-angel - in the Zohar a reference to angels -

נפקי כמה גרדיני טהירין מקטרגין לקבלייהו דישראל (ח"ג רס"ו).

R' Yaakov's next discovery was the following in the Tikunay Zohar כ"א תיקון:

איהי בריתא מסטרא דגופא... ואיהי תוספתא מסטרא דח"י עלמין... ואיהי משנה... ואיהי התקפא... הצרכה איהי מסטרא דשמאלא... שאלה... ותיבתא... שמעתתא... תיקו

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:

החלק ה' משני החלקים של המשנה, והוא הגמרא, יתחלק לכ"א חלקים: ואלו הן - תוספתא, וברייתא, פרוש, שאלה, ותשובה וקושיא ופירוק, ותיבתא וסיוע ורמיה והתקפתא והצרכה ומעשה ושמעתא וסוגיא והלכה ותיקו וכו'

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 Rambam got it right because that's they way the Zohar explains it!

Incidentally I think 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:

בלקותא דסיהרא ושמשא דאסתלק נהורייהו ואשתארו כגופא בלא נשמתא דאית אדון עליהם מחשיך מאוריהם

and here is the original, from keser malchus:

ובהדבקו בסוף החדש עם החמה. אם יהיה תלי ביניהם. ועל קו אחד יעמדו שניהם.  
אז יעמד הירח לפני השמש כעב שחורה. ויסתיר מעין כל רואיה מאורה.  
למען ידעו כל רואיה כי אין המלכות לצבא השמים וחיליהם. אבל יש אדון עליהם. מחשיך מאוריהם.

We have already mentioned that the claim of two famous anti kabalists that the many quotes in the Zohar from amoraim much later than 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 (לי"ג) 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 חתניה instead of חתן.

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

Secondly both r' Shrira Gaon's letter, and the Seder haKabbalah 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 חמוך to חתן.

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. שמיני ל"ו.

ר"א הוה אזיל באורחא אשכחיה לרבי פנחס בן יאיר, פתח ר' אלעזר ואמר עטרת זקנים בני בני. ע"כ.

Another proof is from Zohar פרשת פנחס בדף ר"מ:

א"ר שמעון- בריך ברי לקב"ה! עלך אתמר (משלי כג) ישמח אביך ואמך ותגל יולדתך. ישמח אביך דלעילא ואמך דא כנסת ישראל. ותגל יולדתך דא ברתיה דרבי פנחס בן יאיר חסידא. אלעזר ברי וכי.

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 : ב"מ פ"ד :

יסורי בתורה מאי היא? דכי הווי יתבי רבן שמעון בן גמליאל ורבי יהושע בן קרחה אספסלי יתבי קמייהו רבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון ורבי ארעא מקשו ומפרקו אמרי מימיהן אנו שותים והם יושבים על גבי קרקע עבדו להו ספסלי אסקינהו אמר להן רבן שמעון בן גמליאל פרידה אחת יש לי ביניכם ואתם מבקשים לאבדה הימני אחתוהו לרבי אמר להן רבי יהושע בן קרחה מי שיש לו אב יחיה ומי שאין לו אב ימות אחתוהו נמי לרבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון.

So we see that Rashbi, but not Rabbi's own father - Raban Gamliel - had already died whilst Rabbi was still a young student.

Yet in חולין ז', ובגמרא ירושלמי תענית פ"ג ה"א it says that Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair came to Rabbi 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 Hammuna Sava and Rav Yayva Sava - Talmidim of Rav (see pesachim .קג. ו"קה),

רב ברונא ורב חננאל תלמידי דרב הוו יתבי בסעודתא, קאי עלייהו רב ייבא סבא. אמרו ליה: הב לן וניבריך. לסוף אמרו ליה: הב לן ונישתי. אמר להו, הכי אמר רב: כיון דאמריתו הב לן וניבריך "איתסרא לכו למישתי (פסחים קג). רב חנניא בר שלמיא ותלמידי דרב הוו יתבי בסעודתא, וקאי עלייהו רב המנונא סבא. אמרו ליה: זיל חזי אי מקדיש יומא נפסיק, וניקבעיה לשבתא. אמר להו: לא צריכיתו, שבתא קבעה נפשה. דאמר רב: כשם שהשבת קובעת למעשר " כך שבת קובעת לקידוש (פסחים קה).

