

David J. Halperin
 Professor Emeritus, Religious Studies
 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

SOME THEMES IN THE BOOK *VA-AVO HA-YOM EL HA-‘AYIN*¹

1. Introduction

The Zohar is a book incomparably erotic; the Lurianic writings are unmatched for their technical sexuality. The Sabbatian Kabbalah has the quality of pornography.

—Yehuda Liebes²

The book commonly known as *Va-avo ha-Yom el ha-‘Ayin* (“I Came This Day to the Spring,” from Genesis 24:42) created a scandal among the Jewish communities of Central Europe when it surfaced in 1725, discovered in manuscript form in the luggage of a traveler come from Prague. Small wonder. Although the book contains no explicit reference to Sabbatai Zevi, it is patently a work of Sabbatian Kabbalah. It indeed, as Yehuda Liebes says, presses the traditional Kabbalistic eroticism to the borders of pornography and beyond. Most shocking of all: the anonymously circulated document was reputed at the time—and modern scholars are inclined to agree—to be the work of

¹ This paper was written for a session of the Duke-UNC Seminar on Jewish Studies, held on November 24, 2013, in Durham, NC, and was discussed at that session. I am grateful to the organizers of the session, Professors Yaakov Ariel (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and Malachi Hacoen (Duke University), to my co-presenter Professor Pawel Macejko (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), and to all the participants, for their penetrating comments and suggestions. A partial videotape of the session is available on the Web at <http://www.davidhalperin.net/sexualized-spirituality-and-the-heretic-rabbi-jonathan-eibeschuetz-and-the-moravian-connection/>.

² “Ketavim Hadashim be-Qabbalah Shabbeta’it mi-Hugo shel Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeschuetz,” *Mehqerei Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet Yisra’el* 5 (1986), p. 196.

Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz, the rising star of the Prague yeshiva, who was to become the most illustrious rabbinic scholar and preacher of his time.

My aim in this paper is to explore selected themes of *Va-avo ha-Yom*, namely, **the role of the Messiah, the tension between Grace and Judgment, and sexuality and gender**. My goal is to render the thought of this complex and allusive text from its partly exegetical, partly mythological discourse into a more mundane language of religious and moral belief and intention.

My hypothesis is that *Va-avo ha-Yom* is to be read as **a charter for the world religion of the future, rooted in Kabbalistic Judaism yet unlike any religion hitherto known**. This faith is universal, transcending distinctions between Jew and Gentile. It seems to encompass gender equality, plus what we would now call “marriage equality.” In dissolving the traditional boundaries between categories, the author³ flirts with an amorality in which distinctions of right and wrong become irrelevant. Yet he is aware of the dangers of this stance, and makes it responsible for the devastating catastrophe of divine prehistory, what the Kabbalists had come to call the “Shattering of the Vessels” (*shevirat kelim*). The task of advancing human freedom, while forestalling its hazards, is laid upon the Messiah Sabbatai Zevi.

The text has no chapter divisions, and any separation of it into sections must be speculative. In the appendix to this paper, I translate what I regard as the final section, occupying folio pages 34b-35a of ms. Oxford 955 and comprising approximately the final 3% of the treatise.⁴ This is the most intense and densely packed part of *Va-avo ha-*

³ Although I agree with the current consensus that Eibeschuetz was author—not necessarily the sole author—of *Va-avo ha-Yom*, most of my argument will stand without this identification. I will therefore maintain neutrality on this point, and call him simply “the author.” (The classic discussion of the text, and argument for its connection with Eibeschuetz, is Moshe Arie Perlmutter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz and his Attitude Towards Sabbatianism* [Hebrew], Schocken, 1947.)

⁴ This is an extract from a complete translation I have prepared of *Va-avo ha-Yom*, to which the page and footnote cross-references in the appendix refer. The translation, and particularly its annotations, are a work in progress.

Yom, in which the author brings to their climax the threads of argument he has spun throughout. It is therefore suitable that our exploration begin here, at the end.

Indeed, at the very tail end of the end. Of the 17 numbered paragraphs into which I have divided this concluding section, I begin with the last one, which seems at first sight an afterthought tacked on after a concluding doxology. Later I work back through the concluding section, and follow the threads back into earlier portions of *Va-avo ha-Yom*.⁵

The purpose of the appendix is to convey how the different parts of the author's conclusion fit together. If you wish, you might read it before proceeding further with my paper. But do not be surprised if you find it more or less unintelligible. The author conceals as he reveals. Our purpose must be to peel away his concealments, and, where he tells us portentously to "understand," indeed to understand.

2. The Messiah and his role

This is why David, when *he came to the Head* (symbolizing the Ancient One) *where he was to prostrate himself for God* (indicating sexual coupling) [2 Samuel 15:32], "David sought to engage in alien worship" [Talmud, Sanhedrin 107a], in accord with, *Af loves the nations* [Deuteronomy 33:3].⁶ Understand. [para. 17]

If we are to "understand" what the author is driving at, we must make two assumptions. First, that "David" is a code term for David's most illustrious descendant, the Messiah Sabbatai Zevi. Second, that David's "alien worship" (*avodah zarah*)

⁵ Cited according to the folio pages of ms. Oxford 955.

⁶ In place of ms. Jerusalem 2491's *be-sod af hovev 'ammim* ("in accord with, *Af loves the nations*"), ms. Oxford 955 has the two words, *av hovev*, "loving Father." Whether the replacement of *af* with *av* ("Father") is simply a scribal error, or whether it is significant, I am unable to say.

alludes to Sabbatai's conversion to Islam in 1666, nearly sixty years before these words were written. This is the only mention in all of *Va-avo ha-Yom* of the great theological crux of the Sabbatian movement, the Messiah's apostasy. Yet from this cryptic allusion, the author's understanding of that event may be inferred.

Three texts are quoted: (1) 2 Samuel 15:32, (2) Sanhedrin 107a, (3) Deuteronomy 33:3. The Bible tells how King David, fleeing the rebellious Absalom, arrives *at the head*—in the Biblical context, the “summit” of the Mount of Olives—*where he was [accustomed] to prostrate himself to God* (or, “to the gods”). The Talmud, ignoring the plain meaning of *rosh*, “head,” uses the word to link this passage to Daniel 2:32 and to infer that “David sought to engage in alien worship.” His motive, the Talmud explains, was to prevent people from speaking ill of God's justice: David must commit a crime so monstrous as to deserve the punishment that his son is trying to kill him.

