

The Contemplative Practice of Yihudim in Lurianic Kabbalah

LAWRENCE FINE

ISAAC LURIA (1534–1572) is one of the several greatest figures in the history of the Jewish mystical tradition and the preeminent personality among the kabbalists of Safed in the sixteenth century. Despite the fact that Luria lived in Safed for a period of only two years, from 1570 until his death in 1572, and that a range of teachers including Moses Cordovero and Solomon Alkabez had already established Safed as a mystical community of very considerable importance, it is Luria's name that is traditionally identified with the renaissance that occurred in this city. The reasons for this are twofold. First, Isaac Luria's charismatic personality not only produced a significant discipleship in Safed itself but also generated a powerful legendary and hagiographical tradition, which developed over the course of the succeeding generations. Second, Lurianic teachings and practices were greeted with considerable enthusiasm in diverse parts of the Jewish world from the late sixteenth century on.¹

Although Isaac Luria's fascinating and intricate mythological teachings have been studied extensively by modern scholars, most especially in the work of Gershom Scholem and Isaiah Tishby,² much less attention has been given to what might be called the devotional side of Luria's teachings. Scholem and Tishby have described and analyzed the Lurianic *idea*, the complex gnostic myth according to which a crisis within the life of the Godhead resulted in the scattering of divine sparks in material reality. But the religious practices by which the process of "mending" or "restoration" (*tiqqun*) was to be accomplished have been treated in mostly general terms. A fuller understanding of Lurianic Kabbalah calls for thorough analysis of the variety of spiritual *disciplines* which this teacher imparted to his students. For Lurianism was no mere theoretical system, a set of intellectual

abstractions. *It was a lived and living phenomenon, the actual "world" of a historically observable community.* The ultimate goal of this community was a *pragmatic* one requiring mystical action—nothing less than the return of all existence to its original spiritual condition, a state synonymous with the manifestation of the messianic age.

In pursuit of this goal Isaac Luria guided his circle of followers, approximately thirty-five of whose names we know, toward the cultivation of a rigorous form of piety, at the center of which was a set of contemplative techniques.³ One of the most important of these, and one that is illustrative of the entire Lurianic enterprise, was the practice of meditative exercises known as *yihudim* ("unifications"). The present study seeks to explore the meaning of Lurianism in general by reference to this rather unusual religious practice. At the same time, our study of this particular Lurianic discipline will shed light on the critical role that devotional practices played in sixteenth-century Safed as a whole. This is the case inasmuch as Luria's teachings—their highly distinctive character notwithstanding—are ultimately a complicated variation on a basic theme shared by all the kabbalists of this community: the return of all things from the state of exile to one of redemption.

The Mythological Teachings of Isaac Luria

Any attempt to understand the discipline of contemplation in Lurianic Kabbalah requires at least a general familiarity with the theological and mythological themes that stand at the root of Luria's system. Indeed, the mystical workings of the Godhead and its highly complex nature constitute the focus of contemplation for Isaac Luria and his disciples. Lurianic myth describes in intricate detail three events in the life of God: the *zimzum*, or "self-limitation" of God; *shevirat ha-kelim*, or "breaking of the vessels"; and *tiqqun*, or "reconstruction" and "mending" of the flaw which occurred by virtue of the *shevirah*.

The idea of *zimzum* appears to have no place at all in the Kabbalah of the *Zohar*. Whereas the latter conceives of the initial action of the Godhead as an *outward* one—the self-disclosure of the deepest hidden Self, known as the *Eyn Sof*, by means of the *sefirot*—Luria describes the first movement as a step *inward*, as a withdrawal of God into Himself. *Zimzum* is the process by which He contracts His essence, retreating "from Himself into Himself," abandoning a space within Himself thereby creating an "empty" region. This step inward seeks to solve this problem: how is the existence of the world possible if the Infinite, that is, the *Eyn Sof*, fills all reality? Luria's answer is that by withdrawing into His own depths the *Eyn Sof* establishes room for

creation, for actuality that is not *Eyn Sof*. *Zimzum* does not suggest the concentration of God's power *in* a place, but its withdrawal *away* from a place. The space created is a mere infinitesimal point in contrast with God's infinity. Nevertheless, from the human perspective it is the space in which all dimensions of existence are formed, both on the spiritual and on the corporeal level.

Prior to *zimzum*, the various powers of God, the *sefirot*, were harmoniously balanced without any discernible differentiation. In particular, the opposing forces of Mercy (*Hesed*) and Stern Judgment (*Din*) existed in perfect unity within the essence of the divine. In the process of *zimzum*, however, *Eyn Sof* gathered in one place all the "roots" of Stern Judgment, leaving them behind in the region now abandoned. This resulted in a separation between *Din* and *Hesed* and the establishment of a measure of independence for the forces of Judgment. Thus, the *zimzum*, from one point of view, may be regarded as an act of self-limitation or self-imposed "exile" within God for the purpose of separating out and eliminating the forces of Judgment. More radically formulated, the purification of the divine organism of all elements of potential evil took place in this process, the "dross" within God was purged from His innermost being.

This empty space, into which all the forces of Judgment were concentrated and in which all processes of emanation and creation take place, is called *tehiru* ("vacuum"). Besides the roots of Judgment, an additional positive residue of divine light, known as *reshimu* ("traces"), remained in the empty space. A third element, a ray from God's hidden essence, entered the *tehiru* and acted upon the existing mixture of *reshimu* and *Din*. This illuminating ray or *qav ha-middah* ("cosmic measure") serves as a permanent link between the *Eyn Sof* and the *tehiru*. It seeks to organize the *reshimu* and *Din* that have filled the empty space, and which are inherently opposed to one another.

The form of the divine produced by this first ray of light which penetrates the *tehiru* is termed the "Primordial Man" (*'Adam Qadmon*). Entering the *tehiru* like a beam of light, it is the first and highest shape in which the divinity proceeds to manifest itself following the *zimzum*. In the Lurianic schema it indicates a realm of divinity above the four "worlds" of *'Azilut*, *Beri'ah*, *Yezirah*, and *'Asiyah*.⁴ Luria employs two different images to describe the emanative process from *'Adam Qadmon*—"circle" and "line," (*'iggul we-yosher*). The ten *sefirot* originally took shape in *'Adam Qadmon* in the form of concentric circles, the most external circle remaining in close contact with *Eyn Sof*. Following this, the *sefirot* reorganized themselves in a line—more specifically, in the shape of a human body.

The lights shining from *'Adam Qadmon*'s "ears," "nose," and "mouth" constituted a collective or perfectly unified structure. In this state the *sefirot* were as yet undifferentiated and needed no vessels to contain them in the course of their emanation. However, the light issuing forth from the "eyes" of *'Adam Qadmon* emanated in a different manner. They were atomized or separated into different *sefirot* so as to require their containment in special vessels (*kelim*). These vessels, composed of a "thicker" light, were to serve as "shells" for the purer light.

The vessels designed to contain the upper three *sefirot* emanating from the "eyes" of *'Adam Qadmon*, namely, *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, and *Binah*, performed their task properly. The light flowing into them was held within the vessels and their emanation was orderly. At this juncture, however, the vessels that were supposed to shelter the lower *sefirot* from *Hesed* through *Yesod* proved to be insufficiently strong for the task. Under the impact of the simultaneous flow of light into these six lower vessels, the latter shattered and were dispersed into the *tehiru*. This event is known as *shevirat ha-kehim*, the "breaking of the vessels." While the vessel containing the final *sefirah*, *Malkhut*, also cracked, it did not completely shatter as did the others.

Most of the light that had been contained in the vessels returned to its divine source, while the remainder fell below into the *tehiru* and attached themselves to the now broken shards of vessels. From these shards of broken vessels the powers of the *qelipot*, that is, "husks" or "shells" were produced. These husks are the evil forces of the "other side," the *sitra 'abra*. In addition to constituting the source of evil, the broken shards are also the basis for the material world. The sparks of light that failed to return to their source above remained trapped, as it were, among the *qelipot*. The *qelipot*, in turn, are constantly nourished and strengthened by the holy sparks attached to them. Indeed, were it not for the sparks attached to the *qelipot*, the latter would be altogether lifeless and powerless.

In a way, then, that is strikingly similar to the mythic systems of the gnostics of late antiquity, Lurianic mythology depicts the descent of divine or transcendent light into the world of gross materiality. Imprisoned, these sparks yearn to extricate themselves from their exiled condition. Gershom Scholem summarized the effect that this catastrophic event exerted on the otherwise orderly process of divine emanation in these words:

Its repercussions are manifest in every single detail of Lurianic cosmology. But for the breaking of the vessels, everything would have occupied its rightful and appointed place. Now everything is out of joint. . . . Henceforth everything is imperfect and deficient, in a way "broken" or "fallen." That which should have occupied its appointed and appropriate place has moved somewhere else. However, this situation of not being where one ought to be,

namely, of being removed from one's rightful place, is what is meant by the term "exile." In fact, since the breaking of the vessels, exile is the fundamental and exclusive—albeit hidden—mode of all existence. In Lurianism the historical notion of exile had become a cosmic symbol.⁵

According to some explanations in the Lurianic literature, the catastrophe occurred by virtue of the weak structure or differentiated character of the lights emanating from the eyes of 'Adam Qadmon. That is, their disorganization created an instability that led to the breaking of the vessels in which they were contained. From another point of view, the *shevirah* took place as a result of the further desire to separate the dross from the holy, a cathartic process that served to expunge all elements of evil from within God. Whatever the cause, the kabbalists all agreed that the *shevirah* constituted the decisive event in the cosmological process.

The challenge that Lurianic teaching now faced was to determine how to mend the injury suffered by the Godhead. *Tiqqun* refers to the processes by which restoration and repair were to be accomplished. They constitute the greatest part of Lurianic theory and are complex in the extreme. The primary medium for *tiqqun* was the sefirotic light that continued to issue from 'Adam Qadmon following the "breaking of the vessels." This sefirotic light was now reorganized under five new structural principles known as *parzufim* ("faces"). These *parzufim*, or configurations of divine light, were intended to restore order to the confusion produced by the *shevirah*. The *sefirah Keter* was reconstituted as the *parzuf* of 'Arieh 'Anpin (lit., "the Long-Faced One," i.e., "the Indulgent One" or "Forbearing One") or 'Attiqa Qadisha ("the Holy Ancient One"). The *sefirot Hokhmah* and *Binah* were reformed as the *parzufim* of 'Abba ("Father") and 'Imma ("Mother") respectively. The fourth *parzuf* is that of Ze'ir 'Anpin ("the Short-Faced One" or the "Impatient One"), which contains the six lower *sefirot*, from *Din* through *Yesod*. The final *parzuf* is *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*, the "female of Ze'ir," representing the *sefirah Malkhut*, or *Shekhinah*. This *parzuf* contains two aspects: *Rabel* and *Leah*.

The process by which these *parzufim* manifest themselves is described in language of human development: conception, pregnancy, birth, suckling, and maturity. The "parents," 'Abba and 'Imma, engage in union known as *ziwwug*, which results in the creation of Ze'ir 'Anpin. *Yeniqah* (suckling) is the process by which Ze'ir 'Anpin is nourished after its departure from the womb of 'Imma. By the power of this suckling Ze'ir is able to grow and comprise the six lower *sefirot*.