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.

Thee zohar brings the phrase "הויית באמצע" 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 "שפוני טמוני חול" 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 "זכרה לי לטובה" 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 pesukim from Divrey Hayomim by introducing it somtimes as "תרגם אונקלוס" and sometimes as "ותרגם יונתן בן עוזיאל" - not realizing that the Gemoro in megila (ג.) 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 pesukim sometimes building whole droshos on the misquotes:

Such as this classic:

(ח"א נ"ח:.) - "רבי יהודה פתח. (תהלים מו ט) לכו חזו מפעלות אלקים אשר שם שמות (מלשון שממה) בארץ. כו' דאלו הוו מפעלות יו"ד ה"א וא"ו ה"א. שם קיום בארץ. אבל בגין דהוו מפעלות שמא דאלהים. שם שמות בארץ"

The problem is that the posuk really does say "ה' לכו חזו מפעלות" and not **אלקים**.

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 pesukim in all mesoros are exactly the same. Even in the Gemoro we have pesukim which are different to our mesorah.

To my opinion, this argument does not hold water, since any discrepancies between our masores 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 haschas on Shabbos (:נ"א).

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

בתורתו של רבי מאיר מצאו כתוב, והנה טוב מאד והנה טוב מות

Ah! here we see a whole word different!

The answer to them is: read the rest of the Medrash!:

א"ר שמואל בר נחמן רכוב הייתי על כתפו של זקני ועולה מעירו לכפר חנן דרך בית שאן, ושמעתי את ר"ש בן אלעזר יושב ודורש בשם רבי מאיר, הנה טוב מאד - הנה טוב מות.

It was only a drosha, and not that this is what was actually written.

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

א"ר שמעון בן לקיש שלשה ספרים נמצאו בעזרה ספר מעונה ספר זאטוטי ספר היא באחד מצאו כתוב מעון ובשנים כתוב מעונה אלהי קדם (שם לג) וקיימו שנים ובטלו אחד באחד מצאו כתוב וישלח אל זאטוטי בני ישראל ובשנים מצאו כתוב וישלח את נערי בני ישראל (שמות כד) וקיימו שנים ובטלו א' באחד כתוב אחד עשר הוא ובשנים מצאו כתוב אחד עשר היא וקיימו שנים ובטלו א'

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 ניסח?

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:

אמר רבי יוסי...כתיב ויהי משה בהר ארבעים יום וגו' וכתיב ויקרא אל משה וגו' (משפטים). משמע דמשה בטורא הוה בההוא זמנא דקרא ליה. וכתיב מאהל מועד. ואהל מועד לא הוה בטורא דסיני דהא בינייהו דישראל הוה.

The Yaavetz points out that the first posuk is in mishpotim, and the second quote "מאהל מועד" 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:

"וכל העם רואים את הקולות ואת הלפידים [כדין אמרת] הזאת נעמי. דא הוא נעימו דאורייתא. ולא ידעי ישראל ענשא דאורייתא] עד דאתו למרה דכתיב ויבאו מרתה וכתיב שם שם לו חק ומשפט ושם נסהו כדין אמרה אורייתא קראן לי מרה."

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 - תשת תרת תשרת - whereas we know it was R' Avahu in Caesaria who was invented the order תשרית. Some respond that when the gemoro says "התקין ר' אבהו" it doesn't mean he invented it, he just popularized it.

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 תשרת 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 Massechtos 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 eretz 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:

"והיה מחניך קדוש. מאי קדוש קדושים מבעי ליה."

Why didn't he ask about the "והיה" too?

”ושרה שומעת פתח האהל והוא אחריו. מאי והוא אחריו? והיא אחריו מבעי ליה. אלא רזא איהו”

I'm sure its fairly obvious why there is really no question here, since the הוא is the malach and the אחריו 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 גילוי פנים בתורה שלא כהלכה, which is heresy, such as:

- The obligation מדאורייתא to wear Tefillin both in the style of Rashi as well as Rabeinu 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 mekubalim claiming to know secret tikkunim for this one have amassed 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 hamoed 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 rabba not Yom kippur.
- In Zohar of Pinchos, that an Eishes Ish is מותרת לזר 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 "מאן פני האדון יי? דא רשב"י" and R' Yaakov writes seemingly vividly:

לשון זה חירוף וגידוף הוא בודאי

Yet then proposes amending the text of the zohar by adding the word את to read מאן את פני האדון such that the דיוק is from the word את an not by logical inclusion into האדון ה'.