The author of *Va-avo ha-Yom*, in his turn, ignores the Talmudic context. He gives a new meaning to *rosh*, in accord with the symbolism he has developed throughout his treatise. It is a code term for the superior Divine potentiality—or deity, if you will⁷—of *'Atiqah Qaddisha*, “the Holy Ancient One,” to whom “David” has ascended. There “David” prostrates himself, offering his buttocks for the deity's anal penetration.

The significance of this act is set forth in paras. 10-11, of which para. 17 must be read as a continuation:

Know this: the true Messiah⁸ couples with the Ancient One. He [the Messiah] stands in for the Shechinah; and with him, [as with the Shechinah], the

⁷ Is the theology of *Va-avo ha-Yom* monotheistic? To this question—which can be asked also of the orthodox Kabbalah—I would answer yes, but not in the Biblical sense of exclusive monotheism. Rather, in the sense of the “inclusive monotheism” of the ancient Greek intellectuals, where the Many are not rejected but understood as aspects of the One. To speak of the Ancient One as a “Divine potentiality” pays homage to the author's essential monotheism. To speak of him as a “superior deity” recognizes the mythological garb in which this monotheism is expressed.

⁸ *Mashiah ha-amitti*, which, when the second word is spelled with only the final *yod* (מִשְׁחָה), has the same numerical value as “Sabbatai Zevi.” Ms. Jerusalem 2491 indeed spells it this way. Ms. Oxford 955 adds a

ejaculate is not uncontained.⁹ He prays in [the Ancient One's] presence; and this is the esoteric meaning of the *prayer of the Poor Man when he enwraps himself* [Psalm 102:1], for [the Messiah] is called *poor man, riding on a donkey* [Zechariah 9:9] ... and he is a representation of the Shechinah. He then *pours out his speech prior to YHVH* [Psalm 102:1], which is to say, he prays to the Ancient One who is called “prior to YHVH.” [para. 10]

Some comment on the *dramatis personae* is required. The Shechinah is, as throughout the Kabbalah, the female potentiality of the Divine—the goddess, if you will—although *Va-avo ha-Yom* introduces the added complexity of multiple Shechinahs. *YHVH* is the “God of Israel,” the author’s designation¹⁰ for the male potentiality (or deity) by whom the created universe is guided and ruled. The Biblical *lifnei YHVH*, “before YHVH,” is taken hyper-literally to mean *prior to YHVH*, alluding to the Holy Ancient One, who is “prior” to the God of Israel both in the sense of being superior to him and in the sense of being *prior* in the sequence of divine self-unfolding.

Zera' le-vattalah literally means “wasted seed,” the semen produced by masturbation or nocturnal emission.¹¹ In *Va-avo ha-Yom* I prefer to translate it as “uncontained ejaculate,” since the author’s stress is not upon its wastefulness but its devastating potency. (We will later see that “uncontained ejaculate” was the cause of the Biblical Flood, which is itself a symbol for the primordial catastrophe of the “Shattering of the Vessels.”) The “effluence” (*shefa*)—the liquid energy from the source of Divinity, variously represented as light and as seminal fluid—is safely conveyed in an act of sexual intercourse, as between the “God of Israel” and his Shechinah.

double vertical stroke above each word, emphasizing the numerical significance of the phrase, but spoils the equivalence by writing האמית . Cf. Perlmutter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz*, p. 79.

⁹ On the text, see the note to this passage in the appendix. On the significance of “uncontained ejaculate” (*zera' le-vattalah*), see below.

¹⁰ In accord with standard Sabbatian usage.

¹¹ As in the Talmud, Niddah 13a.

But the higher deity called “the Holy Ancient One” has no female partner. His “uncontained ejaculate” has already once wreaked devastation upon the structures of existence. He must therefore withdraw himself from any connection with the world—until the Messiah offers himself to him as his partner, his Shechinah-equivalent, the container for his semen. **It is this sexual act, identified in para. 17 with Sabbatai Zevi’s apostasy, that makes possible the Holy Ancient One’s direct intervention in human affairs—and thereby the salvation of the Gentiles.**

This is the point of the citation, in para. 17, of Deuteronomy 33:3: *af hovev ‘ammim*, which might be translated, “he loves even the nations.” But the author of *Va-avo ha-Yom* gives *af*—which, taken by itself, might be the noun “nose” rather than the particle “even”—a very special meaning:

Rav Hamnuna Sava,¹² speaking in the person of the Messiah, says: “To the Possessor of the Nose do I pray.” He thereby speaks allusively of the Ancient One who has one nose. You must realize that the Ancient One consists of pure Mercy, without any Judgment whatsoever, even for those who violate the Torah. This is the significance of the verse that speaks of the *af*, the “nose,” which is the Holy Ancient One—who has one “nose,” as opposed to the God of Israel, who has *appayim*, “two noses,” and is therefore called *erekh appayim*, “long of both noses.”¹³ This “*Af*” loves the nations [Deuteronomy 33:3], even the Gentiles, since he is altogether without Judgment. And this is why on the Purim festival, over which the Ancient One holds sway, “one must get so drunk that he cannot tell the difference between ‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordecai’ ” [Talmud, Megillah 7b]—for [the Ancient One] is pure Mercy. [para. 11]

¹² A numinous, mysterious figure of the Zohar. The quotation that follows is from the Zoharic treatise *Idra Rabbah* (III, 130b), of which I will speak below.

¹³ A hyper-literal understanding of the Biblical phrase used to mean “patient, long-suffering,” and normally said of God (e.g., Exodus 34:6).

We will return to consider the implications—not wholly positive—of the Ancient One’s undiluted Mercies. But first we must pause to look at three earlier passages in *Va-avo ha-Yom* that bear on the Messiah’s function, and on the feminization that enables him to carry it out.

First, vis-à-vis David. The Biblical figure of David is so emphatically masculine that it would hardly occur to us to think of him as a woman. Yet in the traditional Kabbalah, David can function as a representation of the *sefirah Malkhut*, which is female and normally identified with the Shechinah.

The author of *Va-avo ha-Yom* adopts this symbolism, and carries it to almost grotesque lengths. “You must know this: that David is symbolic of the Higher Shechinah.”¹⁴ Bathsheba is “the Lower Shechinah, *Malkhut* of Emanation”; David’s dalliance with Bathsheba is therefore a lesbian amour, parallel to Eve’s (= the Higher Shechinah’s) eating from the Tree of Knowledge (= the Lower Shechinah). David also “eats” Bathsheba, as an unripe fig,¹⁵ and is himself (really, herself) “eaten” by jealousy of the “house” that is the Lower Shechinah,¹⁶ toward whom the “God of Israel’s” erotic desires are mostly directed (fol. 30b-31a).