In its original state, union between 'Abba and 'Imma was constant. The two lower *parzufim*, Ze'ir 'Anpin and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*, were likewise in a

state of unity with one another. These two pairs of male and female were each looking "face to face" in a perpetual condition of marriage.

According to Lurianic teaching, the soul of the first man, Adam, was made up of all the various "worlds" and was intended to extricate and reintegrate the divine sparks that still remained within the *qelipot*. When Adam was created, the cosmic process of *tiqqun* had virtually been completed. It was his task to finalize the restorative process through contemplative exercises. He was capable of doing so as his body was a perfect microcosm of 'Adam Qadmon. Through his mystical activities Adam could have separated the holy sparks from their demonic shells, thus reestablishing the primordial unity of all things. Having purged the realm of holiness of the final vestiges of dross, the *qelipot* would have sunk beneath the lowest spiritual world of 'Asiyah and lost all their power. The cosmos would have achieved its original state of perpetual communion with the divine light, and the historical process would have come to a close.

None of this came about, however, because of Adam's failure. Instead of accomplishing his great task, Adam sinned, interrupting his own communion with the upper spheres and attaching himself to the lower worlds. As Gershom Scholem aptly formulated it, Adam's sin parallels on an anthropological level what occurred on the ontological plane through the "breaking of the vessels." Among the many injurious consequences, Adam's sin transformed the relationship of Ze'ir 'Anpin and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir* to one of "looking back to back," (*ahor-be-ahor*). Likewise, the "female waters" (*meyyim nuqvin*), the power that ascended from *Nuqva de-Ze'ir* to arouse the energy of Ze'ir, was cut off. In turn, the "male waters" (*meyyim dukhrin*), the power that flowed from Ze'ir to *Nuqba de-Ze'ir* during *ziwwug*, ceased to flow. The harmonious existence of the "worlds" dependent on the union of these two *parzufim* was thrown into disorder and confusion. The "worlds" which had begun to rise and to return to their proper position when Adam entered the Garden of Eden, once again fell below. The entire "world" of 'Asiyah descended into the realm of the *qelipot*, and good and evil were again thoroughly mixed in with each other. Humanity and all reality in the world of 'Asiyah became materialized. Finally, the sin of Adam caused the sparks of all human souls that had been contained within his own to fall and become imprisoned as well within the *qelipot*; there they help to nourish the evil powers of the lower world.

Tiqqun, therefore, involves two fundamental aspects. First, it means the gathering of the divine lights that had fallen into the realm of the *qelipot* by virtue of the "breaking of the vessels." It necessitates the complete separation of the holy from the "shells" which entrap it. In addition, it means the gathering of all the holy souls likewise imprisoned in the *qelipot*. The

Lurianic expression “raising of the sparks” (*ha'alat ha-nizozot*) includes both of these responsibilities.

But precisely how is *tiqqun* to be achieved? If it is each individual's obligation to help bring about *tiqqun*, what is one to do to accomplish this? The human task, according to Isaac Luria, is essentially a contemplative one. Every religious action, regardless of the kind, requires contemplative concentration on the *parzufim* and various combinations of the divine name in order to “raise up the fallen sparks.” The primary focus of attention is the reunification of the *parzufim* *Ze'ir 'Anpin* and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*. Every action done in the world below—the material world—accompanied by concentration on the dynamics being initiated through such action, causes the “female waters” within *Nuqva de-Ze'ir* to become aroused and ascend with the 288 sparks that were believed to be attached to the broken vessels. The “female waters” act as spiritual “chemicals” which bring about—even if only temporarily—*ziwwug* or harmony between male and female within the Godhead. The crucial point here is that such reunification depends entirely on the efforts of human beings. This is a process that can only be set in motion through the contemplative exercises of kabbalists whose souls are thoroughly cleansed and purified. Thus, the focus of contemplation is the inner dynamics of reorganization and restructuring that occurs in the course of acts of devotional piety.

The kinds of activities by which the kabbalist seeks to accomplish these goals can be divided into three basic categories: liturgical prayer, the performance of all other *mizwot*, and the practice of *yihudim*.⁶ The same general contemplative idea characterizes each of these types of activity, and Hayyim Vital's versions of Luria's teachings spell out the proper mystical intentions (*karwanot*) in great detail. But the practice of *yihudim* stands out as a rather extraordinary meditative discipline for reasons that will become clear as we turn our attention to a description of these exercises.

Qualifying for the Practice of Yihudim

Intrinsic to virtually every traditional system of meditation is a stage in which the future adept must become prepared so as to be fit and worthy for successfully mystical practice. According to Luria, the attainment of prophetic inspiration or the Holy Spirit is not possible without having first passed through such a stage. The *yihudim* are not to be practiced by just anyone; nor are they to be performed casually. Rather, intense and methodical effort must be exerted by an aspiring adept in order to train himself to become worthy of even beginning the practice. The qualifying activities

that Vital describes are of three types, which we may broadly label ethical, ritual, and penitential.

The Cultivation of Moral and Spiritual Qualities

In the first place we find rules prescribing the kinds of spiritual and moral qualities that an individual who wishes to achieve mystical inspiration must cultivate. One such quality, for example, which Luria considered essential for anyone seeking to perform the *yihudim*, is joyfulness (*SRH*, 33).⁷ Whenever one performs a religious act, be it study of Torah, prayer, or the like, great heartfelt joy is indispensable. The joy of performing God's will ought to be regarded as greater than all material wealth. Correspondingly, no quality of spirit prevents the possibility of divine inspiration as much as sadness. Vital reports that sadness prevents the soul from receiving supernal light, although the feeling of sadness while confessing one's sins is appropriate. In one of his own treatises, Vital suggests that happiness strengthens a person, enabling one to love God and cleave to Him, whereas sadness derives from *Sama'el*, the power of evil.⁸ Moreover, the *Shekhinah*, the female presence of divinity, cannot reside in a place where sadness exists.⁹

A closely related spiritual trait with which Isaac Luria appears to have been particularly concerned was the avoidance of anger, inasmuch as it inhibits the prospects of prophetic inspiration. Citing a talmudic passage from *Pesahim* 66b which states that a prophet's inspiration will depart when he is angered, Vital writes that Luria was more stringent with regard to this matter than all other transgressions. Whereas all other sins cause damage to one of the soul's “limbs,” the sin of anger injures the soul as a whole, altering it completely. When one is angered, one's highest level of soul (*neshamah*) leaves and is replaced by a lower stratum of soul (*nefesh*) from the side of the *qelipot*. Citing Job 18:4, “Thou that tearest thyself in thine anger,” Luria teaches that anger “tears” the soul making it *trefa* (lit., “torn”). Following earlier rabbinic and Zoharic traditions, Luria goes so far as to identify anger with idolatry.¹⁰ When one is angered, one is filled with a “strange god” whose removal can be brought about only through great acts of repentance. The danger of anger is such that it draws one to sin and makes divine inspiration impossible. Because it damages the soul in its entirety, atonement requires personal *tiqqun* of every aspect of one's being. As with sadness, anger makes one vulnerable to the powers of evil, which are prepared to occupy the void created by the departure of holiness.

Qualities of modesty, which are stressed in both classical rabbinic and medieval Hebrew literature, are also considered of great importance in order to qualify oneself for divine inspiration. One must conduct oneself in meekness, humility, and fear of sin (*SRH*, 34).¹¹ Correspondingly, one should avoid pride, jesting, gossip, and pedantry. An individual ought not be too strict or severe even if there should be significant cause. Nor should one indulge in "idle" conversation, that is, in talk unrelated to Torah or spiritual matters (*SRH*, 34).¹² All of these standards were typical of rabbinic and medieval piety and ethics. Moreover, they were of concern generally to the kabbalists of sixteenth-century Safed who wrote treatises on kabbalistic ethics and repentance. The particularly Lurianic feature, though, is the stress on the notion that failure to meet these standards results in severe injury to the soul, diminishing or even rendering impossible the attainment of divine inspiration.

Special Acts of Ritual Piety

The second category of qualifying activities involves a variety of ritual observances and special acts of piety designed to qualify one to perform the *yihudim*. The basic purpose of these customs was to destroy the power of the demonic and to purify the soul. Such purification necessitated an ongoing war with the powers of evil, whose persistence prolonged the work of *tiqqun*.

As Hayyim Vital reports, Luria informed him that attainment of the Holy Spirit depends, among other things, upon the care and contemplative concentration with which blessings of enjoyment (*birkhot ha-nehenin*) are carried out. This is especially true in the case of enjoying food:

Since through him [blessings over food recited with proper mystical intention] the strength of these *qelipot* which cling to physical foods, and cleave through them to man who eats them, is abrogated. And by virtue of the blessings over them [i.e., the food] recited with mystical intention, he removes these *qelipot* from them, purifies his physical self, and becomes pure, ready to receive holiness. And he [Luria] warned me carefully in this regard. (*SRH*, 34)

Luria also enjoined his disciples to practice the custom of rising at midnight for the purpose of praying and studying through the night, an activity especially efficacious in qualifying one for the performance of *yihudim*. In *Sba'ar Ruah ha-Qodesh* (34–35), Vital records that the midnight vigil will be effective only for one who has performed certain deeds during the day, including causing others to repent, giving charity anonymously, and reading

the literature of the *Poseqim* (rabbinic legal decisions). As we shall see, the most favorable time to perform the *yihudim* is also at midnight.

Other important acts of piety included strict observance of the Sabbath in all its details, entering the synagogue with great awe and trembling, and wearing *tefillin* (phylacteries) the entire day. Furthermore, the attainment of the Holy Spirit requires the regular study of Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud (i.e., Gemara) and Kabbalah (*SRH*, 35).¹³ In this connection, one particular activity that Luria regarded as essential to achieving divine inspiration was intensive study of the law (*halakhah*) (*SRH*, 35).¹⁴ According to Luria, the *qushia*, the difficult problem in a legal argument requiring resolution by intellectual acumen, represents the evil "shell" which covers the "brain," the holy element. In resolving the halakhic difficulty, a person must concentrate on breaking the *qelipah*, which will result in disclosure of the *halakhah*, the holy inner core. The latter consists of secrets of the Torah and kabbalistic knowledge. The person to whom such intensive study comes easily is required to spend an hour or two each day engaged in it. One who finds it difficult should study only halakhic rules or conclusions (*dinim*) rather than neglect the study of Torah by dwelling on complex arguments.

Hayyim Vital also records those practices which other students of Isaac Luria told him they received from the mouth of the master. In the name of Jonathan Sagis, Vital reports that Luria regarded ritual immersion as essential to attainment of the Holy Spirit (*SRH*, 36).¹⁵ Immersion was deemed a purifying exercise of such significance that it was to be practiced with the utmost regularity. Vital adds, however, that Luria himself could not practice ritual immersion for six months during one winter because of illness, though he suffered no loss of divine inspiration.

Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi Berukhim told Vital that Luria related to him that the following activities were conducive to mystical inspiration: avoidance of "idle" talk, rising at midnight and weeping on account of our lack of mystical knowledge, and study of forty or fifty pages of *Zohar* each day without intensive reflection (*SRH*, 36). Samuel Uzeda reported that he was informed by Luria that anyone who passes forty successive days without speaking anything but words of Torah will become prepared to achieve mystical inspiration and knowledge.