Nevertheless he concludes his comment by saying:

ועם כל זאת שאיני מרחקו, על פי הגהה זו, מ"מ איני מקרבו בשתי ידיים ולא נתקררה דעתי עדיין בלשון זה. לבי מהסס בו. כי יראָה הוא דבר אחד, שמצינו מצות יראה באב ואם ובמקדש שצוה הקב"ה בפירוש לירא מהם. אבל לכלול באת פני האדון להראות את פני האדון דא רשב"י. מיחזי חברותא כלפי שמיא וכעין שיתוף ח"ו. ועכ"פ נותן מכשול לחסרי דעת.

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:

כד הוה רבי אבא וחברייא חמאן לרבי שמעון הוּו רהטי אבתריה ואמרי (הושע יא) אחרי ה' ילכו כאריה ישאג. עכ"ל.

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 –

"גם ספר הזוהר הוא נזר המקובלים בלי ספק בעולם, בשגם העיד עליו האר"י ז"ל, שהיה איש קדוש ואלקי ורה"ק שורה עליו, הלא עליו בנויה כל חכמתו, הנשגבה והנוראה, חלילה להרהר אחר דבריו.

### **Chalila leharher 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:



והכי כל מלאך אשתני שמיא כפום שליחותיה ולכל שליחותא ושליחותא דלהון אית רגעא ושעתא ידיעא ומזל ידיע ויום ידיע וככב ידיע ותמן אשתני.

and says:

נראה כדעת המעוננים. וצריך חקירה אם נמצא בכתבי האר"י מענינים אלו.

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

תנו רבנן: מעונן... רבי עקיבא אומר: זה המחשב עתים ושעות, ואומר: היום יפה לצאת, למחר יפה ליקח, לימודי ערבי שביעיות חטיף יפות, עיקורי קטניות מהיות רעות

And he is also right that such is to be found in Kisvay hoAri, though not regarding meonen, but menachesh, and I quote from the words of R' Vital: שער רוח הקודש ה:

כל מה שנגזר למעלה מכריזים הגזרה ההיא בכל העולמות כו' והנה עבוי וגסות האויר אינו מניח לשיעבור וירד הקול הרוחני כו' ואמנם כאשר העופות מפריחים באויר וחולקים אותו על ידי הפרחתם ועפיפתם ואז קול הכרוז עובר שם כו' כי דרך עפיפתו ופריחתו מוליך אותו כו' כי פעמים... מגידים בעפיפתם.

"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 (ס"ו). ת"ר לא תנחשו כגון אלו המנחשים בחולדות בעופות ובכוכבים. "לא תנחו" - this refers to those who divine by rats, birds and stars.

This is the famous art of soothsaying described by the Greek poet Hesyos in his poem Ornithomantia - 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:

היה יודע (האר"י) כל מיני חכמות כו' ובשלהבת האש.

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:

גם פעם אחת בליל שבת נכנס הרב (the Ari) לפני החכם ר' יוסף אשכנזי הנקרא תנא גדול ומצאהו שהיה לומד המשניות על פה כמנהגו, ובאמצע הלימוד התחיל הנר מפעפע כדרך הנר הנופל למים ועשה כן כמו חצי שעה. וכשיצא הרב והלך לביתו מצא לכמה"ר אביגדור בנו של הר"י אשכנזי הנוכח. אמר לו אחיך הקטן איך שלומך, אז נבהל להשיב ואמר למה אדוני שואל עיו, הנה הוא ישן במטה בקו הבריאות. אמר לו- הנר סיפר לי שבשבע זה יפטר לבית עולמו. וכן היה.