Against this background, the equation of David (and the Davidic Messiah) with the female Shechinah, serving as container for the Ancient One’s seminal emissions, becomes more plausible.¹⁷

¹⁴ Who embodies herself in the “Lower Shechinah,” the *sefirah Malkhut*. This dichotomy, of the “Internality” (*penimiyut*) of the divine entities and their “Enclotement” (*hitlabbeshut*) within the traditional sefirotic structures—which may be conceived as suits of armor for them—is characteristic of Sabbatian Kabbalah in general and *Va-avo ha-Yom* in particular.

¹⁵ Talmud, Sanhedrin 107a.

¹⁶ Psalm 69:10.

¹⁷ Pawel Maciejko has called my attention to several passages in Jacob Frank’s *Words of the Lord* that feminize David, and Sabbatai Zevi, in much the same way: nos. 447, 552, 609, 725 (translated in Harris Lenowitz, *The Collection of the Words of the Lord [Jacob Frank] from the Polish manuscripts*, published on the Web at <https://archive.org/details/TheCollectionOfTheWordsOfTheLordJacobFrank>, 2004). The links between Frank and his followers, and the Sabbatians of Eibeschuetz’s circle, have frequently been noted; e.g., Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755-1816* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 199-203.

Second, vis-à-vis the failed military Messiah of the second century CE, Bar Kokhba (called “Ben Koziba” in the Talmud and midrash):

This is how Rabbi Akiba went astray, believing Ben Koziba to be the Messiah. [He was misled] by the name, for Ben Koziba was called “Ben Kokhba” [“son of the star”] suggesting that the “star” [divine genital]¹⁸ of which we have spoken had begotten him. [Ben Koziba] came in the character of “semen” and erection, which requires the heating of the entire body, and therefore was not truly named for that “star.” The one who is truly linked to the “star,” however, is the one whose link is via the symbolic meaning of urine, which flows through the organ in the absence of erection, purely in the manner of “falling.” [Ms. Oxford 955, fol. 29a]

This passage appears in the context of the bizarre-seeming notion that the “God of Israel” and his Shechinah sustain the life of the *Tehiru*, the nether abyss, by urinating into it. In his urine, the “God of Israel” occasionally lets pass into the *Tehiru* some exceptionally holy soul—Abraham’s, say, or the Messiah’s—for the purpose of “mending” and raising its contents.¹⁹ The author has demonstrated to his own satisfaction that “star” can be used as a code term for either the male or the female genital. The Messiah’s path, therefore, takes him downward through the “star” (the divine penis), and he is appropriately called “son of the star.” Which, indeed, “Ben Koziba” was. But he was the wrong kind of “son of the star,” expelled as semen from the erect penis, not “falling”²⁰ as urine from the detumesced.

¹⁸ A symbolism developed in the earlier context; see below.

¹⁹ Based upon the conventional Sabbatai Zevi’s descent into the demonic abyss, effected through his conversion to Islam.

²⁰ The Messiah is called “son of the fallen” in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 96b-97a, cited in fol. 31a), and is spoken of in the Zohar as having “fallen” into a pit (III, 279a, cited in fol. 29a).

What can this mean, in ordinary human terms? “Ben Koziba” was a fighting man, hyper-virile, a prodigy of brawn who (the midrash assures us) could catch Roman catapult stones with his knees and kick them back like soccer balls.²¹ Yet his Messiahship was an ineffectual failure. Sabbatai Zevi was sexually impotent for most of his life—and it is this feminized Messiah, limp organ and all, who is the true “man of war,” cooling the seething *Tehiru*, bringing redemption to the world.²²

Finally, as an analogue to the “God of Israel” himself:

The “God of Israel,” prefigured by the Biblical Adam, must after his misstep in the Garden of Eden be ensheathed in a “garment”—sometimes of skin, sometimes of light²³—which shields him from the predations of the “Insolent Waters” that roil in the *Tehiru*.²⁴ When he has sex with the Shechinah, the “God of Israel” rolls this skin back from his penis, like the foreskin during circumcision. But “when he has sexual connection with the Root”—a higher divine potentiality, prior and superior even to the Holy Ancient One²⁵—and like Sabbatai Zevi he takes the female role, then the God of Israel

must divest himself of this skin, and this is the meaning of *I have stripped off my garment* [Song of Songs 5:3, spoken by the **female** lover]. At times, however ... the skin cannot be removed ... and in this event he [the Root?] copulates as though through a sheet, as our ancient rabbis have said: “He makes a hole in the

²¹ *Midrash Lamentations Rabbah* 2:4.

²² So the author says, in the paragraph just before the one I have quoted in the text: “It is he who will fight the war, as suggested by the words, *He will smash the head of Moab, and bring cooling to all the children of Seth* [Numbers 24:17, translated as the author understands it].” In other words, it is the “cool” feminized Messiah who is the true warrior, not the “hot-bodied,” virile Ben Koziba.

²³ Genesis 3:21, as interpreted in *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 20:12.

²⁴ The “Insolent Waters” (*mayim zedonim*, from Psalm 124:5), and the author’s understanding of the Eden story, would each deserve a paper until itself. Suffice it to say that in the author’s reading of Genesis 3, “Adam” stands for the “God of Israel,” “Eve” for the “Higher Shechinah,” and “God” for “the Root” (on whom see below).

²⁵ Apparently to be identified as the constructive volitional aspect of the infinite *Ein Sof*; Perlmutter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz*, p. 87. It is the highest of the divine aspects in *Va-avo ha-Yom* to have anything like a distinct personality. We will encounter it again in the next section.

sheet and through it he copulates.”²⁶ What he does is make a wound, a perforation in the skin, and afterward he copulates—which, as I have written above, is the significance of the verse, *What are these wounds?* [Zechariah 13:6].²⁷

It is also the meaning of [the words spoken by Job, 19:26], *Underneath my skin this one was knocked*, meaning that [Job] got a “knocking” in the sexual sense²⁸ ... underneath the skin. Now “Job” is symbolic of the God of Israel, as the Gemara tells us.²⁹ ... *Freely he multiplies my wounds* [Job 9:17]—“freely,” unrestrained by the commandments, for in the higher realm the commandments are not binding. ...

