EXILE AND REDEMPTION IN JEWISH MYSTICAL THOUGHT

Exile was a formative experience for the Jewish people throughout the progression and development of Jewish history. Exile became the expression of historical circumstance embodying the loss of political sovereignty, the deprivation of independence and the loss of territorial borders. Exile expressed Jewish consciousness not only in stateless existence, deportation, displacement and banishment, but also in a profound sense of estrangement, powerlessness, alienation, fear and inferiority as well as lack of sovereignty, a threat of continuity and the abandonment of a communal-religious identity.1

Throughout Jewish history exile was a primary factor which generated a culture that was compelled to rely on common religious memory as recorded in sacred texts and in the common sacred language. Both preconditioned the religious life and the shared religious ritual which was centered around the textual heritage and communal hopes allowing self preservation and continuation of the Jewish community. Those three elements formed the bridge spanning the memory of the common national religious mythological past and the hopes for common national restorative-future. All three were dependent on study, recitation, commemoration, interpretation, imagination and creativity within the confines of an inner spiritual world separated from external realities. Yearning and hope for the expected redemption from the long exile could only have been nurtured and maintained through the means of a ritual commemoration of the past and the mystical reconfiguration of the future.2

In utter contrast to the all-encompassing meaning of exile and to the incompressible concepts of time and place within the surrounding cultures, the Jews instituted an alternative inner chronology and a distinct interpretation or perception for historical memory which contrasted life in exile and which maintained the hopes for redemption.3 Jewish spirituality and ritual life of commemoration were centered around the study of holy scriptures through two

---

1 Y.E. Baez, Godol, Berlin 1936 and see note 14 below.
2 On the daily life inspired by these perceptions, see Y. Katti, Tradition and Crisis, Boston 1990.
3 Y. Yershalaim, Sabbath, Jewish History and Jewish Memory, Washington 1982.
major attitude of study known as halakhah and kabbalah. Halakhah was
fronted the existential needs according to the traditional legislative and
interpretative process which drew its legitimacy from the past, while kabbalah was
focused on the esoteric or hidden meanings of the literal sacred texts and on
restring the divine realm in relation to metaphysical schemes which
would decipher the inevitable course of the redemptive future.2

Jewish mystical thought, that which had developed in France, Spain, and
Germany in the second millennium of Jewish exile, in the wake of the crusades,
the religious persecutions and the expulsions;3 could be characterized as a theo-
logical response which attempted to challenge the exile existence. Kabbalistic
mystical literature negated the validity of empirical reality, a reality which came
to be perceived as exile and enslavement, and opposed the conventional social
norms of a world that came to be defined as *sitra agra and kelalah* (the other
side, the ultimate powers of evil). Kabbalah consolidated an alternative order
that was perceived as the passageway towards redemption and freedom associ-
ated with *sitra dekhala and shekhinah* (powers of holiness divine presence).4

This theological perspective that transformed enforced historical destiny into a
cosmic *historia sacra* was consolidated as a response to historical experience that
perceived the world order as exile and dispersion while constructing an alterna-
tive spiritual order of redemption and regeneration of the people. It should be
emphasized that such a spiritual response to historical changes and iniquity was
the only avenue left opened before the Jewish communities which possessed nei-
ther political power nor military force throughout the course of its long exile.

Much of the Jewish mystical tradition is primarily concerned with the explicit
distinction between exile and redemption. The absurdities of the hazardous and

---

3 On the list of tragic historical events that affected the life of European Jewry in the Christian
world, see Jonathan Israel, European Jewry at the Age of Maustralisation 1550-1730 Oxford
1985, 6-36.
4 On the kabbalah see: G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, New York 1965; G.
Scholem, Kabbalah, Jerusalem 1974; G. Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, New
York 1965-G. Schudak, On the Mystical Shape of the Ordeal, New York 1951; G. Scholem,
Origins of the Kabbalah, (trans. A. Ashok/Princeton 1967); I. Jakob, The Wisdom of the
Zohar, trans. D. Goldschmidt (Oxford 1989). For contemporary definitions, critical appraisals,
and updated bibliography on kabbalah and Jewish mysticism see: R. Blom, Peneq ba’alshem
sheh hallevon (various definitions of freedom). Studies in Jewish Mysticism, in: Almqvist 15
(1997), 9-119. (English version is forthcoming in 2005 from Littauer Library, Oxford, and
will be called: Jewish Mysticism: The Quest for Spiritual Freedom). St. Idaho, Kabbalah: New
Perspectives, Yale 1988; Y. Lieben, Studies in Jewish Mysh and Jewish Mysticism, (trans. B. Stein)
Almqvist 1993; E.R. Wolfson, Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in
Medieval Jewish Mysticism, Princeton 1994; J. Yau, On Sanctity, Religions, Ethics and Mysticism
in Judaism and Other Religions, Jerusalem 1997.
EXILE AND REDEMPTION IN JEWISH MYSTICAL THOUGHT