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

כי לא נחש ביעקב וכו' (במדבר כג כג), צונו צורינו לא תנחשו (ויקרא יט כו), ובעונותינו שרבו כיום הזה מנחשים בישראל, בודקים בעונות כו' ועוד יש נחוש ורב הוא ונהג בין בני אדם, רואין אש וגחלות בוערות מעומד, אומרים יהי לנו אורח, אם תכבהו במים האורח יפול במים, ואין לך נחוש גדול מזה, ואמת ויציב הדבר כמה בני אדם ניסוהו, אך הוא השטן הוא המתעה אותם. כשרואה השטן שזה מנחש ואומר יפול האורח במים, אז אומר השטן אלך ואפיל האורח במים להטעות זה, להיות לסימן זה בידו לנחש לעולם, ואוי להם לעושים כך, כי עוברים על כמה לאוין לא תנחשו (ויקרא יט כו) לא ימצא בך מעונן ומנחש (דברים יח ז) ובחקותיהם לא תלכו (ויקרא י"ח ג), ועוד שעושים עדות התורה שקר כי לא נחש ביעקב (במדבר כג: כ"ג). עכ"ל.

The Ari, though, explains all his strange practices with various kabalistic explanations.

Regarding all the Ari's predictions: even if they had been true, this is not a proof of his genuineness, one should bear in mind the words of the Ramban from Parshas Re'eh that comments on the posuk

כי יקום בקרבך נביא או חלם חלום...ובא האות והמופת אשר דבר אליך לאמר נלכה אחרי אלהים אחרים אשר לא ידעתם...לא תשמע אל דברי הנביא ההוא או אל חולם החלום ההוא כי מנסה יהוה אלהיכם אתכם...והנביא ההוא או חלם החלום ההוא יומת כי דבר סרה על ה' אלהיכם וגו'

Says the Ramban:

יתכן שירמוז הכתוב למה שהוא אמת (כלומר נביא באמת) כי בנפשות בקצת האנשים כח נבואי ידעו בו עתידות, לא ידע האיש מאין יבא בו, אבל יתבודד ותבא בו רוח לאמר ככה יהיה לעתיד לבא בדבר פלוני ויקראו לו הפילוסופים כהי"ן, ולא ידעו סבת הענין אך הדבר נתאמת לעיני רואים אולי הנפש בהתבודדה תדבק בשכל הנבדל ותתכוין בו והאיש הזה יקרא "נביא" כי מתנבא הוא, ועל כן יבא האות והמופת אשר יאמר אליך (ועדיין מצוה לסקלו לנביא אמת זה באבנים וביערת הרע מקרבך!). ע"כ מהרמב"ן.

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.

#### **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 nigleh! No schar olam haboh 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:

כי עבר קציר כלה קיץ ואנחנו לא נושענו. רפואה לא עלתה למחלתינו. אין מזור לבשרנו. ולא עלתה ארוכה למכתינו לחורבן בית מקדשינו, הנחרב זה היום אלף ות"ק וד' שנים אוי לנו כי פנה היום יום אחד של הקב"ה שהוא אלף שנים וגם נטו צללי ערב שהם ת"ק וד' שנים יותר מחצי היום הב'. וכלו כל הקצין ועדיין בן דוד לא בא.

ונודע את אשר ארז"ל כל דור שלא נבנה בה"מ בימיו כאלו נחרב בימיו. ואתנה את פני לחקור ולדעת מה זה ועל מה נתארך קיצינו וגלותינו. ומדוע לא בא בן ישי?

ומצאתי און לי ואנינה בקרבי ולבי דוי. ממאמר א' הובא בס' התיקונים תיקון ל' דף ע"ז ע"ב. וז"ל-

תנינא כתב ורוח אלהיים מרחפת וגו' מאי ורוח אלא בודאי בזמנא דשכינתא נחתת בגלותא האי רוח נשיב על אינון דמתעסקי באורייתא בגין שכינתא דאשתכחת בינייהו והאי רוח אתעביד קלא, ויימא הכי: אינון דמכין, דשינתא בחוריהון, סתימין עינין, אטימי לבא, קומו ואתערו לגבי שכינתא! דאית לכוון לבא בלא סכלתנו למינדע ביה ואיהו בינייכו ורזא דמלה- קול אומר קרא. כגון קרא נא היש עונך וגו' והיא אומרה מה אקרא כל הבשר חציר. כלא אינון. כבעירה דאכלי חציר. וכל חסדו כצין השדה כל חסד דעבדי, לגרמייהו הוא דעבדי. ובהוא זמנא מה כתיב- ויזכור כי בשר המה רוח הולך ולא ישוב דא איהו רוחו של משיח. ווי לון מאן דגרמי דיוזיל ליה מן עלמא. ולא יתוב לעלמא דאילין אינון דעבדי לאורייתא יבשה ולא בעאן לאשתדלא בחכמת הקבלה וגרמין דאסתלק נביעו דחכמה דאיהו יו"ד מינה ואשתארת ביי"ת יבשה ווי לון