The basic purpose of these customs and rituals is clear. They are intended to cleanse the soul and thereby render it receptive to divine inspiration. This can be done only by destroying the power of the *qelipot* and by preventing the infiltration of evil into the purified soul. The task of *tiqqun*, the removal of the demonic forces from the lower world and the lifting up of the sparks of holiness, entails a never-ending battle. Laxity or passivity on the part of an individual fortifies the evil powers and entrenches their

position, whereas the continuous cultivation of particular spiritual qualities and the performance of special acts of piety destroy their potency.

Acts of Penitence

The third category of qualifying exercises is acts of penitence known as *tiqquney 'awonot*. The Lurianic kabbalists, as was the case with all of the sixteenth-century Safed mystics, possessed a profound sense of their own sinfulness. The feelings of guilt harbored by these individuals derived from several sources. In the first place, collective sin was, of course, among the traditional explanations for historical calamity and suffering in Jewish theology. The consciousness of exile weighed particularly heavy on the Safed kabbalists precisely because they were convinced that the sins of the generation of the Spanish Expulsion were responsible in some way for the tragic events that had befallen Iberian Jewry at the end of the fifteenth century. This sense of shared guilt and failure was continually reinforced by the belief that the exile was prolonged by virtue of every *new* transgression, a kabbalistic notion based on the conviction that every sin reiterates Adam's primordial transgression. Just as Adam's sin resulted in the disunification of the *Shekhinah*, the female quality of the Godhead, from Her spouse, *Tiferet*, every sin deepens the *Shekhinah's* exile. Elijah de Vidas, the author of the popular sixteenth-century kabbalistic treatise *Reshit Hokhmah* (*The Beginning of Wisdom*), puts it in these straightforward terms: "It is appropriate for a person to arouse himself in repentance when he considers that the *Shekhinah* is exiled on his account, as it is written: 'And for your transgressions was your mother put away' (Isa 50:1)." It is this belief that the fate of the Godhead itself was bound up with the kabbalist's action which served as the most powerful source of guilt. Israel is responsible not merely for its own exiled historical situation, but for the rupture within the life of deity as well.

Isaac Luria prescribed specific penitential acts whose purpose, in the words of Hayyim Vital's son Shmuel, was to "mend his [i.e., the kabbalist's] soul" and "cleanse him from the filth of the disease of his sins." Afterward, writes Shmuel Vital, he would be prepared to perform the various kinds of *yihudim*. Hayyim Vital himself introduces the *tiqquney 'awonot* with a discussion of the relationship between one's soul and sin. The following passage provides a lucid account of the Lurianic theory of sin and the effectiveness of genuine repentance:

Man is created from matter, and from form which consists of soul (*nefesh*), spirit (*ruah*) and super-soul (*neshamah*), the divine portion from above, as it is

said: "and [God] breathed into his nostrils the breath (*neshamah*) of life" (Gen 2:7). And his body is dark matter from the side of the "shell," luring and preventing man from [achieving] perfection of his soul [in order] to cut it [i.e., his soul] off from the Tree of Life . . . and so "there is not a righteous man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccl 7:20). And it is known that sin is a blemish, stain and rust in the soul, and this is the sickness of the pure soul. When it [is immersed] in filth and stain, it is unable to perceive and achieve the true perfection, which is [attainment of] the mysteries of the Torah. . . . And the transgression becomes a barrier separating the soul from her Creator, preventing her from perceiving and comprehending holy and pure supernal matters, as it is said: "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul" (Ps 19:8). . . . When the soul is pure and unblemished, then the supernal holy matters take shape in her, and when she dwells in rust and stain everything becomes bittersweet [i.e., evil appears as good]. [This is] similar to the sick person who, when he is ill, abhors the good things and loves things which aggravate his illness. The doctor, in order to restore his health, gives him spices including gall, by which his nature will return to what it originally was, and his health as before.

So, too, the sick soul, to remove the sickness from her, must receive the bitterness of medicine and "return" in [the form of] mortifications and fasts, sackcloth and ashes and stripes, ritual immersions, and purifications from filth and the stains of sins. [This is] in order to be able to attain and comprehend supernal matters, which are the mysteries of the world. . . . (SRH, 39)¹⁶

Only the weapons of ascetic piety are potent enough to cleanse the soul entirely of the filth that clings to it. Luria himself, proclaims Hayyim Vital, is the diagnostician and healer of diseased souls! (SRH, 39-40).¹⁷ Luria's powers stem from the spirit of prophecy which he possessed, meriting him divine light and esoteric knowledge with which to teach his followers. But Luria only revealed his knowledge to those disciples who were completely pure and worthy. To this end he prescribed for each of his students personalized penitential activities to meet their specific needs:

He [Luria] would not reveal any of the mysteries of this holy knowledge to one in whose soul he perceived, with the [aid of the] Holy Spirit, a blemish—until he gave him penitential acts to straighten out all he did crookedly. And like the expert doctor who prescribes for each sick person the proper medicine to cure this illness, so too [Isaac Luria] may he rest in peace, used to recognize the sin, tell him where he incurred a blemish, and prescribe for him the penitential act needed for this transgression in order to cleanse his soul, so that he could receive the divine light, as it is written: "O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved" (Jer 4:14). (SRH, 40)

Luria did what any good physician would do: he carefully diagnosed the specific maladies which his "patient" had and prescribed the appropriate cure. Among the diagnostic techniques that Luria had at his disposal,

according to Hayyim Vital, was the capacity to discover the character of a person's sinfulness by feeling his pulse and by reading the letters and signs engraved upon his forehead, an esoteric science known as metoposcopy. These and other techniques are discussed in considerable detail in the writings of Hayyim Vital.

Along with diagnoses Luria specified the penitence necessary for particular transgressions. Vital informs us that he recorded all of the *tiqquney 'awonot* which he heard from his teacher's mouth for the sake of those who needed to purify their souls. The character of these exercises can be illustrated by reference to several typical instructions.

One *tiqqun*, for example, prescribes the penitence for the sin of merely thinking about a transgression. A fast of eighty-seven days is required to atone for this sin. A person must concentrate on the name of God, *YHWH*, as it is written out *plene (bi-millui)* so as to spell the name of each letter. The numerical equivalent (*gematria*) of this name equals 45 (*SRH*, 41).¹⁸ By adding up the number of letters utilized in this spelling, that is, 10, plus the number of letters involved in spelling out the *millui* of the *millui*, that is, 28, and the 4 letters of the simple *YHWH*, we arrive at 42. Adding 45 and 42 the figure of 87 is achieved, accounting for the fast of 87 days. This is a relatively simple, though representative, example of the way in which the technique of *gematria* is used to derive practical results. It is based on the conviction that the numerical equivalents of names and words are not arbitrary, but suggestive of the "meaning" or "power" of the name or word.

Another *tiqqun* is prescribed as atonement for the transgression of the *mizwah* of honoring one's father and mother (*SRH*, 48). According to Luria, the *parzufim* of 'Abba (Father) and 'Imma (Mother) are associated with the divine name *YaH*. The *millui* of *YaH* equals 26, which is the number of fasts required to atone for this sin. In addition, 26 lashings are prescribed. Performance of the penance atones for the sin, not merely by raising the sinner's consciousness with regard to his act but also by "mending" the damage done to the relevant parts of the divine structure through such transgression. Thus, the number 26 is of the utmost significance for the penitent. By concentrating on the proper number of fasts and lashings, their relationship to *YaH* and the *parzufim* of 'Abba and 'Imma, the individual repairs the injury suffered by the Godhead.

Another *tiqqun* is that required for one who has publicly humiliated another person. He must roll upon thorns called *ortigas* (*SRH*, 49).¹⁹ Luria derived this practice from Proverbs 24:31, "The face thereof was covered with nettles." The word "face" is taken to mean the face of one who has been put to shame in public. Just as the humiliated person is covered with "nettles," the guilty part must suffer affliction with thorns.

Still other mortification practices were enjoined as acts of repentance. Transgressions involving sexual matters called for particularly severe affliction.²⁰ For example, a person who has had intercourse with the wife of another man must submit to a fast of 325 days, which corresponds to five times the *gematria* of the name 'ADoNaY. For every one of the fasts he must don sackcloth and rub dust on his forehead, traditional signs of mourning. Moreover, the final portion of each meal that breaks a day of fasting must be dipped in dust before eating. In this case Luria equates the number 325 with 320 "judgments" (*dinim*) whose severity is "sweetened" by adding five times the letter 'alef from the five times 'ADoNaY. In other words, it is concentration on the name 'ADoNaY, whose source is in the *parzuf Nuqva de-Ze'ir*, that atones for this transgression. The wearing of sackcloth and the application of dust signify the reunification of the *parzufim Ze'ir 'Anpin* and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*. This is possible because these two *parzufim* are symbolized by heaven (*shamayim*) and earth ('arez), the *gematria* of which equals that of the Hebrew words for sackcloth and dust, 681.

One who is guilty of having had intercourse with a menstruating woman must fast for a total of 59 days, which corresponds to the *gematria* of the word *niddah* (menstruant). Moreover, he must be lashed and ritually immerse himself in water each day. He is not permitted to sleep on his bed during the days of fast.

While the kabbalists of the sixteenth century regarded properly carried out sexuality within the context of marriage a mystical rite of vital significance, the abuse and misuse of one's sexual powers were viewed with the most severe anxiety. Misuse of generative powers, illegitimate lust, and passion strengthen the realm of the "other side" (*sitra 'ahra*), the forces of evil. Strict penance, though, is able to disentangle the improperly mixed elements of holiness and impurity.

Virtually every one of the *tiqqunim* involves a certain length of fasting. Hayyim Vital indicates a number of reasons for engaging in such fasts. A person is to regard himself as a *sacrifice* in which the blood and fat are given up to God through abstention from eating. Such a spiritualized interpretation of fasting is related to the conception that a person's sins initiate a breach within the letters of the divine name *YHWH*. Sacrifice, through fasting, draws the separated letters near to one another again, reuniting the totality of God's being.

We also find that fasting constitutes atonement for that which one has already eaten. Luria taught that the soul of a deceased sinner will undergo a process of transmigration (*gilgul*) and may come to reside in an animal or vegetable. When a person consumes meat, it is possible that the soul of such an Israelite dwells within the food. During a period of fasting a penitent

should concentrate on the *tiqqun* or "repair" of what he has eaten with the intention of raising up the soul of the departed sinner.

It is clear that the ritual exercises prescribed by Luria for expiation of sin and purification of the soul were not intended to be mere physical afflictions or punishment for its own sake. Rather, they were to cleanse the soul by calling to mind the blemish within it and the damage done to the corresponding elements within the Godhead. The emphasis rests with the proper attitude of repentance and the mending which such repentance accomplishes. The immediate goal of these penitential exercises, and of the qualifying activities as a whole, was personal preparedness for the sake of indulging in a higher order of contemplative ritual, a subject to which we now turn.