The cruellest of historical reality, which patterned Jewish existence in exile for two thousand years, was the prevailing existential experience. This existence not only denied Jews any common geographical borders and foreseeable continuity within shared time and place, but also denied them the sense of normality in life and equal participation in worldly concerns. Life as an exiled, persecuted and marginalized minority caused intensification of the only domain where sovereignty could be allowed and continuity was expected — the spiritual realm expressed in the language of the sacred texts and holy ritual. The religious obligation of never ending study as the primary course of religious devotion and cleaving to the divine as an expression of spiritual freedom was enlaid in this intellectual creativity of legal deliberation and mystical imagination. The sacred texts of the Bible, the Midrash and the Talmud, were perceived as multifaceted and infinite: their sacred literal form was the source of deriving law and instilling norm and order, and as such, related to the revealed world within given time and place. The concealed and equivocal renderings were considered as relating to an inexplicable and divine world beyond any limits of given time and space.

Kabbalistic literature was composed during the adversity and the anguish of Exile and was concerned with the redemption of the Jewish nation or in the creation of an alternative reality which would reverse the course of Jewish history and would transmute borders of time and place. The point of departure of this literature, which was concerned with the combination of eschatological perceptions with hopes of redemption, occurred with the perception of all too apparent truth that the long expected messianic coming as based on biblical eschatology had not and would not immediately be fulfilled.

The underlining conception of the kabbalistic eschatological tradition was formulated in Tikkunei Zohar, a medieval pseudepigraphic mystical text written by


about 1300, though ascribed to Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai, a sage living in the second century C.E. in the Late Mishnaic period. The pseudographic text bridges the historical gap of 1600 years between its assumed early date of composition and the much later time of revelation. The exochiologial tone of the text is readily perceived:

Elijah of blessed memory said to Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai: may be rest in peace, how privileged are you in that from this book of yours elevated people will be sustained, until this book is revealed to those below in the last generation in the end of days, and because of it you shall proclaim [Kery throughout the land to all its inhabitants. [...] Each of you shall return to his dwelling and each of you shall return to his family (Lev 25:10), and therefore it is explained that through the book of the zohar they will go out of exile.\(^9\)

According to the Zoharic tradition, the secrets of the kabbalah (which were assumed to have been written in the second century as noted above) were hidden for a thousand years and were destined to be revealed only at the End of Days. Thus the revelation of the text at the end of the 13th century and the subsequent dissemination in the following period signifies for many the emergence of the messianic era. Kabbalistic circles inferred from this assertion that by virtue of those who study the Zohar redemption shall come in the near future. The imminent connection between the study of the Zohar and the resultant hastening of redemption enhanced the study of the Zohar with an eschatological perspective. Similarly, the coming of the Messiah was exclusively preconditioned by the dissemination of kabbalah.\(^11\)

Thus, a twofold attitude was established - the revelation of the Zohar attests that the End of Days is near, however, only through the study of this book's mystical context and by means of its wide dissemination could the fulfillment of the hidden eschatological plan for redemption be assured.\(^12\)

---

\(^9\) Scholen, Me'or Trends, 156-204; note especially p. 162; Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar, introduction.

\(^10\) Tikkanu Zohar, Mantova 1558: (Ed. B. Margolin, Jerusalem 1978), end of Tikkan VI, p.23b-24a. Ra'aya Meheven, Zohar Yveker, 110d.