פיקודא תנינא ויאמר אלהים יהי אור. ובג"ד אמר הקב"ה השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים אם תעירו ואם תעוררו את האהבה עד שתחפץ כו' דאיהו רחימו בלא פרס ולא ע"מ לקבל פרס. ויראה ואהבה ע"מ לק"פ איהי שפחה ותחת שלש רגזה ארץ וגו'. תחת עבד כי ימלוך ושפחה כי תירש גבירתה עכ"ל (ר"ל עכ"ל הזוהר שהביא).

והנה מ"ש בתחילת דבריו ואפי' כל אינון דמשתדלי באורייתא כל חסד דעבדי לגרמייהו וכו' עם היות שפשטו מבואר ובפרט בזמנינו זה בעו"ה אשר התורה נעשית קרדום לחתוך בה אצל קצת בעלי תורה אשר עסקם בתורה ע"מ לק"פ והספקות יתירות וגם להיותם מכלל ראשי ישיבות. ודיני סנהדראות להיות שמם וריחם נודף בכל הארץ כו' ואמנם האנשים האלה מראים תימה ועונה באמרם כי כל עסקם בתורה הוא לשמה כו' האמנם אע"פ שלכאורה אפשר לפרש לשון המאמר על אופן זה, עכ"ז דבר קשה מאד מאד לומר.

וכי בשופטני עסקינן ולא בכללות כל התלמידי חכמים העוסקים בתורה? (תמיהני מה קורא לכה שופטני, מאחר שאמר שרוב בני דורו העוסקים בתורת הנגלה עושים אותה קרדום כו' א"כ מצוי הוא זה השופטני וראוי לדון בו!) והראיה ע"ז אומרו דרך כללות ואפי' **כל** אינון דמשתדלי באורייתא, **כל** חסד דעבדי, לגרמייהו עבדי. ואין לומר דמלת כל היא יתירה ומשבתא שהרי מקרא דורש וכל חסדו כציץ השדה שלא נאמר וחסדו אלא וכל חסדו לרמוז כי כל הת"ח העוסקים בתורה הנקראת תורת חסד על לשונה הם דומים בחסד ההוא אל ציץ השדה משום דלגרמייהו עבדי אבל ביאור לשון הנז"ל יובן ראשיתו מאחריתו באומרו ויראה ואהבה ע"מ לקב"פ איהי שפחה ותחת שלש רגזה ארץ.

והענין יובן במ"ש בס"ה בפרשת בראשית דף כ"ז ע"ב. ובג"ד אמר קב"ה לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו דא משנה איתתא דההוא נער ואיהו שפחה דשכינתא ואי זכו ישראל איהי עזר לון בגלותא מסטרא דהיתר טהור כשר ואי לא איהי כנגדו מסטרא דטמא פסול אסור וכו' דלית יחודא עד דערב רב יתמחון מן עלמא. ובג"ד אתקבר משה לבר מארעא קדישא וקבורתא דיליה איהי משנה דשלטא על מטרוניתא דאיהי קבלה למשה ומלכא ומטרוניתא מתפרשא מבעלה ובג"ד תחת שלש רגזה ארץ תחת עבד כי ימלוך דא עבדה ידיעה ושפחה דא משנה ונבל כי ישבע לחם דא ערב רב (!!!) רחמנא לצלן מהאי דעתא כוזיבא להניא לב בני ישראל מלימוד השי"ס משום שלדידיה היא שפחה, והוקשתה לערב רב, ורק הקבלה (השקרית ההיא) היא תורה לשמה! אוי לעינים שכך רואות בכתב בשם הנחשב לרב גדול ומקובל בישראל!(!).