You must realize that [the God of Israel] occasionally is the recipient of anal sex, as implied in the words, *I made love to Israel, boy-fashion* [Hosea 11:1]. Know also that there will come a time, when the Insolent Waters are gone from the earth and the *Tehiru* [abyss] is purified, when the Shechinah will engage in anal sex in the lower realms.³⁰ ... This was the symbolism of carrying the Torah scroll into the latrine, which mending-ritual [*tiqqun*] he performed. Understand. [Ms. Oxford, fols. 26a-b]

The symbolism of this *tiqqun*, evidently carried out by Sabbatai Zevi during his lifetime,³¹ is blatantly obscene. The copyists tried to veil it by altering *bet ha-kisse*,

²⁶ Found nowhere in the rabbinic literature, although a passage from the Palestinian Talmud (Yevamot 1:1) bears some resemblance to it, and was no doubt what the author had in mind. My paper “The Hole in the Sheet, and Other Topics in Sabbatai Kabbalah,” read in December 2009 before the Association for Jewish Studies, remains unpublished.

²⁷ Where the question, *What are those wounds between your arms?* is answered, *It is where I was bruised in the house of my lovers.*

²⁸ Compare the British slang “knocking shop” for a brothel.

²⁹ There follows a very strained exegesis of the Talmud, Bava Batra 15a. Job as a “type” of the Messiah Sabbatai Zevi is a staple of Nathan of Gaza’s theology.

³⁰ Allegedly demonstrated by the Talmud, Shabbat 30b.

³¹ On the text of the passage, and the identification of the unstated subject, see Liebes, “Ketavim Hadashim,” pp. 212-215.

“latrine,” into the pointless *bet ha-keneset*, “synagogue.” The entire sentence is hacked with a knife out of ms. Jerusalem 2491, with a savagery one can feel upon examining the original manuscript. (As I did in Israel, in 1989.) If there is anything in *Va-avo ha-Yom* that warrants Yehuda Liebes’s remark that “the Sabbatian Kabbalah has the quality of pornography,” it is this passage.

Yet, in its eighteenth-century context, it may not be quite as shocking as it now seems. The author’s stress on the sexual “wounds” inflicted upon the God of Israel is reminiscent of the contemporary Moravians’ veneration of the vagina-like wounds of Jesus, inflicted upon the helpless Savior by the phallic spear.³² Whether Eibeschuetz or someone else, he was hardly insulated from the “sexual-spiritual underworld” of his time, about which Marsha Keith Schuchard has written in connection with William Blake.³³ *Va-avo ha-Yom* may be read as a product of that underworld.

One other feature of this passage is bound to strike the modern reader. It uses a pseudo-rabbinic quotation to authorize a sexual practice which until now has been universally dismissed as urban legend.³⁴ I refer to the famous “hole in the sheet,” which, three centuries ago at least, was plainly something real.

³² Craig D. Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Marsha Keith Schuchard, *William Blake’s Sexual Path to Spiritual Vision* (Inner Traditions, 2006), chapter 3. I am grateful to Professor Atwood for answering my queries about Moravian history, and for referring me to his book and to the article cited in the following note.

³³ Preceding note; and Atwood, “Christ and the Bridal Bed: Eighteenth-Century Moravian Erotic Spirituality as a Possible Influence on Blake,” in Mark Crosby, Troy Patenaude and Angus Whitehead, *Re-envisioning Blake* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 160-179. Eibeschuetz spent his teen years in Moravia—including the town of Eibenschuetz (Ivančice), where his father briefly served as rabbi and from which he took his name—and Pawel Maciejko has called attention to a contemporary report that he studied the writings of the radical Pietist and member of the Moravian Brethren Johann Christian Edelmann: “Controverse sur la crypto-chrétienté de Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz,” *Les Cahiers du Judaïsme* 29 (2010), pp. 130-134.

³⁴ E.g., www.snopes.com.

3. Grace and Judgment

The Moravian parallel reminds us: on the basis of what has been said so far, it is possible to detect a quasi-Christian, indeed Marcionite³⁵ thrust in *Va-avo ha-Yom*. It seems to propose a dualism, of the restrictive, punitive “God of Israel” vs. the “loving Father”³⁶ revealed by the Messiah. By transgressing the bounds set by the particularistic God of Judaism, the Messiah opens the way to that Father for all humanity.

We will see that there is strong support for this “Christian” reading of *Va-avo ha-Yom*, and yet that it oversimplifies the author’s extremely subtle and complex theology. First, though, let it be remarked: the author had a Jewish source for his dichotomy of the “God of Israel” vs. the “Holy Ancient One,” from which he quotes profusely in the course of his argument. This is the Zoharic text called the “*Idra Rabbah*” (“Greater Assembly”),³⁷ which opposes an inferior Just God to a higher divinity, a Good God, who unlike his lower counterpart is an embodiment of pure mercy and grace.

In speaking of “Just God” and “Good God,” I am borrowing the terminology used by Marcion of Sinope for his opposing deities, the Gods of the Old Testament and the New. The *Idra* itself does not use these titles. Yet they well suit its contents, with the important distinction that in the *Idra* the higher and lower Gods are complementary and not, as in Marcion, antagonistic. The *Idra* calls its superior divinity ‘*Attiqa* or ‘*Attiqa Qaddisha*, “the (Holy) Ancient One,” as does *Va-avo ha-Yom*.³⁸ The lower divinity, “the

³⁵ Referring to the dualistic, anti-Judaic theology of the second-century Christian heretic Marcion of Sinope; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Beacon Press, 1958), chapter 6. I am using this purely as a descriptive comparison; I do not mean to suggest (or to deny) a direct genetic connection of Marcion with either *Va-avo ha-Yom* or the *Idra Rabbah*.

³⁶ In ms. Oxford’s text of para. 17; see above, n. 6.

³⁷ Zohar, III, 127b-145a.

³⁸ Although the *Idra* uses other names for him as well: *Arikh Anpin*, “Long-Face” (probably to be understood idiomatically as “the Patient One”), and ‘*Attiq Yomin*, the “Ancient of Days” of Daniel 7:9. In *Va-avo ha-Yom*, a clear distinction is made between the “Holy Ancient One,” who is an element of Internality, and *Arikh Anpin*, the “Enclothement” in which the Ancient One is encased.

interacting God of biblical myth and liturgical trope,”³⁹ is *Ze’ir Anpin*, “Little-Face”—probably to be understood as “the Irascible One”—a term used in *Va-avo ha-Yom* for the external “Enclotement” of the “God of Israel.” The Bible is filled with news of *Ze’ir Anpin* and his activities. But the name of the Ancient One, concealed and mysterious like Marcion’s “Good God,” is mentioned only once in all the Torah.⁴⁰

There is nothing, then, about *Va-avo ha-Yom*’s dualism per se that points to Christian overtones, or any influence beyond the Kabbalistic tradition. Yet another consideration tips the scale definitively toward a “Christian” reading of our text. This is the extraordinary fact that *Va-avo ha-Yom*—unlike any other Kabbalistic source of which I am aware—explicitly identifies “Edom” and “Esau,” the medieval Jewish code-words for Christendom, with the exalted sphere of the Holy Ancient One.