\(^12\) cf. Yehuda Hayy, introduction to Minhat Yehuda, in: Me'arhe Yehuda, Mantova 1558.
EXILE AND REDEMPTION IN JEWISH MYSTICAL THOUGHT

In the mystical tradition, the contradictory concepts of exile and redemption were diametrically symbolized respectively as defilement and holiness, as k'klalah and kaddishah, as satan and shekhinah or as the powers of evil combating the forces of the divinity. The cosmic struggle of heavenly holiness against earthly defilement signifies the ongoing battle between a prevailing exile and the yearned-for redemption. The study of the Zohar, the deciphering of the hidden meaning of s-ruptures, and the fulfillment of the commandments with kabbalistic intent alongside a denial of mundane concerns were conceived to be the pre-eminent manner by which the powers of holiness could be strengthened and the redemption could be hastened. Conversely, both the commitment of sin, the indulgence in mundane concerns and negligence in the dissemination of the mystical writings were perceived as strengthening the powers of evil and contributing to the continuation of exile. These ideas which had prevailed in diverse esoteric kabbalistic circles were amplified by the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492.

The Spanish Expulsion uprooted and dispersed overwhelming numbers of the Jewish people and created a devastating impression on this generation and indeed on the generations to follow throughout the course of the entire sixteenth century. The realistic circumstances which brought about the banishment of the Jews were well known and could not be contested, however, facts could offer but an insufficient explanation and could give no consolation for the devastating experience. The banishment was perceived neither as a mere historical incident nor as an arbitrary political decision of the mundane powers that could be compensated for within the stipulations of realistic historical circumstances. The catastrophe was expressly interpreted in religious terms as a part of an all encompassing and predetermined process signifying the End of Days, of which the expulsion was only the initial manifestation of approaching events. The exiles were searching ceaselessly for different signs for their eschatological assertions and they found support in...
the mystical tradition. The 'revelation' of the Zohar in the late medieval period was considered by the exiles and their followers as a significant expression of the emergence of eschatological times. Already in 1498 the messianic promise of the Zohar was merged with the religious interpretation of the Expulsion by Yehudah Hayut, a survivor from Spain: 'Hence it is explained that the Zohar was destined to be hidden until the last generation when it shall be revealed unto man; by virtue of its study the Messiah will come, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord and that will be the reason for its coming.  

The convergence between the hastening of redemption and the dissemination of the study of kabbalah was securely founded in the tradition of the Zohar and was increasingly elaborated in diverse directions in different Kabalistical circles during the sixteenth century.

This traumatic historical event was perceived in the first few decades of the sixteenth century as the foundation and background for the coming redemption since the events were interpreted as pre-messianic tribulations. The tribulations were construed as apocalyptic birth pangs which would culminate in the inevitable coming of the Messiah, delivered from heaven through the study of the Zohar. This messianic resurgence found various expressions in apocalyptic writings of the sixteenth century and in the pre-messianic figures of David Ha-Nevevi (†1542) and Shlomo Molcho (1500-1532). This stage of acute expectations for miraculous divine intervention accompanied by eschatological heralds concerning imminent messianic redemption, reached a dramatic climax with the execution by auto-da-fe of Shlomo Molcho, who chose to be burnt at the stake in Mantua in 1532 as a martyr rather than to submit to the Papal decree demanding a renunciation of his profound belief in imminent messianic expectations.  

The martyrdom of Molcho imposed a grievous impression on the broad Jewish community and casted suppression of acute messianic expectation. Rabbi

19 ibid., Jewish Messianic Movements, 256-280. See Shlomo Molcho, Ha'ayt Kane, Amsterdam 1660; Shlomo Molcho, Sefor Ha'Mayzar, Safed 1529.
Joseph Karo (1488-1575), a leading rabbinic figure in Turkey who was associated with Molcho, began to receive what he perceived as auditory heavenly visits which embodied the concepts of exile and redemption in a new way that changed the nature of mystical eschatology. The new turn in Karo’s vision, that was initiated upon receiving the news about Molcho’s death on the stake, was reflected in the assertion that exile and redemption were not any more the historical lot and hope of the people of Israel on earth but they are to be understood as the exile of the shekhinah and the redemption of the shekhinah in heaven.