הנה מבואר כי תורתנו הק' כלולה ונמצאת בכל ד' עולמות אבי"ע ובהיותה בעולם האצילות אז נקראה קבלה כי שם היא מופשטת מכל הלבושים הנקרא פשט מלשון פשטתי אם כתנתי שהוא בחי' המלבושים החיצוני שהוא ע"ג עור אדם המתפשט מעליו לפעמים וזהו עיקר מלת פשט. ואמנם בעולם האצ"י אשר שם הקב"ה יושב ועוסק בתורה כנזכר במדרז"ל וגם בדברי המתרגם על פ' דודי צח ואדום וכמש"ה ואהיה אצלו אמון וגו' הנדרש לרז"ל על בריאת העולם שהיה הקב"ה מביט בתורה ובורא עולמות.

ואין ספק כי לא כמעשה אדה"ר ולא כמעשה דבני חרי וכמעשה אתונו דבלעם וכיוצא בהם בהיותם כפשוטם היה משתעשע בהם הקב"ה אלפים שנה קודם שנברא העולם ובורא בהם עולמות. אמנם שעשועות של הקב"ה בתורה והיותו בורא בה את העולמו היתה בהיותו עוסק בתורה בבחי' הנשמה הפנימית שבה הנקרא רזי תורה הנקרא מעשה מרכבה היא חכמת הקבלה כנודע אל היודעים וטעם הדבר הוא להיותו עולם האצילות העליון מאד טוב ולא רע דלא יכיל להתערבא עמיה קליפה ועליה אתמר וכבודי לאחר לא אתן כנזכר בספר התיקונן ד' ס"ו תיקון י"ח וכן בסה"ז בפי' בראשית דכ"ח ע"א ע"ש ולכן גם התורה אשר שם איננה רק מופשטת מכל לבושי הגופנים משא"כ למטה בעולם היצירה עולם דמטטרו"ן הנק' עבד טוב והוא הנקרא עץ הדעת טוב מסטרא ומסטראל דסמאל שהוא קליפין דיליה נקרא עבד רע כי התורה אשר שם הם שית סדרי משנה הנקראים שפחה כנ"ל וכנזכר בפרשת בראשית שם דף כ"ז ע"א ולכן נקראת משנה לפי ששם יש שינויים הפוכים טוב מסטרא דעבד טוב היתר כשר טהור רע מסטרא דעבד רע איסור טמא פסול. גם הוא מלשון כי מרדכי היהודי משנה למלך שהיה שפחה הנקרא עבד מלך.

גם נקרא מלשון שינה כנזכר בפרשת פינחס דף רמ"ד ע"ב קם זמנא תנינא ואמר מארי מתניתין נשמתין ורוחין ונפשין דילכון אתערו כען ואעברו שינתא מניכון דאיהו ודאי משנה אורח פשט דהאי עלמא ואנא לא אתערנא בכו אלא ברזין עילאין דעלמא דאתי דאתון בהון לא ינום ולא ישן.

וזה יובן במ"ש יותר למעלה שם ורבנן דמתניתין ואמוראי כל תלמודא דלהון על רזין דאורייתא סדרו ליה (ראה לקמן פרק ד' ס' קנ"ט מ"ש על זה) ונמצא כי המשנה והש"ס הם הנקרא גופי תורה. כו' ונחזור עתה למאמרנו הראשון ולבאר מ"ש ואפי' כל אינון דעסקי באורייתא כל חסד דעבדי וכו' ואמר עוד שם כי המשנה היא שפחה משום דאיהי ע"מ לקבל פרס פי' כי הנה כל מדותיו יתברך הם מדה כנגד מדה ולכן **העוסקים בפשטיה הגופניים הטובים עליהם נאמר בשמאלה עושר וכבוד הוא הפרס הנתון להם בעה"ז**

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

**כי כן עסקם בתורה הוא בבחי' היותם בעה"ז? בדיני איסור והיתר טומאה וטהרה וכו' והם כנגד העבד העובד את רבו שבודאי ע"מ לקבל פרס (!) וכל חסד דעבדי וכו' כעבדים ושפחות המשמשים את רבם ע"מ לקבל פרס. אמנם העוסקים ברזי התורה שהם בחי' התורה כפי מה שעוסקים בה בעה"ב עליהם נאמר אורך ימים בימינה לעולם שכולו ארוך. וכו'.**

אין הנאה להקב"ה מכל מה שברא בעולמו רק בהיות בניו למטה עוסקים ברזי התורה להכיר גדולתו ויופיו ומעלתו כי בפשטי התורה ובספוריה ובדיניה ובמצותיה בהיותם כפשטם אין בהם שום היכר וידיעה לידע את בוראם יתברך אדרבה יש בהם מצות וחקים שאין הדעת סובלם. וכו'.