The Time and Place for the Practice of *Yihudim*

The practice of the *yihudim* is an independent exercise, detached entirely from the format of traditional prayer and the performance of other *mizwot*. The total setting suggests an experience quite different from these other vehicles for Lurianic contemplation. According to our sources, there are two places in which the *yihudim* can be performed: at the grave of a *zaddiq* (a righteous individual) or in one's own home (SRH, 108). The reason for performance at the grave has to do with the fact that one of the essential goals of the *yihudim*, as we shall see, is to commune with the soul of a departed *zaddiq*. They can be carried out in one's home, but far greater purity on the part of the adept is necessary in order to bring about the communion of souls (SY, 4).

Certain days were considered more propitious than others for the practice of *yihudim* (SRH, 108). Practice at the grave could be done on all days except for the Sabbath, new moon (*rosh hodesh*) and festivals. On these days the souls of the righteous (*nefashot*), which normally hover above the grave, ascend to the "terrestrial paradise" and are thus unavailable for communion. Although all other days are acceptable, the most preferable are the eve of the new moon and the eve of the fifteenth day of the month. On these days an individual is considered likely to be more spiritually prepared. In the case of *yihudim* performed at home, all days are acceptable—including the Sabbath, new moon, and festivals. Although both types of *yihudim* can be adequately practiced at any hour of the day, the "favored time" is after midnight. If one performs the devotions at home, it is particularly important to wait until the midnight hour.

This separation of the *yihudim* from the context of conventional prayer is not without significance. The history of mysticism suggests that, in general, the devotion of mystics tends toward private experience. Mystical

prayer is characterized by an unusual degree of concentration and intensity, as well as by a concern for the highly personal apprehension of God or the sacred. Jewish mystics, however, have always had to deal with the entrenched tradition of communal prayer, according to which a quorum of ten is required for public worship. As a consequence, the earliest kabbalists gravitated toward the use of traditional liturgy for their meditative activities.

In Isaac Luria's case, the practice of contemplation in private, as with the *yihudim*, is understandable from several points of view. Although the *kawwanot* (mystical intentions) of prayer remained tied to communal worship in Lurianic devotion, the nature of the contemplation involved tended to shift the emphasis from collective dynamics to individual experience. The *kawwanot* of prayer are of an extremely complex character, requiring intense and lengthy concentration. Moreover, the *primary* focus of contemplative attention is no longer directed toward the text of the prayers themselves as much as toward the sefirotic system to which the words of prayer correspond. These factors must have necessarily led to an increased withdrawal into oneself in the course of prayer.

From this privatizing tendency it was an easy transition to meditation divorced altogether from regular communal worship. Such a move allowed for the development of freer techniques for raising up one's soul and contemplating the intricacies of the divine world. Moreover, the added dimension of communion with the soul of a *zaddiq* called for a technique and a setting other than that of communal devotion. It is thus not surprising that alongside of the elaborate system of *kawwanot* of prayer, Isaac Luria fashioned a meditative ritual detached from public worship.

Communion of Souls with the Departed

One of the essential goals of the practice of *yihudim* is mystical communion between the soul of the adept and that of a departed *zaddiq*, as noted earlier. Hayyim Vital's account of the process of communion is contained in a series of short "introductions":

Be aware that in the case of all possible *Yihudim*, if you perform the *Yihud* by actually stretching yourself out on the *zaddiq's* grave [i.e., in a prone position], you should contemplatively "intend" that by virtue of your stretching out on top of him you also cause the *zaddiq* to stretch out his soul (*nefesh*), which will then spread out in his bones that are in the grave: [whereupon] he comes "alive" and his bones become like a "body" to the soul that is stretched and spread out within them. This [particular] soul is the one that remains over the grave, as is known, which is the secret meaning of: "And his soul mourneth over him" (Job 14:22). And it is as if this *zaddiq* lives in body and soul at this moment.

And if you perform the *Yihudim* in your house, without prostration, there is no need to practice the contemplative intention indicated above. However, you must *always* concentrate upon raising up your soul (*nefesh*) and that of the *zaddiq* while they are bound to one another, your soul included with his, regardless of whether you perform the *Yihudim* while prostrated at the grave or while at home. You must also concentrate your attention upon that root within Adam from which both your soul and that of the *zaddiq* derive. And concentrate upon arousing that root, for it is the “limb” within Adam from which the soul of this *zaddiq* originates. By doing so you can raise up his soul through the mystery of the “female waters.” (SRH, 75)²¹

We have here what is surely a most unusual and extraordinary ritual. When performed at the grave of the *zaddiq*, the adept’s prostration arouses the *zaddiq*’s soul. This, in turn, “activates” his bones so as to revive him temporarily, as if he were actually alive. The quasi-magical nature of this practice is evident. What distinguishes it, in part, from actual magic, however, is that the physical act by itself does not suffice to accomplish the intended goal; rather, a *contemplative* effort is required. In fact, we see that the physical act can be dispensed with altogether if necessary. What is more significant, the ultimate goal of this activity is a *spiritual* one, the ascent of the soul along with that of the *zaddiq* to the upper realms. Nevertheless, the theurgic tendency so essential to most forms of kabbalism may be said to be taken in this case to something of an extreme.

The “soul” referred to in this passage is the *nefesh*, the lowest of the various parts of soul described in kabbalistic literature. In earlier Kabbalah the soul is generally considered to have three aspects. In an ascending hierarchy they are the *nefesh* (soul), the *ruah* (spirit), and the *neshamah* (super-soul). The *nefesh* is immediately present and active in every individual; the two more elevated levels, however, are *latent* and become manifest only in the case of one who is spiritually aroused, having striven to develop oneself through religious activity. Such activity assists in the development of the higher powers of cognition and represents the fullest maturation of the soul. Later kabbalists—including the Lurianists—added two additional levels of soul. Known as *hayyah* and *yehidah*, these are considered to represent still higher stages of spiritual attainment, present in only the most select figures. According to the teachings of Lurianic Kabbalah, these five parts of the soul correspond to the five *parzufim* of *’Adam Qadmon*. Further, every one of them is associated with each of the “worlds” of *’Azilut*, *Beri’ah*, *Yezirah*, and *’Asiyah*, producing an elaborate hierarchy of soul-ranks. The most exalted level of soul, for example, has its origin in the *yehidah* of the *sefirah Keter* in the highest divine world of *’Azilut*.

According to Lurianic teaching, the various parts of the soul return to their respective places of origin following death. However, the *nefesh*—or,

more precisely, the *lowest* grade of *nefesh*, “*nefesh* of the lower world of *’Asiyah*” —hovers over an individual’s grave. It is this grade of *nefesh* to which our passage refers. If, however, the contemplative kabbalist has himself attained higher levels of soul, such as *ruah*, or *neshamah*, he can attempt meditatively to bind these to the *ruah* and *neshamah* of the *zaddiq* with whom he is seeking to commune. In order to understand the nature of this contemplative goal it is necessary to delineate in somewhat greater detail the notion that certain souls have affinity for one another.

As we indicated earlier, Luria taught that the soul of Adam was originally made up of all the future souls of humankind. The structure of this soul was complex: it possessed 613 “limbs” or “parts,” each one corresponding to one of the 613 *mizvot* in the Torah. (Each of these “limbs” of Adam’s spiritual body reflected the corresponding “limbs” of *’Adam Qadmon*, making Adam a lower configuration of the supernal *anthrōpos*, itself the paradigm for all reality.) Every one of the 613 “limbs” of Adam’s soul was itself a fully developed configuration, subdivided into 613 additional parts or “roots.” In turn, each of these major “roots” (*shoresh gadol*) comprised a number of minor “roots” or sparks; every such spark is an individual soul. There exist, as a consequence of this intricate subdivision, “families” or groups of souls which derive from common “roots” within Adam’s original soul. The critical point is that these “families” have a special attraction and affinity for one another, sharing, as they do, the same source. Because of this they are uniquely qualified to assist one another in the task of raising up souls from the now materialized realm of the world of *’Asiyah*. The knowledge of one’s soul-ancestry—knowledge that Isaac Luria was able to give his disciples—was thus of crucial importance to the contemplative kabbalist.

It is this affinity of souls that constitutes the basis for the communion of souls to which our passage refers. Because of their natural kinship, the soul of the adept can “arouse” the corresponding aspect of soul of the *zaddiq*. In turn, the soul of the *zaddiq* can assist in their simultaneous ascent to the upper realms. The desire to raise up one’s soul is thus much more than a private matter; it forms part of the continuous struggle to restore all the elements of holiness that have descended into the material sphere to their proper place above. What appears to be primarily a personal act of *tiqqun* partakes in the far larger task of messianic restitution. The redemption of the individual soul is a small but absolutely vital part of the infinitely complex effort to redeem divinity as a whole.

Luria’s notion of soul-communion also drew on themes developed in the *Zohar*. In speaking of the fate of the soul after death, the *Zohar* teaches that the lower souls (*nefashot*) remain in this world, hovering over the grave, in order to protect the living. When the living come to them and beg for

mercy, the souls of the departed inform their spirits (*ruhot*), setting off a chain reaction of celestial communication:

We have learned that when the world requires mercy and the intervention of those righteous ones, that which is in the world (i.e., the *nefesh*) to shield mankind, ascends, goes and flits about the world to tell the spirit, and the spirit ascends, removes itself and tells the super-soul, which informs the Holy One, blessed be He. Then God has pity on the world and the reverse process takes place, the super-soul telling the spirit and the spirit, the soul. (*Zohar* 3:70b)

Our Lurianic sources utilize this motif for their own purposes. Vital's text (*SRH*, 109), as well as that of Joseph ibn Tabul (folio 175a), cites the continuation of the above *Zohar* passage, according to which the living inform the souls of the departed righteous when the world is in distress so that they might cleave "soul to soul" with the righteous. Although no ritual of prostration upon the grave is suggested here, the *Zohar* is describing a simplified prototype of the Lurianic notion of soul-communion. Of particular interest is Moses Cordovero's comment on the Zoharic passage under consideration.

This is the meaning of "soul bound up with soul"—this is when he "pours" his soul upon the grave of the *zaddiq*, cleaving soul to soul, and speaks with the soul of the *zaddiq*. He informs him of the world's distress, and the soul of the *zaddiq* arouses other souls. . . . (Cordovero's *Zohar* commentary in Abraham Azulai's 'Or ha-Hammah, 3:56a)

Cordovero also reports that such a practice was performed by "men who worked wondrous things in Spain." It is not clear exactly what Cordovero means by the term "pour" in this comment, but it does appear that he has in mind something akin to Luria's practice. It is possible that the peregrinations (*gerushin*) carried out by Cordovero and Solomon Alkabez, in which they wandered from grave to grave in the environs of Safed and had experiences of automatic speech in which they uttered kabbalistic interpretations of scriptural verses, were inspired by the Zoharic tradition.