Karo left detailed recordings of his visions in his mystical diary which was published posthumously as Maggid Meisharim. He wrote of hearing the heavenly voice of the shekhinah urging him and his fellow mystics in Turkey who were engaged ceaselessly in the study of the Zohar, to redeem this divine female entity from the bondage of exile:

My friends, my beloved [...] blessed be you [...] that you have undertaken to crown me tonight, for it is now many years since the crown fell from my head, I have no one to comfort me and I am cast into the dust, embracing dunghills. But now you have removed the crown so in former glory through your studies. [...] Therefore my sons, be strong, resolve and joyful in my love, my Torah and my reverence; and if you could surmise the minutest part of the grief that is my lot, [...] Therefore, be strong and resolve and desist not from study. [...] Therefore, stand upon your feet and exalt me [...] and the repeated blessed are you, remove your studies and desist not for one instant and go to the Lord of Israel instantly [...] and through you I have been exalted tonight.21

The exiled shekhinah had described itself in the words of the daughter of Zion in the book of Lamantations as a sorrowful captive thrown on the dunghills, desolating and tormented in exile and yearning for deliverance and salvation. This salvation could only be achieved by the actions of the mystical circle of Karo and his associates, who would transform and indeed forever reverse the respective roles of heaven and earth. The human being is perceived as the redeemer of the deity who is in exile, at against the traditional perception in which the redemption descends from heaven in order to free the Jewish nation from the enslavement of exile. The significance of this change is invested in the reversal of male position from a passive to an active role as well as the shift in focus of the idea of redemption from the earthly historical arena onto a heavily mythological-cosmic arena. The shekhinah can be redeemed from her exile...
only by man as the redeemer who alone can execute the restitution of heaven and earth back to their pre-expulsion position. Furthermore, the redemption affects directly the heavenly powers and not the immediate dentity of man. The essence of the human engendered redemption - in which the mystic becomes the active agent for redemption while God becomes a passive subject - is detailed in the doctrine of the divine voice which had been heard by Karo. He and his associates were also involved in attempts to communicate with the divine voice and to study it. They also attempted to establish a relationship between the powers and the world, and to make the mystic the agent for the divine voice. This was achieved through the establishment of a community of mystics in Safed, where the voice of God and the world were perceived as one. This new attitude - that which concentrated all efforts on affecting the heavenly powers through sympathetic communication with the kabbalistic powers - led to the creation of new mystical rituals which would enable the mystic to achieve communion with the divine. This was achieved through the establishment of a community of mystics in Safed, where the voice of God and the world were perceived as one. This new attitude - that which concentrated all efforts on affecting the heavenly powers through sympathetic communication with the kabbalistic powers - led to the creation of new mystical rituals which would enable the mystic to achieve communion with the divine. This was achieved through the establishment of a community of mystics in Safed, where the voice of God and the world were perceived as one.
The Kabbalists propagated the dualistic perception which views the world in its entirety as divided between the domains of holiness and evil, Qeddushah and Kelipah. They studied the scriptures as expressing the struggle of the holy and the profane in heaven and earth, and interpreted the commandments as reflecting the dual ontological perception of reality. They believed that these actions assisted the struggle of holiness against evil and moved to change the balance of power between exile and redemption. An example of this attitude that strove to change the state of exile in heaven and on earth and to restore the cosmic order could be found in the kabbalistic writings of Joseph Karo and Moise Kordovero who integrated the dualistic ontology of the Zohar with the mystical efforts of changing the balance of eschatological history reflected in struggle between exile and redemption: All of the Torah is composed of the positive law and the prohibitory law. Positive law refer to the holy sphere and prohibitory law is relegated to the evil sphere of Satan. By participation of the kabbalistic worship, the humiliation of the gentle will occur and their rule will be overthrown, and it is understood according to what is known that this world includes two supermundane systems, one holy and one profane.

In the course of the sixteenth century, kabbalism underwent a significant transformation at it formed a conjunction with the contemporary eschatological notions. This conjunction between eschatological hopes and mystical beliefs had two major consequences. The first was the transformation of the kabbalah from an elitist-esoteric concern of an elect few into a popular doctrine readily available to wide circles. The mystics of the sixteenth century took as active cause in the dissemination of kabbalistic eschatology, altering the traditional dichotomy between kabbalism and exotericism. All were urged and exhorted to engage in the study of kabbalah for the sake of redemption. As a result of this overriding demand, the books of the Zohar were printed in 1558 since, until that time they existed since they were written for about 270 years only in manuscript form, being exclusively reserved for the elect few. This unprecedented breach of esoteric tradition was justified by the obligation to

25 Cf. Elie, 'Mystic Expectation'.
26 Ma'agal Ma'asseh, 120.
27 Moise Kordovero, Sefer Zohar, Jerusalem 1985, IV, 155.
28 Cf. Tishby, 'The Consequences on The Printing of the Zohar'; Elie, 'The Deportation on the Position of the Kabbalists'.