“Edom,” we are plainly told in fol. 11b, is the Holy Ancient One, while “Esau” is “the Root,” the yet loftier potentiality from which the Ancient One has emerged:

The Ancient One was given the designation “Edom,” inasmuch as we have no authorization to discuss him in detail, as we do for the rest of the Shapes.⁴¹ Hence he is called “Edom,” from the root meaning “silence,” as in Job [31:34], *I shall be silent [eddom], I shall not step outside the door.* ... The Root is called “Seir,”⁴² as we have said, and also “Esau,” for as the construction-master he gives orders, saying “Do [*asu*]⁴³ this, that, or the other thing.” Furthermore “Esau” has the same numerical value as *nahash hai*, “the Serpent lives,” inasmuch as where [the Root dwells] there is no sleep or entrancement whatever. This is the inner

³⁹ As Pinchas Giller puts it, in *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of the Kabbalah* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 113.

⁴⁰ *Idra Rabbah*, Zohar, III, 130a, referring to Genesis 22:16; quoted in *Va-avo ha-Yom*, fol. 21a.

⁴¹ *Parzufim*, often translated “countenances” or “configurations” (Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, 1954, pp. 269-273). Scholem normally prefers the latter translation, Pinchas Giller (*Reading the Zohar*) the former.

⁴² The Biblical name for the territory of the Edomites.

⁴³ In Hebrew spelled the same as “Esau.”

meaning of the verse, *The same is Esau the father of Edom* [Genesis 36:43]. For [the Root] is father to the Ancient One.

Leave aside the strange equation of “Esau” with “the Serpent lives”; we will come back to it. The etymology of “Edom” is no less strange, given that the Bible has already explained the name, in a manner far more plausible and, moreover, perfectly suited to the agenda of the traditional Kabbalah.

According to Genesis 25:30, Esau was called “Edom” because of the red (*adom*) lentil soup for which he sold his birthright. Verse 25 hints at the same etymology, when it says that Esau came forth “ruddy” (*admoni*) from Rebecca’s womb. Red in the Kabbalah is the color of Judgment; while Isaac—who preferred Esau over Jacob—symbolizes the *sefirah Gevurah*, the divine quality of Judgment. The Bible’s *edom* = *adom* etymology was therefore a godsend to the Kabbalists.⁴⁴ With it, they could bind Esau/Edom to a realm of undiluted Judgment, so intense and concentrated as to be demonic. Edom’s religion, Christianity, is thus branded as a manifestation of cosmic evil.

The author of *Va-avo ha-Yom* turns his back on all this. Instead he identifies Edom with the Ancient One, prior to and higher than the “God of Israel.” This is a being of pure Grace, free from subjection to the Torah and its commandments which bind the “God of Israel.”⁴⁵ We can hardly explain the author’s motive unless we suppose he intends a radical revisioning of the meaning of Christianity and its relation to Judaism—one in which Christianity comes out as superior.

⁴⁴ E.g., Zohar, I, 137b.

⁴⁵ Fol. 16b-17a: “You need to be aware that ... all the obligation of these commandments rests upon the God of Israel, who is called ‘Blessed Holy One.’ This is inner meaning of the statement [Talmud, Berakhot 6a] that ‘the Blessed Holy One wears phylacteries,’ meaning that it all rests upon him. ... The Ancient Holy One is different. The God of Israel draws from him all the waste matter, separating it from him, leaving only pure Graces behind; he therefore has no need to perform the commandments or to fulfill the Torah.”

We will need to modify this last judgment, though, when we realize that for the author, unfettered Grace is far from being an unmixed blessing. On the contrary: it has already shown itself at least once to be a devastating curse.

When [the effluence] takes the form of uncontained male ejaculate, its nature is that of a *flooding of many waters* [Psalm 32:6]. ... All this is the evident lesson of the Shattering of the Vessels: they received their effluence in the form of uncontained ejaculate, and therefore were shattered ... we therefore must not pray to the Ancient One, or even to the God of Israel when he is not coupling with his Shechinah. For the consequence will be uncontained ejaculate, laying waste to the worlds. [Appendix, paras. 6-7]

This passage, from near the end of *Va-avo ha-Yom*, is a reprise of what the author has spelled out in more detail in his treatment of the primordial catastrophe that comes in Lurianic Kabbalah to be known as *shevirat ha-kelim*, “the Shattering of the Vessels” (represented, for our author, by the Flood of the Book of Genesis). This is the tradition that there once existed a system of *sefirot* that was in some way structurally deficient, that could not bear the influx of “effluence” (*shefa*’) from above, and therefore “shattered.”

The Ancient One possessed nothing of the Balance: Judgment was contained within Grace, and all the Graces that were there partook of the quality of absolute extension, without any restraint or restriction.⁴⁶ ... It would have been far different if sexual coupling had been in play. For through coupling Contraction is achieved, and ... in a state of Contraction—which is a state of

⁴⁶ I cannot help but think of Herbert Weiner’s inspired image of “those ice-cream machines which poured their contents on to the cone below, the shape being only able to form when the machine stopped. What would happen if there were no stopping? Why, there would be no shaped ice-cream cone, only an ever-changing blob” (*9½ Mystics: The Kabbala Today*, Collier Books, 1992, pp. 33-34). Not only that. The entire universe would be suffocated in ice cream.

Judgment—the Judgement is leavened with Graces, Judgments thereby sweetened and mixed in with Graces. ... Finally, and most crucial: when the Female receives effluence, she acts as measuring-line for it, giving it proportion. ...

But here all this was missing. There was no sexual coupling, only thought and imagination, as in a seminal emission. ... They still had not reached the state where [male and female] looked at one another face to face, and consequently ... were in every respect vulnerable to Shattering. [fols. 12b-13a]

This from the author’s introduction to his detailed account of the Shattering of the Vessels. Now from his conclusion, in which he accounts for the catastrophe and sketches the new dispensation that arose from it:

I have earlier written that all the worlds of Cain and Abel,⁴⁷ in all their ten aspects, were those that reigned *before there was any king over Israel*, whose dominion was rather *in the land of Edom* [Genesis 36:31], which is to say, under the influence of the Ancient One. This was why they were susceptible to Shattering. ... For he is pure Mercy, pure expansion; they are thus without anything that might restrain [it] and protect them—Judgment functioning as a restraint. [fol. 19b]

Genesis 36:31: *These are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.* This is the pivotal verse expounded over and over in the *Idra Rabbah* to refer to the Shattering of the Vessels—or, as the Zoharic literature calls it, the Death of the Kings—and it reverberates through the subsequent

⁴⁷ The author’s Biblical symbol for the primordial system of *sefirot*, developed in great detail earlier in the treatise. Working from Eve’s utterance in Genesis 4:1, the author supposes that “Cain” and “Abel” were birthed by the Shechinah through the thought of the Ancient One, without any sexual coupling; hence the structural weakness that made them susceptible to “Shattering.” This reads like a criticism of Christianity: the virgin-born are bound to be inadequate, fragile.