We know of the practice of visiting the gravesites of important rabbis and teachers in the Safed area from a variety of sources. There are reports as early as the thirteenth century of visits to the cave of Hillel and Shammai in Meron—a small village near Safed—in order to pray for rain. Even before the Spanish Expulsion, visits were made to the grave, in Meron, of Shimon bar Yohai, whose mystical teachings the *Zohar* purports to contain. Testimony by various Safed kabbalists, Joseph Karo, Moses Cordovero, Abraham Galante, and Eliezar Azikri indicate the widespread custom of visits to Shimon bar Yohai's grave for study, prayer, and meditation.²² Karo's *maggid*, or angelic mentor, for example, informs him that Shimon bar Yohai

and his son Eliezer reveal heavenly mysteries to those who study *Zohar* at their graves.²³ It is clear, then, that by the time Isaac Luria arrived in Safed, the custom of visiting the graves of sages for various devotional purposes was already quite common. Such a practice, along with the conceptions found in the *Zohar* described above, is likely to have served as the framework for his own technique of soul-communion at the graves of *zaddiqim*. Nevertheless, Luria's ritual represents a far more complex and elaborate meditative exercise.

Contemplation upon Divine Names

While maintaining a state of cleaving to the soul of a *zaddiq*, the adept moves on to a second stage of practice. The focus of meditation is now on an intricate array of divine "names." These "names" correspond to the *parzufim* and their multiple subconfigurations, whose unification is effected through formalized and sustained concentration. Like the *parzufim*, the "names" of God constitute a vast and complex "map" of the divine structure.

Although the most characteristic symbolism employed in kabbalistic literature to describe the inner workings of God is that of the *sefirot*, the kabbalists also conceive of the emanation of deity in terms of the revealing of divine *language*. In this symbolism the Torah comprises a network of "names," each of which signifies a particular concentration of divine power or energy. As such, these "names" possess a fullness of meaning not exhausted by human language. It is not surprising that the Lurianic "names" are only to a limited extent conventional words at all. In a way that is highly reminiscent of the seemingly arbitrary combining of Hebrew letters characteristic of Abulafian mysticism, Luria's divine "names" are, to a considerable degree, beyond rational understanding altogether. For the contemplative, however, to exercise one's concentration successfully upon the "names" of God is to reorganize theurgically and restructure the life of the divine.

Unification of Male and Female within Divinity

As an example of this contemplation we turn to one of the *yihudim* that exhibits some of the essential elements of these meditations (*SRH*, 110–11). It is concerned with the unification of *Hokhmah* and *Binah* (the *parzufim* 'Abba and 'Imma), as well as that of *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut* (the *parzufim* Ze'ir 'Anpin and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*), the totality of which represents the complete tetragrammaton, *YHWH*.

Analysis of this meditation requires an understanding of the relationship between the tetragrammaton and the structure of 'Adam Qadmon.

According to Luria, the figure of 'Adam Qadmon, as indicated earlier, possesses four structural dimensions: eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Each of these is the source of different *parzufim*, which, in turn, correspond to various forms of the tetragrammaton. The "organs" of 'Adam Qadmon can thus be conceived of as divine lights which combine to form names, the expression of which represents different aspects of the divine structure. According to this conception, the tetragrammaton can assume four basic forms; these are known as the names 72, 63, 45, and 52 and are based on different spellings (*milluim*) of YHWH:

1. Name 72 is expressed by *millui de-yudin*²⁴ and is written out as follows: YW"D H"Y WY"W H"Y. The *gematria* of this name is 72.

2. Name 63 is expressed by *millui de-yudin* with an 'alef in the *waw* and is written as follows: YW"D H"Y WA"W H"Y. The *gematria* of this name is 63.

3. Name 45 is expressed by *millui de-'alfin*,²⁵ which is written as follows: YW"D H"A WA"W H"A. The *gematria* of this name is 45.

4. Name 52 is expressed by *millui de-hein*,²⁶ which is written as follows: YW"D H"H W"W H"H. The *gematria* of this name is 52.

In addition to representing one of the *parzufim* that make up the entire divine structure, each of these names corresponds to one of the four letters of the simple tetragrammaton. This set of associations can be summarized as follows:

"Organ" of 'Adam Qadmon	Parzuf	Name	Letter
eye	'Abba	72	Yud
ear	'Imma	63	Heb
nose	Ze'ir 'Anpin	45	Waw
mouth	Nuqva de-Ze'ir	52	Heb

This meditation begins with the attempt to unite the upper "parents," *Hokhmah* and *Binah* ('Abba and 'Imma). The adept concentrates on the name YHWH within *Hokhmah* and on the name 'EHYH within *Binah*. He mentally joins these two names by interspersing their letters—thus forming the single divine appellation: YAHHWYH"H. After concentrating on this name, the adept is instructed to turn his attention to the name 72, itself corresponding to *Hokhmah*/'Abba. Contemplation of the name 72 serves to stimulate the initial unification of *Hokhmah*/'Abba and *Binah*/'Imma. The name 72 also corresponds to the quality of divine compassion, *HeSeD*, the *gematria* of which is 72. This *Hesed* helps to facilitate the love between the

upper two *parzufim*. The meditative action represents the first letter of the simple YHWH.

In the next stage the adept concerns himself with the completion of this unification by attempting to bring about the ascent of the "female waters." He does this by concentrating on the name 63, whose source is *Binah*/'Imma. The ascent of the "female waters" aroused by an individual's contemplation of the name 63 acts as the catalyst that finalizes the unification of *Hokhmah*/'Abba and *Binah*/'Imma. This action represents the second letter of the simple YHWH.

Following this the adept is instructed to turn his attention to the uniting of the lower two *parzufim*, *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut* (*Ze'ir 'Anpin* and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*). He contemplates the name YHWH within *Tif'eret* and the name 'ADNY within *Malkhut*. In his imagination he combines the two names by interspersing their letters, thus forming: YAHDWNH"Y. He then turns his attention to the name 45, which itself corresponds to *Ze'ir 'Anpin*, the contemplation of which serves to stimulate the initial unification of the lower two *parzufim*. This action represents the third letter of the tetragrammaton, *Waw*. In the second stage, an individual finalizes the uniting of *Ze'ir 'Anpin* and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir* by raising up the "female waters" from *Malkhut*. This is achieved by contemplation on the name 52, itself rooted in *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*. This corresponds to the fourth letter of the tetragrammaton, *heb*.

Through this meditation, then, both sets of male and female within 'Adam Qadmon are united with one another, 'Abba and 'Imma, *Ze'ir* and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*. The net result on the theosophical plane is the total reunification of YHWH. Inasmuch as each *parzuf* corresponds to one of the four letters of the simple YHWH, when the *parzufim* are brought into proper relationship to one another through contemplation, the tetragrammaton itself is restored to its primordial state of unity. The following chart outlines this meditative exercise.

- Ia. Unification of *Hokhmah* and *Binah*: YAHHWYH"H
YUD HY WAW HY (72)
- Ib. Arousal of "female waters" to complete unification:
YUD HY WAW HY (63)
- IIa. Unification of *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut*: YAHDWNH"Y
YUD HA WAW HA (45)
- IIb. Arousal of "female waters" to complete unification:
YUD HH WAW HH (52)

Achieving Prophetic Inspiration

We are now in a position to ask about the nature of the *experience* itself that the adept underwent in the course of practicing the *yihudim*. What were the effects upon the psyche and the body of the contemplative kabbalist, and what were the ultimate consequences of his practice? What partial answers we are able to provide to these questions derive from two kinds of sources. First, we rely upon fragmentary and incidental statements in the theoretical accounts describing the *yihudim* in Hayyim Vital's *Sha'ar Ruah ha-Qodesh* and *Sha'ar ha-Yihudim*. Second, Vital has recorded his own experiences during the performance of *yihudim*. These valuable reports are preserved in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* and Vital's mystical diary, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*.

According to our sources, the flow of divine power set off by the uniting of male and female, *Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*, in the course of meditation, constitutes the source of divine inspiration which the successful adept attains—either in the form of prophecy or the Holy Spirit.²⁷

All of the prophecy of prophets derives only from [the *sefirot* of] *Nezah*, *Hod* and *Yesod* within *Ze'ir Anpin*—because from there an illumination shines upon *Malkhut*, the feminine [aspect of *Ze'ir Anpin*]. From this illumination prophets draw their prophecy. . . . There is no comprehension for any prophet or seer except by means of *Nuqva de-Ze'ir*. (SY, 1)

That prophetic inspiration derives from *Nuqva de-Ze'ir* is in complete accord with the traditional kabbalistic notion of prophecy through *Malkhut*. Uniting the *parzufim* of *Ze'ir* and *Nuqva de-Ze'ir* provides an individual with divine inspiration and enables him to speak words of “prophecy.” The Holy Spirit or the spirit of prophecy begins to rest upon him and manifests itself through spontaneous unreflected speech, a form of motor automatism. Prophetic utterance such as this requires great power of concentration and is not easily achieved:

There is one who begins to achieve some inspiration (*hasagah*) and the Spirit (*ha-Ruah*) rests upon him. But it [i.e., the Spirit] does not possess perfection with which to cause the voice of prophecy and the Holy Spirit to dwell upon his lips and tongue. Without speaking, he only feels at the moment of *yihud* that his hair stands up, his body and limbs shake, his lips tremble—but the power of speaking is not in his mouth. (SY, 5)

This condition may afflict an adept only after he has already achieved a certain degree of inspiration. The spirit speaks within him but does not manifest itself vocally. Luria thus prescribes several particular *yihudim* whose specific function is to invest the adept in need of special assistance with the power to bring forth prophetic speech:

If the person who performs *Yihudim* has already obtained some arousal on the part of his super-soul, which speaks to him by means of some *Yihud* which he has performed, but he does not yet have the strength to bring forth the speech upon his lips from the potential to the actual—he should perform this *Yihud* before he does the other one. (SRH, 115–16)

Although Vital writes in one place that “God will reveal to him wondrous things from His Torah,” the speech itself, which the contemplative either hears from without or utters from his own mouth, derives from the *zaddiq* with whom he is communing: “On account of these *Yihudim*, they [i.e., the *zaddiqim*] reveal to them secrets of the Torah and matters of the future” (SY, 3). In *Shivhei ha-Ari*, we read the following about this process:

And how is this mystery of communion (*devequt*) performed? Let a righteous person stretch out on the grave of one of the *Tanna'im* (early rabbis) or one of the prophets, and cleave with his soul (*nafsho*) to that of the *zaddiq*, and with his spirit (*ruho*) to his spirit. Then the *Tanna* begins to speak with him as a man talks to his friend—and answers all that he asks, revealing to him all the mysteries of Torah.²⁸

Isaac Luria's Performance of Yihudim

Before turning to Vital's autobiographical accounts, we take notice of an interesting passage in *Shivhei ha-Ari*, which describes Isaac Luria's own performance of *yihudim*. Though there appears to be little other testimony concerning Luria's performance of these exercises, it is reasonable to assume that he engaged in the same contemplative exercises that he prescribed for his disciples.²⁹