RACHEL ELIOR

The resurrection of heaven and the redemption of the soul, the redemption of the soul of man, in which the mystic becomes a passive subject and is only 'sewn' immediately to Alban, and to disseminate the powers of evil, could be exiled and thus fulfill the call to

Turkey could not wait patience of exile and 'elevated' mystic elevation of the soul is refused, see the life century were the hundred years. Immanuel Kant wrote: 'The mind's the sphere and the prohibitory law are delegated to the evil sphere of Satan'. By participation of the kabbalistic worship, the humiliation of the gentle will occur and their rule will be overthrown, and it is understood according to what is known that this world includes two supermundane systems, one holy and one profane.
basteen redemption through the study of the mystical scriptures. The sense of eschatological expectation is candidly expressed by many mystics who asserted that they were motivated to commit their mystical visions into writing on account of their profound belief in the inevitable eschatological course of history and the imminent approach of the end of days.

The second significant outcome of the tension between kabbalah and messianic expectation was a comprehensive process of spiritualization that entailed a profound change in Jewish religious life. In the core of this complex process was the distinction between ‘law of exile’ and ‘law of redemption’, the first concept was associated with the literal understanding of the halakha while the second one was associated with the mystical understanding of the kabbalah. This process that distinguished between the law of the present and the law of the future was propagated by diverse mystical circles who challenged and critized the common predominant perception of religion while striving to establish the claim for spiritual supremacy of the kabbalah as ‘the Messianic Torah and the Torah of the world to come’ in all aspects of religious life. These attempts became apparent with the initiative to establish a new definition of the relation between kabbalah and halakha in light of the prevailing eschatological expectations.

Before the sixteenth century kabbalistic interests had existed harmoniously, for the most part, alongside the dominance of the halakha, since it occupied a marginal esoteric role. However, in the course of the sixteenth century the earlier marginal position of the kabbalah was replaced with a claim of supremacy through a doctrine that promoted radical change in Jewish life for the sake of advancing the messianic era. The kabbalistic literature that was written from the turn of the sixteenth century onward utilizes the various stages in the formation of alternative religious norms in which the roles of halakha and kabbalah were reversed.

The common denominator of the diverse mystical writings of the period that challenged the supremacy of the halakha, the ‘Torah of the mundane world’.

---

31 Elrion, ‘The Dispute on the Position of the Kabbalah’.
32 Hayim V.
33 G. Sod, Emanation of the Deity in the Mystical Kabbalah and in the Kabbalistic World. On the Liturgical Kabbalah.
was the negation of the literal conception of the Torah as possessing sufficient religious spiritual meaning and true knowledge of God.

Regarding the Torah in its literality, which is the Torah of the mundane world, it is worthless when compared to the Messianic Torah and the Torah of the world to come. [...] Regarding the Mishnah, there can be no doubt that the Mishnah's literal aspects are bare words, titles, and outer wrappings when compared to the hidden mysteries which are inherent and intrinsic in its inner aspect (i.e., kabbalah). 32

The kabbalistic conception that was founded on growing estrangement to the world of exile and growing devotion to the hidden world of redemption, denied the relevance of the prevailing rationalist perspective and legal orientation which derived from the literal reading of Scripture, arguing for the existence of a concealed spiritual perception of the Torah and the Mishnah, perceiving both as being invested with hidden divine significance and messianic vocation. This inner meaning was to be found in the kabbalah of the Zohar and in the writings of its followers. Thus those scholarly tendencies concerned entirely with the law and with literal interpretation were grasped as a direct contradiction to the foundation of the mystical perception and its messianic vocation and therefore should be rejected and contested. 33

The culmination of this new orientation is to be found in the introduction to the Lurianic magnum opus Ets Hayyim, written by Hayyim Vital (1542-1620) in the later part of the sixteenth century. 34 Ets Hayyim expresses the essence of the new Lurianic kabbalah that flourished in Safed in the second half of the sixteenth century. Vital's introduction to this work does not relate to the new mystical beliefs that were introduced by Isaac Luria but rather summarizes the ideological background of the struggle for the new position which the Kabbalah had been seeking to attain throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. Each of Vital's conventions presented in the introduction had been previously stated in the kabbalistic literature of the generation of the expulsion. In other words, the introduction to Ets Hayyim is the summation of the spiritual turning-point of the first part of the sixteenth century and not the articulation of its second manifestation that was embodied in the Lurianic kabbalah.