Kabbalah.⁴⁸ The key *Idra* passage, Zohar III, 135a-b, makes completely clear that “Edom” is the domain of severe, undiluted Judgment, and it was this unmitigated harshness that brought about its collapse.⁴⁹ Of course the plain meaning of the *Idra* is fatal to our author’s theory. So, in a long exposition of that passage, he uses all his hermeneutic ingenuity to get the text to say the opposite of what it obviously does say—and, where even this will not work, passes in silence over the offending words.⁵⁰

There is a second reason as well. The Ancient One’s effluence takes place without any female participation, solely as male ejaculate, and this is what causes Shattering. . . . Now as before, therefore, if they are dependent on him for their effluence, it will come to them as uncontained ejaculate and they will be shattered. [Ibid.]

And so the God of Israel found himself compelled to take matters in hand, and transfer to himself the guidance and nourishment of the worlds.

For this reason, [the God of Israel] removed from them any effluence that might come to them directly from the Ancient One. Rather, he would cause effluence to flow upon them from the God of Israel . . . having within him the Balance of Judgment and Mercy, all properly mixed as we have said, within the nature of the God of Israel who is like a king in his country, marching out his forces in orderly fashion, giving to each its allotted portion.

⁴⁸ Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, pp. 95-98.

⁴⁹ Translated and annotated in Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), vol. I, pp. 332-333.

⁵⁰ Fol. 21b. When the *Idra* calls Edom “the place where all the judgments exist” (Tishby), the author tries to understand this as, “the place where all the Judgments *remain*,” and explains that “the Judgments there remained static and did not emerge [from potentiality] to actuality, and were mixed with mercy.” But the *Idra*’s comment on “Bela the son of Beor,” and its etymology of the name of his city Dinhabah (Genesis 36:32), which even our author’s ingenuity cannot explain away, are simply ignored.

Not only that: even with him as the source of the effluence, it was important that it not take the form of uncontained ejaculate. To insure this, the God of Israel arranged that they should not receive all the effluence in spite of their being dependent upon him to provide it. Rather, he would pour the equivalent of male juices into the Female, who ... would add her own female juices and mix them together. ... She would then give effluence and nourishment to each of them, as appropriate for each, in measure; for she is the building's Measuring Rod, the Artisan who shapes each one in its proper measure. [Ibid.]

Once again a reversal. Christianity is the “old dispensation,” Judaism the new. The author forces us to think again about which is better. Christianity is indeed the loftier of the two. Yet its elevation renders it ineffectual, so ill-suited to the needs of those it is supposed to nourish that it turns destructive. In theory it is the embodiment of love, grace, and kindness. In reality it spawns malignant phenomena like the religious wars that devastated Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—the last and most vicious of which, the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), had its beginnings in Eibeschuetz's city of Prague and must have left its mark on the society's group consciousness. *Va-avo ha-Yom's* vivid descriptions, of the panic and flight of the doomed *sefirot* as the Shattering prepares to overwhelm them, can be read, speculatively but plausibly, against this background.

So Judaism wins the contest. The “God of Israel,” lower than the Ancient One in the hierarchy of divinity, is paradoxically more perfect than he. The *Idra Rabbah* (III, 138a) had interpreted Exodus 34:6, *va-yiqra YHVH YHVH*, to mean: “and YHVH called out, ‘YHVH’ ”—an inferior YHVH, in other words, invoking a superior YHVH. “The first [YHVH],” says the *Idra*, “is perfect, the second perfect in every way.” But which YHVH is the more completely perfect? The *Idra* seems originally to have intended the Ancient One to be the superior. *Va-avo ha-Yom* says the opposite:

The Ancient One, in other words, partakes of the quality of perfection through his absolute Mercies. Yet, as such, he is not “perfect in every way,” since [his one-sided, absolute Mercy] makes the act of construction impossible. It was, on the contrary, entirely responsible for the Shattering! But the God of Israel **is** “perfect in every way,” in that he partakes of the quality of Balance, giving to each in proper measure, whether this means augmenting or diminishment. [fol. 21b-22a]

“To each in proper measure.” Contrast the Purim-day madness of the Ancient One’s dispensation, so ethically inebriated that one “cannot tell the difference between ‘Cursed be Haman’ and ‘Blessed be Mordecai’ ” (para. 11 from the appendix, quoted above, p. 6). To feel the impact of this, substitute “Hitler” for “Haman,” the Dalai Lama (or Mother Theresa or whoever) for “Mordecai.” For that is the consequence of being “altogether without Judgment”: the essential moral distinctions cannot be made. Chaos—as in the horror of the Thirty Years War⁵¹—is the inevitable result.

So the author’s verdict is in: Christianity is sublime but impossible. Judaism must necessarily be our choice.

But now he throws in one more of his long series of surprises.

Recall his equation of “Esau” with *nahash hai*, “the Serpent lives,” basing himself on the numerical equivalence of the two in Hebrew. Who is that *nahash*, that Serpent? There can be no possible question. It is Sabbatai Zevi.

Sabbatai in his lifetime identified himself, and was identified by his followers, as “the Holy Serpent.” Like the author’s equation here, that identification was based on

⁵¹ Or the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648-49, which may also lie deep within the author’s awareness—Eibeschuetz spent his earliest years in Poland—and which he might also have reasonably blamed on Christianity. But, as will presently be seen, I have a special reason for inclining toward the Thirty Years War.

numerical equivalence: *nahash* in Hebrew has the same value as *mashiah*, “Messiah.”⁵² There is not the shadow of a possibility that the author was unfamiliar with this equation. He uses it on fol. 25a, though without specific reference to Sabbatai Zevi. (“Now it is well known that the serpent is symbolically equivalent to the Messiah.”) By interpreting “Esau” as *nahash hai*, he is saying: **the Messiah/Serpent Sabbatai Zevi has his enduring, present-day life within the domain of Esau, of Christianity.**

At first sight this appears paradoxical. Does he not know that it was to Islam, not Christianity, that Sabbatai Zevi converted? Surely he does. But for him this is an antiquarian detail, of no essential significance. The essential reality is **that Sabbatai passed into the domain of the Other**; and this undifferentiated “Other” is for the author represented by Christianity.