Once the Rabbi went to prostrate himself upon the grave of Shemayah and Avtalyon in *Gush Halav*, at a distance of one *parsa*, for the purpose of inquiring of them the true secrets of the Torah. For such was his custom. Whenever he desired to speak with a prophet or a certain *Tanna*, he would go to his grave and lay himself down upon it, with outstretched arms and feet, “putting his mouth upon his mouth. . . .” [2 Kgs 4:34], as did Elisha with Habakkuk. He would contemplate a *Yihud*, and elevate the soul, spirit and super-soul of this *zaddiq* through the mystery of the “female waters.” . . . He would bind his soul, spirit and super-soul to those of the *zaddiq*, and bring about supernal unification. By means of the *Yihud* the soul of this *zaddiq* would be invested with a new light, greater than that which he had previously. In this way the dry bones which lie in the grave revived; the soul, spirit and super-soul of that *zaddiq* descended to his bones, bringing him to actual life, speaking with him (i.e., Luria) as a man speaks to his neighbor, revealing to him all the secrets of the Torah concerning which he asks of him. All these *Yihudim* are in my possession, written down, praised be God. For the Rabbi transmitted them

to his disciples, all ten of whom successfully practiced them. As a consequence, the *zaddiqim* [with whom they commune] spoke to them, answering all their questions. However, they possessed the strength to do this only during the Rabbi's lifetime. After his death their efforts were without success, with the exception of our teacher, Rabbi Hayyim Calabrese, may God protect and preserve him, who successfully practices them to this day. (*Shivhei ha-Ari*, 5)³⁰

The Experiences of Hayyim Vital

Turning to Vital's account of his own experiences, we learn that Luria prescribed particular *tiqquney' awonot* for sins which Vital had committed.³¹ Among other things, Vital had indulged in alchemical studies during the years 1566–1568, just prior to his taking up with Luria—a practice that he later regretted. He also needed to purify himself for having become angry with his wife, for having drunk forbidden wine with an apostate, having cursed his parents, and having committed a minor sexual transgression on his wedding night. Luria told him that he would have to undergo a two-and-one-half-year period of absolution in order fully to qualify himself for contemplative experience. Vital also reports that Luria reproached him for failing to practice *yihudim* regularly. In the following text we learn the importance that Luria attached to the performance of these meditations:

One day I visited him [i.e., Luria], a whole month having passed during which I had performed none of the *Yihudim* he had prescribed for me. Recognizing this by looking at my face, he said to me: "If you leave me for a day I shall leave you for two' (Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot* 9:5; 14d). You cause great harm by failing to perform the unifications for it causes the souls who wish to become attached to you to become separated from you." I excused myself in that I desired only to study the Torah at that time, especially since those souls did not come to me as openly as they should have done. He replied that in spite of this I must not fail to perform these unifications daily. It is more important than the study of the Torah since it unifies the upper worlds and so serves the dual purpose of Torah study and unification. He warned me that when I perform the unifications my intention should not be only for the purpose of attracting the soul but in order to put things right on high.

He also said to me, when I went with him to the sepulcher of Rabbi Akiva, that Rabbi Akiva had told him I was to mention Rabbi Akiva's name ten times consecutively before each of the three daily prayers, evening, morning and noon. As a result he will become impregnated in³² me and will greatly assist me. He told me that there was no need for me to say "Rabbi Akiva," only "Akiva."

He also said to me that until the festival of Tabernacles in the year 5334 (1573) I shall require real assistance, that he should assist me whenever I perform unifications. But from then onwards I shall require no assistance

whatever, for then compensation will have been made for the two and a half years I had sinned by failing to study the Torah. Furthermore, until that time, even if he did assist me, it was only on occasion for it could not then have been permanent, but that from that time onwards it would be permanent, God willing.³³

What is truly remarkable in this passage is what it reveals about the status assigned to the practice of *yihudim*. Contemplative devotion is more important than the study of Torah! Insofar as the real and *ultimate* goal of the study of Torah is the unification of the upper worlds, a ritual that accomplishes this more directly has priority. This serves to illustrate perfectly the fundamental transformation of values to which Lurianic piety testifies. Every dimension of religious life is now directed toward clearly defined mystical goals: it is the *contemplative* act, the attainment of divine inspiration, the restoration of the cosmos, which demand one's every waking moment.

Although Hayyim Vital refers in quite a number of places to this practice of *yihudim*,³⁴ we possess only a single *detailed* description of the actual physical experience he underwent in the course of engaging in one particular meditation. In the absence of other such accounts by Vital, or by any of the other students to whom personalized instructions were given by Isaac Luria, we are dependent on this passage for any sense of what the performance of *yihudim* was like from the adept's point of view.

On the eve of the New Moon of the month of 'Elul in the year 5331 (1571) my master of blessed memory sent me to the sepulcher of Abbaye and Rava.³⁵ There I prostrated myself at the grave of Abbaye of blessed memory and first performed the unification of the Mouth and Nose of the Holy Ancient One (*'Attiqa Qadisha* or *'Arieh 'Anpin*). Sleep fell upon me and then I awoke but I saw nothing. Then I again prostrated myself on Abbaye's actual grave and I performed the unification recorded in my master's own handwriting, but as I was engaged in combining, as is well known, the letters of the Tetragrammaton with those of *'Adonai*, my thoughts became confused and I was unable to combine them, so I ceased from reflecting on that combination of letters. It then seemed to me in my thought as if a voice was saying to me: "Retract! Retract!" many times and I thought to myself that these were the words Aqavyah ben Mahalalel addressed to his son, as is well known. (Mishnah *'Eduyot* 5:7) So I tried again to combine the letters and this time I was successful. It then seemed to me in my thoughts that they were saying to me: "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son" (Gen 22:8) (*'elohim yir'eh lo ha-seh le-'olah beni*) and it seemed as if they were explaining the meaning of the verse to me, namely, I was apprehensive that I had not performed the first unification adequately but it was not so. It had, in fact, been effective before God, hence: "God will provide Himself the

lamb." And it seemed in my thoughts as if they were explaining to me that the whole of the first unification I had performed was hinted at in the verse. For the initial letters of ' *elohim yir'eh lo ha-seh* have the numerical value of forty-six, the same as that of the Tetragrammaton and ' *Ehveyeh*. And the initial letters of *ha-seh le'olah beni* form the word *bevel* ("breath") of the Supernal Mouth which I had in mind while performing that unification. And it seemed to me as if they were saying that Hillel the Elder is hinted at in the initial letters of *lo ha-seh le'olah* but I failed to grasp the meaning of this. Behold, all this passed through my mind.

Then a great dread and trembling seized hold of all my limbs and my hands trembled. My lips, too, were trembling in a highly exaggerated manner, moving quickly and concurrently and with great speed as if a voice was perched on my tongue between my lips. It said with great speed more than a hundred times: "What can I say? What can I say?" I tried to steady myself and prevent my lips from moving but was unable to still them at all. Then I had in mind to ask for wisdom upon which the voice broke out in my mouth and on my tongue, saying, more than twenty times, "Wisdom, Wisdom." Then it repeated many times: "Wisdom and knowledge." Then it repeated: "Wisdom and knowledge will be given to you from heaven like the knowledge attained by Rabbi Akiva." Then it repeated: "And more than that of Rabbi Akiva." Then it repeated: "Like that attained by Rabbi Yeiva Sava." And then it repeated: "And more than that of Rabbi Yeiva Sava." And then it said: "Greeting to you." And then it said: "They send you greetings from heaven." All this was said at a great speed, repeatedly many times, utterly wondrous, while I was in a waking state and while prostrated in the sepulcher of Abbaye.

Then I went to my master of blessed memory who said to me that I was most effective in performing these two unifications one after the other and this was, indeed, the right way to perform them. The reason I had received no response after performing the first unification was because they were waiting until I had performed both. And my master of blessed memory said to me that when I returned from that place and entered my house he saw the soul of Benaiah ben Yehoiada going along with me. He told me that Benaiah did not belong to my soul root, but the reason he accompanied me was that he is always revealed together with anyone who performs the supernal unification. For this was his habit during his lifetime on earth as we have stated elsewhere.

My teacher of blessed memory said to me at the time of the afternoon prayer that if I shall be worthy on the coming Sabbath, the soul of Rabbi Yeiva Sava will remain with me for ever, never to depart, as do the other incarnations. Through him I shall be worthy of receiving powerful illuminations, especially during the ' *Amidah* prayer while reciting the benedictions "the years," "the shoot" and "hearkening to prayer." The reason for it is that Rabbi Yeiva Sava also reveals himself to the saints just as Benaiah does, as we have explained. Furthermore, he belongs to my soul root. Therefore, if I shall be worthy of having him reveal himself to me he will disclose to me, God willing, marvellous things.³⁶

Hayyim Vital's experience, as described in this text, consisted of two distinct stages. The first stage involved the contemplation of the *yihudim* themselves. His initial efforts at unification appeared to him to be unsuccessful. His mind became confused after attempting a second *yihud*, following which he heard a voice uttering the request of the dying Aqvayah ben Mahalalel to his son.³⁷ We learn from Vital's diary that this sage was one of the various *zaddiqim* who comprised his *gilgul* ancestry. Having heard this voice he returned to contemplation of the second *yihud*, which he successfully completed. Again he heard a voice which this time uttered a scriptural passage (Gen 22:8), the *notariqon* and *gematria* of which elucidated the meaning of the initial *yihud*. The initial letters of several words in this passage, forming as they do the word *bevel* ("breath"), indicated to Vital the mystery of the supernal Mouth intended by the first meditation. This demonstrated to him that it had been successful after all.

Having achieved a level of inspiration in which he heard the external voices of others speaking to him, Vital entered a more intense stage of experience. He was overcome with physical trembling and began to utter short phrases repeatedly and quickly in the manner of automatic speech. He was apparently "possessed" by the voice that was speaking through his mouth, unable to control himself at all. The substance of the disclosure elicited after his having asked "for wisdom" consisted in a confirmation of the exalted status of his soul. He is promised the attainment of knowledge exceeding that of Akiba, a famous rabbinic teacher of the first century, and that of Yeiva Sava, a figure in the *Zohar*. According to Vital's diary, both of these men were part of his *gilgul* ancestry. The exceptionally elevated status of his soul, the transmigrations through which it had gone, and the unlimited possibilities for mystical illumination of which he was capable were themes with which Vital was continually preoccupied.

One of the initial and essential goals of many forms of contemplation is that of separating oneself completely for a period of time from the realm of normal sensation. The purpose or effect of doing so is to provide the conditions under which one can achieve an altered state of awareness of one variety or another. In Vital's account several elements appear to contribute to such an effort. In the first place, arising at night to engage in the *yihudim* clearly served to establish a quiet, nondistracting environment. Besides the various mythic associations with which the Safed kabbalists viewed the hour of midnight, the effect of practicing devotional activities at such a time would be to create an opportunity for undisturbed concentration. Elsewhere, Vital adds that the adept is to seclude himself and close his eyes while concentrating (*SRH*, 117, 130). The very deprivation of sleep might

reasonably contribute to inducing an altered state of consciousness. Susceptibility for this would be enhanced if one was fasting as well.

While these physical conditions may help explain what happened to Vital as reported in this text, there can be no doubt that the primary means by which he entered into the kind of state described here was the concentration on the letter combinations themselves. Intense contemplative concentration for sustained periods of time upon the various names of God must have served the purpose of enabling an individual to exclude from the mind's consciousness all external sensation and bring about the unusual experience suggested by Vital. Vital himself explicitly states elsewhere that the contemplative "must exert intense powers of concentration, turn his heart from all external thoughts, and divest his soul of its bodily aspect" (SRH, 111).