8 Hayyim Vital, Eqq-Hayyim, Warsaw 1890, Introduction to the Gate of Introductions, 2.


Vital wrote his introduction as a reflection upon the change in the order of priorities stemming from his eschatological hopes. He strove to amend the prevailing misapprehension of the Torah only as law or as literal revealed narrative known as pesher. He aspired to rescue the Torah in its inherent hidden divine origin and true spiritual significance. Vital endeavored to identify the spiritual perception of the Torah with the kabbalah arguing that the scripture and the law have a concealed stratum, a position which thereby minimize the priority of the legal position and the revealed literal layer. He asserted that the paramount vocation of the kabbalistic literature lies in the discovery and deciphering of this layer. In his opinion, traditional legal concerns and halakhic interpretation in their literal were no longer to be viewed as the center of Judaism since they reflect the Torah of Exile. The Kabbalah as the outer hand should be placed far above the halakhah in importance and position since it is the Torah of Redemption:

The major scholars of Torah have degenerated into the henchmen of denying the validity of the truth while insisting that the only meaning of Torah is the literal meaning, the pesher. The situation is desperate since it is only by means of the kabbalah that redemption can be taught about while to refrain from it would delay the restoration of our Temple and our Glory.\(^{55}\)

Vital consolidated this dual perception of the Torah as hidden spirit and revealed law under two opposing concepts which originated in the early kabbalistic literature — *Tana Ese Hayom* and *Tana Ese Hadad at* — the Torah of the Tree of Life and the Torah of the Tree of Knowledge.\(^{56}\) In the previous mystical tradition, the former concept represents the hidden, superior spiritual and eternal holy Torah which will prevail in the messianic future. The latter term refers to the subordinate Torah which had already been given to the Jews, that which emphasized literal dimension and legalistic determinations. Vital argued forcefully that the kabbalah is the *Tana Ese Hayom* while the halakhah, the mishnah and the pesher (literal interpretation) are the *Tana Ese Hadad at*. The focus of his contention viewed the literal perception of the Torah and the application of the halakhah as the conclusive deciding criterion for all aspects of daily life, as expressions of the era of the exiles while the kabbalah was patented as the expression of the new messianic era, thought to be imminent.\(^{57}\)

---

\(^{55}\) *Esh Hayom*, Introduction, 6


\(^{57}\) *Esh Hayom*, Introduction, 1-10.

---

\(^{54}\) Abraham H. Idel *Ideas in Hebraic Mysticism*. 1
The division between the Torah of the Tree of Knowledge (halakhah) and the Torah of the Tree of Life (kabbalah) symbolised later on in the seventeenth-century Sabbatianism and eighteenth-century Frankism the difference between observing the prevailing norms (halakhah) associated with exile and breaking the bonds of halakhah and traditional norms (kabbalah) associated with freedom in paradise before the law was given, but in the sixteenth century it was an expression of externalising exile and redemption and making them part of the mystical discourse.

The mystical interpretation of the law with its eschatological perspective was offered as a spiritual alternative to the dominant contemporary Hachshurah-legal tradition and to its major exponents. There can be but a small doubt that it was the eschatological orientation, which dominated the mystical circles of the generation, that inspired the daring criticism of the rabbinical establishment as well as the literal legal system. It was the transformation of the acute messianic perspective that motivated a new perception of spiritual priorities and religious hierarchy.