This passage to the Other is described in para. 17—cryptically and allusively, to be sure—in historical terms: “David sought to engage in alien worship.” Para. 10, “the true Messiah couples with the Ancient One,” describes the same event on the mythological plane. It is impossible to avoid comparison with the Crucifixion, which is similarly both historical and mythological. Thousands were crucified in the Roman Empire; thousands abandoned their Judaism for Christianity or Islam in the centuries that followed. Only one Crucifixion was a salvific act; just so, only one Apostasy. With it, **Sabbatai offered himself as the Ancient One’s missing female partner. He thereby made it possible for the Ancient One to intervene in the life of these lower worlds without destroying them.**

The dispensation of the “Balance,” associated with the “God of Israel,” might then pass away, and the dispensation of Grace begin.

⁵² Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676* (Princeton University Press, 1973), index, s.v. “Serpent symbolism.”

On the basis of what has been said so far, we might reconstruct the stages of the author's *Heilsgeschichte* as follows:

- (1) Christianity was tried and found wanting.**
- (2) Judaism stepped in, successfully, to remedy Christianity's deficiency.**
- (3) Sabbatai Zevi, through his redemptive apostasy, makes Christianity once more viable, and indeed preferable.**
- (4) But Christianity, as enabled by Sabbatai Zevi as Messiah, is no longer Christianity but a new religion, unlike anything ever seen on this earth.**

What are the features of this renewed "dispensation of Grace," as it manifests itself in mundane human existence?

Most obviously: universal human brotherhood. *Do not loathe an Edomite, for he is your brother.* This is Deuteronomy 23:8, which the author quotes in the course of an abstruse discussion of the religious significance of Esau;⁵³ and it follows, from what has been said about the "Other," that for this author "Edomite" means not just a Christian but any Gentile. *God ... repudiates no one*, says 2 Samuel 14:14—or so our author understands the Scripture—and for this reason the Shechinah enters each night amid the life-threatening chaos of the "Insolent Waters," the "souls whose process of ripening is not yet complete. ... It is in order to bring them the light, to enter them under the Shechinah's wings⁵⁴ and restore them to life—for God repudiates no one—that ... with the heat of fire she purifies the waters that are near her ... then receives them and pours

⁵³ Fol. 7b: "Esau's head was in Holiness," and Isaac loved him because he "sensed holiness in Esau's head, as Luria tells us that Esau's head was buried with Jacob in the Cave of Machpelah, his head being within Holiness. [I do not know the source of this assertion.] It has already been explained that the 'head' has the quality of the Ancient One, and there [in the "head"] he is your brother, which is not the case with the rest of the body." Historically, Jewish-Christian relations have not exactly been brotherly; Sabbatai Zevi's ascent to the "Head," who is the Ancient One, changes all that.

⁵⁴ A rabbinic expression for converting people to Judaism; e.g., Talmud, Sanhedrin 96b, *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 39:16.

upon them waters of Grace” (fol. 27a). *God repudiates no one*. Therefore, the author surely infers, neither must we.

This reminds us of what is missing from *Va-avo ha-Yom*. It is an omission we hardly notice among all the complexities, until we reach the end and wonder what has happened to it. **The racism and xenophobia, that disfigure the orthodox Kabbalah, are nowhere to be found.** Nowhere in this text are Gentiles demonized, either as people or as religions. If the sex in *Va-avo ha-Yom* descends from eroticism into pornography—and the following discussion will put this issue in a somewhat different light—its treatment of the human being rises from the fear-driven bigotries of the past into something approaching universal acceptance and respect.⁵⁵

4. Sexuality and gender

There is another realm in which the old-new dispensation makes its presence felt. This is in *Va-avo ha-Yom*'s treatment of sexuality and gender.

The text, at least at first reading, seems to share in the puritanism of traditional Judaism. Nor does it lack the overtones of divinity and demonism which the Kabbalah attached to this puritanism, intensifying it into a near-pathological dread of sexuality and its power. “This is the reason,” the author says, “why one must take care not to touch even a woman’s little finger; for at a higher level, in this precious realm, that is an act of full sexual intercourse.”⁵⁶ The devastating power he attributes to “uncontained ejaculate” echoes the rabbinic and Kabbalistic horror of masturbation and its deadly dangers. Even lawful marital sex is too potent to be allowed in its full intensity; hence the “hole in the

⁵⁵ Maciejko quotes the testimony of Eibeschuetz’s student Carl Anton (who converted to Christianity) that “Rabbi Jonathan did not agree with those [rabbis] who claimed that the doctrine of love of one’s neighbor should be restricted only to the Jews, who should care only about other Jews, but claimed that this love is universal in character and that it is as great a sin to cause detriment to people of another religion as to harm members of one’s own family”: “Controverse sur la crypto-chrétienté de Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz,” *Les Cahiers du Judaïsme* 29 (2010), pp. 130-134.

⁵⁶ Fol. 5b, drawing upon the Talmud, Berakhot 24a and Shabbat 64b, which liken looking at a woman’s little finger to looking at her genitalia.

sheet,” which the author mistakenly regards as a rabbinic enactment. The Lower Shechinah, wandering amid the Insolent Waters with her purifying fire, must remain ever virgin lest those waters find a point of entry into her.⁵⁷ (Yet her virginity seems only technical; she manages to enjoy a fairly active sex life in spite of it.)

But there is another side. The numinous power of sex can work for good as well as for ill. The author allows his divine potentialities a range of erotic activities, homosexual as well as heterosexual, that goes far beyond the traditional Kabbalistic repertoire. He describes them with an explicitness that indeed, as Liebes says, verges on the pornographic. His understanding of Hosea 11:1 as *I made love to Israel boy-fashion* (above, p. 10), could not have been conceived by someone who regarded homosexuality as an unspeakable abomination.

Of course these are divine beings; *quod licet Iovi non licet bovi*. Yet in the same passage the author anticipates a time “when the Insolent Waters are gone from the earth and the *Tehiru* is purified, when the Shechinah will engage in anal sex in the lower realms.” Surely this envisions the opening “in the lower realms” of a range of sexual options, including those currently off limits,⁵⁸ as betokened by Sabbatai Zevi’s bringing the Torah scroll into the latrine.

Between the raw scatology of this act, and the ethereal heights of divinity, lies the vast field of human sexuality. Can we suppose this to have been unaffected by what the divine potentialities do in the World of Emanation and beyond, or by what the Messiah did with his scroll inside the latrine? Does the author mean to say nothing about what constitutes acceptable sexuality here on earth as in heaven above—at least in that golden future (or eschatologically present?) time “when the Insolent Waters are gone from the earth”?