The central feature of Vital's experience was that of hearing voices communicating to him and through his own voice. In his diary, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, he reports having asked his teacher, Luria, whether the voice of the *zaddiq* which he hears is *actually* that of the *zaddiq* himself or merely his own voice. Luria assures Vital that the voice which he has experienced is indeed that of the *zaddiq*, inasmuch as the soul of the *zaddiq* invests itself in Vital's heart through proper concentration. As Vital reports it: "From there [i.e., from Vital's heart] the sound of the *zaddiq's* speech ascends to my mouth (*ma' aleh dibburo be-fi*) and speaks with my mouth, whereupon I hear his voice."³⁸ Elsewhere in his diary Vital indicates that sometimes the voice of the *zaddiq* speaks *to* him rather than through his own voice. When he is restricted to this lesser experience, it is apparently on account of laxness in fulfilling his religious responsibilities.³⁹

Unreflected automatic speech such as this was quite well known among the Safed kabbalists of the sixteenth century. The *gerushin* or mystical peregrinations of Moses Cordovero and Solomon Alkabez, Joseph Karo's experiences of a mentor angel or *maggid*, Luria's own technique of inducing a *maggid*, and Vital's technique of communing with the soul of a departed *zaddiq* through the contemplative recitation of passages from the Mishnah, are all examples of experiences resulting in the revelation of mysteries of the Torah and esoteric knowledge in the form of unreflected automatic speech.⁴⁰

The Status of Heavenly Revelations in Safed

It remains for us to consider briefly two related matters that may help to clarify the broader significance of the contemplative ritual we have studied. The attempt to acquire kabbalistic knowledge through personal and direct revelatory means stands in distinct contrast to traditional rabbinic methods

of developing teachings on the basis of various types of textual inquiry. Different hermeneutical styles may be brought to bear upon such inquiry—logic, for example, in the case of rabbinic law or medieval rationalism; moral or narrative concerns in the case of midrash aggadah or moralistic literature. The common factor, however, is the essentially *intellectual* process of studying an existing text or texts for the purpose of clarifying, interpreting, or furthering meaning. For meaning is believed to reside within the texts themselves; one need only apply the appropriate techniques of inquiry to ferret out the meaning of the text. This was the case not only for the rabbis of late antiquity; it was true also for the medieval philosophers, biblical exegetes of various types, as well as most of the early kabbalists.

In the case of the *yihudim* (as well as the other techniques mentioned earlier involving the revelation of mystical knowledge) appeal is not made to the inherent meaning of existing texts, but to a "heavenly" source. The successful adept is said to acquire the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, or to achieve the level of prophecy, even if it is only a minor degree of prophecy. Knowledge is regarded as deriving *directly* from "on high" rather than from an individual's own intellectual powers. Whereas the talmudic sages went out of their way to deny the possibility of further prophecy, claiming instead that the privilege of understanding the meaning of Torah is now a more "earthly" one, the kabbalists of Safed in general, and Isaac Luria in particular, reassert the contention that more direct channels of communication are entirely appropriate, even preferable.

Isaac Luria himself was believed by his disciples to be exemplary in this regard. It was not his intellectual acumen that served as the basis for his authority as a teacher, but his *intuitive* and *contemplative* acumen. It was his knowledge of esoteric sciences and arts, his having merited the revelations of Elijah, his having been invested with the Holy Spirit, his ability to "read" the lines on a face, his capacity to recognize the identity of the souls hovering above graves, which accounted for his authoritative position. Moreover, according to Lurianic teachings, other persons could potentially acquire similar kinds of abilities. With Lurianism, then, we witness the emergence of a new point of view with respect to the acquisition of divine truth. The phenomenon of charismatic experience, in which individuals had direct access to the "heavens," was elevated to a status that it had not enjoyed for centuries.

Revelatory Knowledge as Messianic Gnosis

Finally, how are we to understand the immense preoccupation with the revelation of new mystical knowledge on the part of the Safed kabbalists?

The answer to this question has to do, in large part, with the messianic aspirations of the community as a whole, and Lurianic mysticism in particular. For it was believed that the revelation of esoteric knowledge was both a signal of the coming redemption and a means by which to facilitate the messianic era. In the literature of the *Zohar*, particularly the *Ra'aya Meheimna* and *Tiqquney Zohar*, the eschatological aspect of kabbalistic knowledge forms a significant theme. The Torah of the "Tree of Life" is a concealed Torah, and contains the mystical meanings that will be completely revealed in the messianic future.⁴¹ This messianic Torah is, however, partially revealed through the *Zohar* itself. Not only will the esoteric layer of meaning prevail in the redeemed future, but the very study of the *Zohar* will facilitate the redemption.

With the popularization and democratization of kabbalistic life that took place in the sixteenth century, this idea assumed great importance. Kabbalistic knowledge was, ideally, no longer to be restricted to small circles of initiates, but was to become the property of the people at large. It was precisely such an argument that prevailed in the debate in Italy over the question of printing the *Zohar*. Writing in the middle of the sixteenth century, Isaac Delattes argued that "the merit of studying the book *Zohar* is sufficient to deliver us and to overturn our exile."

The importance of kabbalistic knowledge as a feature of the messianic age is no less important to Lurianism. Sin and exile caused the exile of the inner secrets of the Torah; in the "end of days," however, they will be revealed once again. The redemption of holiness, which lies at the heart of Lurianic mysticism, extends even to the redemption of the Torah itself! Whereas now only fragments of the deepest mysteries of the Torah are within reach, in the messianic future every Israelite will achieve knowledge of the entire Torah. But the revelations merited in the unredeemed state are not merely foreshadowings of redemption; they are actually *instrumental* in hastening the messianic age. The communications that some merited as a consequence of contemplative exercises were conceived of as salvational in and of themselves, *gnosis* in the truest sense.

Notes

1. This legendary tradition was preserved in two influential works, *Shivhei ha'Ari*, written by Solomon Shlomi of Dresnitz during the first decade of the seventeenth century, and *Toldot ha'Ari*, compiled sometime in the middle of the same century. *Shivhei ha'Ari* comprises stories about Luria which, for the most part, are compatible with the personality about whom we learn from the information scattered throughout the works of his actual disciples, especially those of Hayyim Vital. In contrast, *Toldot ha'Ari* is much further removed from what we know about Luria, containing as it does many folkloristic tales such as those, for example, which emphasize

Luria's supposed miracle working. These traditions have been studied by M. Benayahu in his *Sefer Toldot ha'Ari*. Concerning this literature, see also J. Dan, *Ha-Sippur ha'Iuri Beyemei ha-Beynayim*, chap. 11. With regard to the dissemination and influence of Lurianic Kabbalah, see G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, part 1.

2. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, lecture seven; I. Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra weha-Qelipah be Qabbalat ha'Ari*; idem, "Gnostic Doctrines in Sixteenth Century Jewish Mysticism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6 (1955).

3. Hayyim Vital (1542-1620), Luria's chief disciple and the person responsible for the most elaborate versions of Lurianic teachings, lists Luria's students in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim* of the *Shemonah She'arim* (pp. 171-72), and in Vital's mystical diary, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha Rav Kook, 1954) 217-20. (All references to the books that make up Vital's version of Lurianic teachings, the *Shemonah She'arim* [*Eight Gates*], are to the Yehudah Ashlag edition [Tel Aviv, 1962].)

4. The conception of a series of four "worlds" or divine realms above the terrestrial world goes back to thirteenth-century Kabbalah. These include: 'Olam ha-'Azilut, the "World of Emanation," that is, the realm of the ten *sefirot*; 'Olam ha-Beri'ah, the "World of Creation," that is, the divine throne and chariot; 'Olam ha-Yezirah, the "World of Formation," that of the angels and of *Metatron*; and 'Olam ha-'Asiyah, the "World of Making," that world closest to the terrestrial realm and sometimes identified with the terrestrial world itself. The doctrine underwent considerable development in sixteenth-century Safed, especially at the hands of Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria. From the point of view of Lurianic Kabbalah, all of the worlds, including that of 'Asiyah, were originally of a purely spiritual character. With the "breaking of the vessels," however, 'Asiyah descended and became mixed in with the realms of impurity and materiality brought about as a result of the shattering of the divine vessels.

5. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 34.

6. The contemplative intentions (*kawwanot*) to accompany prayer are described in *Sha'ar ha-Kawwanot*, the *kawwanot* of *mizwot* in *Sha'ar ha-Mizwot*, both of Vital's *Shemonah She'arim*. The *yihudim* are discussed in detail in *Sha'ar Ruah ha-Qodesh* (hereafter *SRH*) and *Sha'ar ha-Yihudim* (hereafter *SY*). References to *Sha'ar ha-Yihudim*, which is not part of the *Shemonah She'arim*, are to a reprint published in Jerusalem: Mekor Hayyim, 1970.

7. Cf. *Sha'ar ha-Mizwot*, 1-2; *Sha'ar ha-Kawwanot*, 1:2. Another Safed author, Elijah de Vidas, writes that joyfulness in the performance of the commandments enables one to destroy the evil (*qelipot*) which imprisons the *Shekbinah* (*Reshit Hokhmah* [Venice, 1593], *Sha'ar ha-'Abavah*, chap. 10). An extreme formulation of the importance of joy is reported by Moses Galante in the name of his brother Abraham. He states that the joy with which a *mizwah* is performed is more important than the *mizwah* itself! See *Kobelet Ya'aqov* (Safed, 1578) 36a.

8. *Sha'arei Qedushah* (Constantinople, 1734) part 2, gate 4.

⑨ This notion goes back to *Berakhot* 31a, *Hagigah* 5b, *Shabbat* 30b.]

10. See, e.g., *Shabbat* 105b, *Nedarim* 22b; *Zohar* 1:27b; 2:182a-b; 3:179a. Concerning the value of avoiding anger, see Moses Cordovero's rules of piety, no. 2, printed as part of an appendix to S. Schechter, "Safed in the Sixteenth Century: A City of Legists and Mystics," in *Studies in Judaism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908) 292; idem, *Tomer Devorah*, chap. 1, part 5; *Sha'arei Qedushah*, part 2, gate 4; *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 24; Eliezar Azikri, *Sefer Haredim* (Jerusalem, 1958), *Mizwot ha-Teshuvah*, chap 4.

11. Cf. *Sha'arei Qedushah*, part 2, gate 4. Elijah de Vidas devotes an entire "gate" to discussing humility in *Reshit Hokhmah*, *Sha'ar ha-'Anavah*. See also his *Toza'ot Hayyim* (Jerusalem, 1971) 5-7.

12. Cf. *Sha'arei Qedushah*, part 2, gate 5; Cordovero's rules of piety, nos. 6, 9, and 10 in Schechter, *Studies*, 292.

13. Vital discusses the significance of the various levels of study in *Sha'ar ha-Mizwot, Parashat We'ethanan*; cf. also Vital, *Ta'amei Mizwot* (Jerusalem, 1972), *Parashat We'ethanan*.

14. Cf. *Sha'ar ha-Mizwot*, 79; M. Benayahu, *Sefer Toldot ha'Ari*, 336; Vital's introduction to *'Ez Hayyim* (Warsaw, 1891).