וא"כ היכן הוא הדר התורה ויופיה וגדולתה ועל כיוצא בזה נאמר אם צדקת מה תתן לו ואם חטאת מה תפעל בו כי השכר והעונש אשר עליהם הוא לך לבדך אמנם בסודות התורה ובעסק כוונת המצות ע"ז נאמר בהפך אם בטובה נאמר תנו עוז לאלהים ואם ברעה נאמר צור ילדך תשי ונאמר ויצאו וראו בפגרי האנשים הפושעים בי בי דיקא ולא לי בי ממש כביכול. וכו'.

ת"ח מה כתיב אם לא תדעי לך היפה בנשים אם אנת אתיא בלא ידיעה ולא אסתכלת בחכמה עד דלא אתית להכא ולא ידעת רזין דעלמא עילאה אע"ג דאנת היפה בנשים במצות ובמעשים טובים לית אנת כדאי למעיל הכא צאי לך וכו'.

מצינו ברי' אבהו אשר שופריה מעין שופריה דיעקב אע"ה כפי קשר נשמתו בו ואמרו בגמרא כי עליו נאמר זקן ונשוא פנים הוא הראש דא ר' אבהו שהיו נושאים פנים לדורו בעבורו בשמים והיה **אומר בשעת פטירתו ואני אמרתי לריק יגעתי לתהו והבל כחי כליתי וכל בעל שכר יתמה מדברים אלה ולא יובנו זולתי במ"ש למעלה ענין הפרש עסק התורה בפשטיה שהם תורת העוה"ז אשר היא הבל לפני תורתנו של משיח ותורת העוה"ב וז"ס לתהו והבל כחי כליתי וכו' כי שכר מצות ותורה הפשטיית היא בעוה"ז ובג"ע הארץ. האמנם למיעל לעלמא עילאה אי אפשר עד שיעסוק האדם כפי יכלתו כפי אשר תשיג ידו בחכמת הזוהר ואי לא כדין מפקי ליה מכל תרעין דעלמא עילאה אע"ג דאיהי יפה במצות ובמע"ט.**

Yet Chazal say:

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קימת לו לעולם הבא. כבוד אב ואם. וגמילות חסדים. והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם

And when R' Eliezer, Rebbe of R' Akiva was about to pass from this world, what did he discuss with his students? says in Gemoro Sanhedrin:

כשחלה רבי אליעזר נכנסו רבי עקיבא וחביריו לבקר...נתקבצו כולן למקום אחד. אמרו לו: הכדור והאמוס והקמיע וצרור המרגליות ומשקולת קטנה מהו? אמר להן: הן טמאין וטהרתן במה שהן. מנעל שעל גבי האמוס מהו? אמר להן: הוא טהור. ויצאה נשמתו בטהרה

-he spent his last moments discussing which Kelim are mekabel tumah and not these so called סודות!

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 שו"ת חת"ס ו:ל"ו, 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 - עלה אחד מתלמוד בבלי קדוש יותר מכל ספר הזוהר - 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:

באו ונחזיק טובה וחינוך לשני מלכים גדולים אדירים אדוננו המשובח המנוח הקיסר יאזעף השני ואדוננו המהולל הקיסר פראנץ השני אשר צפו והביטו בחכמתם הנפלאה, רבות רעות ושבושי דעות תסתעפנה מחלומות והבלים המקובלים, והמה לנוקי בני האדם נזקי הגופות ונזקי הנפשות, ופקדו באזהרה גדולה שלא להביא ספרי קבלה בכל מדינות מלכותם הפקודה הראשונה העכסט האף דעקרעט פאם ב' נאוועמבר 1785 למספרם והשני פאם ז' יוני 1794.

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 kabollas propogation 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 "כלימת הגוים" 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 Seforim. 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 its 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 kabala 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.