In the first decades after the expulsion, kabbalistic writings were primarily concerned with immediate redemption delivered from heaven. Mystics were engaged in the definition of an accurate understanding of the eschatological process seen to be obscured within the strata of the Scriptures, and in deciphering the hidden messianic meaning lying behind historical events. These writings concentrated on the attempt to detect apocalyptic meaning within every word of the scriptures. R. Abraham Ha-Levi, one of the leading Kabalist of the period, once stated: "Behold, scripture in its entirety is filled with covert allusion to the future redemption." 30

In the course of the century the mystical circles transformed the kabbalah into the sole concept of their eschatological expectation and gradually relinquished hope for any external redemption. The spiritual pursuit of the kabbalistic writings, the mystical interpretation of the textual heritage, as well as the ceaseless efforts to elevate the shekhinah through comprehensive study, mystical devotion and innovative rituals—taken together, replaced the hopes for historical redemption and turned the end of the days into a mystical frame of mind in which the study of kabbalah moved to the paramount position. The kabbalistic approach generated a growing estrangement and alienation to worldly affairs: ascetic measures known as hichtsaot and hibrudusit (indifference to worldly concerns and seclusion) and mesirus

nefsk (symbolic death of the body for the sake of the rebirth of the soul), were introduced as a response of profound alienation to exile existence. The ascetic measures preconditioned the passage from the external world of exile to the internal world of redemption. Detailed instructions were formulated in the pietistic literature of Sufism to teach the details of ascetic measures of separation and alienation towards the world of exile, and escapist devotional measures of mystical unity towards the world of redemption.

As against the ongoing chaotic experience of exile and the passive despair generated by historical reality, kabbalistic exegesis offered hope and consolation for generations of exiles by consolidating an alternative order or reality and by transcending the constraints of history. This viewpoint offered a sublimation of arbitrary meaningless experience by transforming the events into a stage for a meaningful cosmic—mythical drama of exile and redemption as expressed in the kabbalah. The new course of mystical and ritual activity centered around the ideas of Golus HaShekhinah (exile of the divine presence symbolizing the community of Israel) and Ge’ulas HaShekhinah (redemption of the divine presence and the earthly community of Israel) accorded mutual relations between the heavenly cosmic drama of exile and redemption, separation and unity and the parallel human experience of Golus Israel and Ge’ulas Israel (exile and redemption of the community of Israel) opened new ways of spiritual intentions and religious experience, mystical rituals and kabbalistic theology of hope.

The kabbalistic exchagogical perspective offered freedom from the bondage of arbitrary historical circumstance, by serving as a refuge from the external world, at as freedom from the bondage of the traditional framework of the literal-legal course of study while passively waiting for redemption. The mystical perspective offered cultivated and demanded active human participation in the cosmic course for redemption and replaced passive waiting with human participation in the divine struggle. Tikun and Ha’adas Nissun, Ge’ulas HaShekhinah, Kavanat, and Hitolot and similar mystical concepts relating to human spiritual obligation directed to redeeming the exiled deity, elaborated in Kabbalistic tradition, indicated the new character of the mystical struggle against the bondage of exile.

The teachings of Kave and Vital and many other contemporary Kabbalists reflect a comprehensive breach of restraint which was motivated by exchagogical speculation: Kave broke the borders of divine-human relation by reversing the traditional order of the subject of redemption; Vital broke the confines of tradition by inverting the order of the messianic Torah and the exile Torah, while many other Kabbalists transcended the borders of time and place, reconfiguring both history and metahistory.
EXILE AND REDEMPTION IN JEWISH MYSTICAL THOUGHT

SUMMARY

The article is concerned with the perception of exile of the Jews who experienced it for two thousand years. In the second millennium in the wake of the crucified Jewish mystic known as kabbalah was developed in conjunction with the spiritual perceptions of exile and redemption. The exile from Spain was a turning point that generated new mystical interpretations on the hidden meaning of kabbalah. The passage from exile to redemption was associated with the intense study of the kabbalah. The dissemination of kabbalah was perceived as a tool in hastening redemption and as part of human obligation to redeem the heavenly entity that was exiled. Divine exile and human exile were redefined in the post-expulsion generation.

Rachel Elion, born in 1949 in Jerusalem (Israel), is Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Jewish Mysticism in the Department of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Head of the Department of Jewish Thought. She also is a visiting professor in Princeton University (NJ) and Yokota University (NY).

Address: 22 Dan Street, Jerusalem, Israel 93509 (e-mail: media@pluto.mcc.mijs.ac.il).