15. For *kawwanot* to accompany ritual immersion see *Sha'ar ha-Kawwanot*, 24–26; cf. *Sha'ar ha-Mizwot*, where immersion is said to cleanse one who has had a nocturnal pollution. The same reason is given by Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi Berukhim in his rules of piety (Schechter, *Studies*, 297, no. 6).

16. The basis for the analogy of the sick body to the sick soul appears to be drawn from Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot, De'ot*, chap. 2; *Shemonah Peraqim*, chap. 3.

17. Concerning the theme of Luria as healing doctor and diagnostician of the soul's injuries, see *SRH*, 14; and Benayahu, *Toldot ha'Ari*, 156–57. In this connection, see L. Fine, "The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge," *AJS Review* 11 (1986) 1.

18. The apparent severity of the amount of fasting is mitigated in two ways. Vital explains that a day of fasting does not include the night and that two successive days of fasting which do include the night are equivalent to twenty-seven days, whereas three consecutive days and nights are equivalent to forty days of fasting (*SRH*, 25–26). *Millui* consists of spelling out the full name of each letter and adding up the numerical value of the combined letters. *Gematria* is the technique of determining the combined numerical value of the letters of a word or phrase and relating it to other words or phrases of numerical equivalence. Through *millui* (and other manipulative techniques) the *gematria* of a word can be greatly increased. The technique of *millui* can be extended so as to calculate the *millui* of the *millui*, and so on.

19. The term *ortigas* is Spanish for "nettles." Among the various extreme self-afflictive acts Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi Berukhim was reported to have practiced was that of rolling upon a bed of thorns which felt like fire to his flesh (*Sefer Toldot ha'Ari*, 226).

20. Sexual transgressions for which Luria prescribed *tiqquney 'awonot* included relations with a menstruating woman, adultery, relations with an animal, necrophilia, homosexuality, and nocturnal pollution.

21. This text is paralleled in Joseph ibn Tabul's discussion of the *yihudim* preserved in MS Jewish Theological Seminary 931 (Deinrod 430), folios 175a–180a.

22. See the references in M. Benayahu, "Devotion Practices of the Kabbalists of Safed in Meron" (Hebrew), *Sefunot* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1962) 9–40.

23. Joseph Karo, *Maggid Mesharim* (Venice, 1649), *Parashat 'Emor*.

24. *Millui de-yudin* refers to spelling the letter *heh* in *YHWH* with the letters *heh* and *yud*.

25. *Millui de-'alef* refers to spelling the letter *heh* in *YHWH* with the letters *heh* and *'alef*.

26. *Millui de-bein* refers to spelling the letter *heh* in *YHWH* as *heh-heh*.

27. Our sources do not distinguish between the term prophecy (*nevuah*) and Holy Spirit (*Ruah ha-Qodesh*). They appear to be used interchangeably, each being a form of "inspiration" (*hasagah*). From other Lurianic contexts, however, it would seem that when care is taken to differentiate between the two, prophecy is clearly deemed a more exalted state of inspiration. This is the case, for example, in Hayyim Vital's discussion about Luria's concept of maggidic revelations, where we learn that prophecy has its origin in the *sefirah Tif'eret*, whereas the Holy Spirit derives from the *sefirah Malkhut*. See L. Fine, "Maggidic Revelation in the Teachings of Isaac Luria," in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians*, ed. J. Reinharz and D. Swetschinski, esp. 147–49.

28. Benayahu, *Toldot ha'Ari*, 157 n. 6.

29. See Benayahu, *Toldot ha'Ari*, 157, 199, n. 2. See also *Shivvei ha'Ari* (Bardejov, 1929) 17, where a tradition is reported concerning Luria's performance of *yihudim* at the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai in Meron.

30. The text refers here to the incident in 2 Kings 4 in which the prophet Elisha revives the dead child of a Shunammite woman: "Then he went up and lay upon the child, putting his mouth

upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm." According to a legendary motif in the *Zohar* (1:7b; 2:44a–45a)—upon which the text under discussion apparently draws—the revived child was the prophet Habakkuk.

31. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 127–28, 132–37; *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 146–47, 152–54, 157.

32. *'Ibbur* ("impregnation"), in contrast to the doctrine of *gilgul* (transmigration of souls), refers to the entry of an additional soul into an individual sometime during a person's lifetime rather than at birth. This extra soul generally inhabits a person's body for a limited period of time. This doctrine, which goes back to thirteenth-century Kabbalah, became especially prominent in Lurianic doctrine. Impregnation was believed to constitute an opportunity for a soul which belonged to a now deceased individual to fulfill some *mizwah* which it had not fulfilled during the lifetime of the deceased.

33. Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 149–50; cf. *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 136. We have drawn on the translation of this passage from *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* by L. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 130–31.

34. See, e.g., *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 5, 16–17, 25–26, 28–29, 36, 149–51, 172–73; *SRH*, 131–32, 141–42.

35. Vital describes the cave of Abbaye and Rava, famous rabbinic sages of fourth-century Babylonia in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 185.

36. Vital, *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 170–72. This translation is drawn from Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 131–33. A slightly different version is found in *Sha'ar ha-Gilgulim*, 140–41.

37. Aqavyah ben Mahalalel was a first-century sage who was offered the position of president of the Sanhedrin if he would renounce four of his decisions in which he disagreed with the majority opinion. He refused to do so until, in the hour that he was about to die, he told his son to retract these four opinions on his behalf (Mishnah *'Eduyot* 5:6–7).

38. *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 16.

39. *Sefer ha-Hezyonot*, 25. Vital draws precisely such a distinction in his account of a technique of soul-communion using the recitation of passages from the Mishnah. Here too, the experience of hearing a voice speaking to you rather than through your own voice is attributed to an individual being unfit for the higher level of inspiration. See L. Fine, "Recitation of Mishnah as a Vehicle for Mystical Inspiration: A Contemplative Technique Taught by Hayyim Vital," *Revue des études juives* 141 (1982).

40. Concerning Cordovero's *gerushin* and Karo's maggidic experiences, see R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Oxford, 1962) esp. 51–54, 257–86. Luria's maggidic theory and Vital's technique of Mishnah recitation are studied in this writer's articles indicated in notes 27 and 39. An analysis by Moshe Idel of manuscripts comprising the anonymously authored *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, a fifteenth-century kabbalistic work written in Spain prior to the Expulsion, suggests this book's critical influence in the development of the kind of revelatory techniques mentioned here. *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, which contains heavenly revelations deriving from God and from various angels, especially the angel Azriel, influenced Safed kabbalists Moses Cordovero and Ovadiah Hamon. Moreover, there is evidence that Luria's student, Hayyim Vital, was familiar with *Kaf ha-Qetoret*, a work that stands in intimate relationship to *Sefer ha-Meshiv*. In the light of these facts, Idel suggests the influence, even if indirectly, of *Sefer ha-Meshiv* on Isaac Luria's exaltation of personal and direct revelatory experience. See M. Idel, "'Iyyunim be-Shitot Ba'al Sefer ha-Meshiv," *Sefunot* n.s. 2 (17) (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1983) 185–266; also G. Scholem, "Ha-Maggid shel R. Yosef Taitazak weha-Gilyuyim ha-Meyuhasim Lo," *Sefunot* 11 (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute; 1971–77) 69–112.

41. Concerning these themes, see G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 11–12, 17–22.

Bibliography

For general background to Safed piety, the classic essay by Schechter is still valuable reading. A more recent introduction to the religious life of Safed, studied through translated primary texts,

is Fine, *Safed Spirituality. On the Kabbalah* by Scholem contains important essays on specific themes related to the Safed experience. *Sefer Safed* (ed. Benayahu and Yizhaq), two volumes on the history of sixteenth-century Safed, includes a wide range of valuable essays in Hebrew by leading scholars. The second of these volumes contains a lengthy bibliography.

Lurianic Kabbalah, particularly its mythological issues, is the subject of lecture seven of Scholem's classic *Major Trends*, which also contains a list of the important older scholarship on Lurianism. Scholem also discusses Lurianic ideas—especially their messianic orientation—in his *Sabbatai Sevi*, part 1. The most sustained treatment of Lurianic mythology, however, is the work of Tishby.

The literature of sacred biography, or hagiography, which developed in the decades following Isaac Luria's death, was studied by Benayahu. In this connection see the critique of Benayahu by Tamar, "Al ha-Sefer," in which Tamar disputes Benayahu's controversial contention that *Sefer Toldot ha-'Ari* served as the source for *Shivhei ha-'Ari*, not the reverse, as is widely considered to be the case. These narratives about Luria are also analyzed by Dan in his study of the Hebrew story in the Middle Ages. Concerning the question of the perception of Luria by his disciples, see the article by Pachter, as well as the rejoinder by Tamar. The problem of Luria's relationship to his followers and their collective self-understanding is taken up by Fine in "Metoposcopy."

Other techniques for the achievement of mystical experience developed by Isaac Luria or his disciple Hayyim Vital have been studied in the following articles by Fine: "Maggidic Revelation"; "Recitation of Mishnah"; "The Study of Torah." A closely related phenomenon, Joseph Karo's maggidic experiences, was the subject of a full-length study by Werblowsky. Translations into English of some of Karo's and Vital's mystical experiences are found in Jacobs.

Benayahu, Meir. *Sefer Toldot ha-'Ari*. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1967.

———, and Ben Zvi Yizhaq, eds. *Sefer Safed*. 2 vols. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1962–63.

Dan, Joseph. *Ha-Sippur ha-'Ivri Beyemei ha-Benayim*. Jerusalem: Keter, 1974.

Fine, Lawrence. *Safed Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.

———. "The Art of Metoposcopy: A Study in Isaac Luria's Charismatic Knowledge." *AJS Review* 11 (1986) 79–101.

———. "Maggidic Revelation in the Teachings of Isaac Luria." In *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, 141–57. Edited by J. Reinharz and D. Swetschinski. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1982.

———. "Recitation of Mishnah as a Vehicle for Mystical Inspiration: A Contemplative Technique Taught by Hayyim Vital." *Revue des études juives* 141 (1982) 183–99.

———. "The Study of Torah as a Rite of Theurgical Contemplation in Lurianic Kabbalah." In *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, volume 3. Edited by D. Blumenthal. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, in press.

Jacobs, Louis. *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*. New York: Schocken, 1977.

Pachter, Mordecai. "Demuto shel ha-'Ari be-Hespedo R. Shmuel Uzeda." *Zion* 37 (1972) 22–40.

Schechter, Solomon. "Safed in the Sixteenth Century: A City of Legists and Mystics." In *Studies in Judaism*, 202–85. Second series. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908.

Scholem, Gershom. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken, 1965.

———. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. 3rd ed. New York: Schocken, 1954.

———. *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Tamar, David. "Al ha-Sefer Toldot ha-'Ari." In *Mehkarim be-Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Erez Yisrael U-be-Italyah*, 166–93. Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1973.

———. "Al Aggadot ha-Ari ve-al Hespedo shel R. Shmuel Di-Uzeda." In *Mehkarim be-Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Erez Yisrael U-be-Arzo ha-Mizrah*, 107–18. Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1981.

Tishby, Isaiah. *Torat ha-Ra' we-ha-qelipah be-qabbalat ha-'Ari*. Jerusalem: Akademon, 1971.