⁵⁷ Fol. 27a-b, 31b-33b.

⁵⁸ Anal sex with one’s wife is halakhically permitted, yet frowned upon; see Tosafot to Yevamot 34b, Sanhedrin 58b.

Do we imagine it conveys nothing about his attitude toward flesh-and-blood gender relations when he conjures up, at the climax of his treatise, a glowing picture of the anticipated lovemakings of the no-longer-virginal Shechinah, after the fear of the “Insolent Waters” shall have passed away? A picture, moreover, that overturns the centuries-old tradition of female subordination?

Know: a time will come when the Shechinah will be sexually opened.⁵⁹ So the Bible says: *Fallen, no more to rise is Israel's virgin* [Amos 5:2]— meaning, no longer shall she stand as a virgin, for at that time there will be no fear of the Insolent Waters since they will all have been mended. She will be opened sexually; to her will apply the verse, *Spread wide the place of your “tent”* [Isaiah 54:2]; and so the Bible says, *The moon will be “dug” and the sun linger* [Isaiah 24:23]. “Dug,” as in *the well that the princes dug*, and so forth [... *with a rod and with their staffs*; Numbers 21:18]; meaning, she will be sexually opened.

And the sun linger. At present their coupling is intermittent; but a time will come when it will be continual ... meaning that he will remain with her perpetually [or, “will be in a state of permanent erection,” *she-ya'amod tamid*]. The Bible goes on to explain: *For YHVH rules in Zion*, referring to the God of Israel, *and in the presence of his elders he is a Glory* ... i.e., that it is he who is called his Female's “Glory.”⁶⁰

A time will come when the Higher Shechinah will be above the God of Israel, as represented in *a noble woman is her husband's crown* [Proverbs 12:4]. This is the significance of *then Moses shall sing* [Exodus 15:1].⁶¹ As matters now stand, whenever the Shechinah wants sex she does the serenading, as in, *I am a*

⁵⁹ *Be'ulah*, the passive feminine of the verb meaning “to copulate with,” opposed to *betulah*, “virgin.” The precise English equivalent cannot be used in polite company.

⁶⁰ As opposed to the present condition, where it is the Shechinah who is God's *kavod*, “Glory.”

⁶¹ The Hebrew verb “sing” is in the future tense, although all modern translations, following the context, treat it as past.

rose of Sharon [Song of Songs 2:1].⁶² But a time will come when the God of Israel will serenade her, and this is what is meant by *then Moses shall sing*, “Moses” being the God of Israel.

This is the inner meaning of the verse, *The moon’s light shall be like the sun’s light* [Isaiah 30:26], conveying that the Shechinah will be in a lofty place like the God of Israel, who is symbolized by the “sun”; while the “sun’s” light will take the place of the “moon.” So the verse goes on to say: *and the sun’s light shall be [...] like the light of Seven-days*, i.e., like the light of the Shechinah, who is called “Seven-days.”⁶³ Not meaning, of course, that his light will be diminished; rather, that the Shechinah will be elevated until the God of Israel will be in comparison to her as the Shechinah is now in comparison to him. At that time *YHVH will be One and his name One* [Zechariah 14:9].⁶⁴ **Blessed be he forever! Amen!** [paras. 13-16]

There is some ambiguity over whether the God of Israel and the Shechinah are to be equal or whether they will trade places, she being superior to him as he currently is to her. (See notes 129 and 132, below.) But whether the author envisions equality or turnabout, the message is plain: the woman’s claims are equal to the man’s. If for a change she is on top, this will do him no harm.

Mystical libertinism? As “libertinism” goes, this is pretty mild. That heterosexual and homosexual love have equal value, deserve equal respect; that a woman is a man’s equal and has the same right to erotic gratification as he does; that sexual intimacy is best not dictated by law—these are almost pieties nowadays. For eighteenth-century Judaism they were revolutionary. If they were indeed the private beliefs of the

⁶² Following the interpretation in the Zohar, I, 221a (=III, 107a), which derives “Sharon” from *sharah*, “she sings.”

⁶³ As demonstrated earlier in the treatise.

⁶⁴ Regularly used by the Kabbalists (and in the famous *Lekha Dodi* hymn) to describe the ultimate harmonious synthesis of all the Divinity’s diverse aspects.

era's leading rabbinic authority—if Jonathan Eibeschuetz was in fact the author of *Va-avo ha-Yom el ha-'Ayin*—this is something extraordinary.

From the end of the passage I have just quoted, from *YHVH will be One and his Name One* and the doxology that follows, the author moves directly to the event that makes this blessed denouement possible:

This is why David, when *he came to the Head* (symbolizing the Ancient One) *where he was to prostrate himself for God* (indicating sexual coupling), “David sought to engage in alien worship,” in accord with, *Af loves the nations*. [Or, “loving Father.”] Understand. [para. 17]

And we do now. In full.

5. Postscript

I offer now, with the greatest tentativeness, a speculation that extends my earlier suggestion—itself highly speculative—that the description of the Shattering of the Vessels in *Va-avo ha-Yom* may build upon a group memory of the horror and devastation of the Thirty Years War (above, p. 18).

The early Church saw the workings of providence in Jesus Christ's having been born in the reign of Caesar Augustus, at the same time as the *pax Romana* that was to make Christianity possible.⁶⁵ Is it possible that the author of *Va-avo ha-Yom* found a parallel significance in Sabbatai Zevi's having first proclaimed his Messiahship in 1648, the year of the Peace of Westphalia, which brought an end not only to the Thirty Years War but to the whole era of European religious warfare? In which a shared Christianity

⁶⁵ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II, 30; cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.ii.23.

ceased to be a source of “shattering,” and might even be a foundation for the building of a new edifice of peace and brotherhood?

Our answer would depend on how educated Europeans around the year 1725 looked back upon the events of a century before, and the extent to which a Jewish thinker like Eibeschutz—for whose ties with his Christian counterparts there is ample evidence—might have shared their perspectives. I cannot speak to these questions. But if we are prepared to entertain this possibility, it gives a new perspective to the “realized eschatology” that seems to me to underlie *Va-avo ha-Yom*.

It is not wholly clear whether the author looked forward to a “second coming” of Sabbatai Zevi, this time in glory. My strong impression is that he did not, although I must admit there are one or two passages that seem to imply the Messiah will play some future role on earth.⁶⁶ Rather, the Messiah has already effected the great world-transformation. What remains is for us humans fully to actualize it, on earth as it is in heaven.

The bottom line: Sabbatai Zevi’s transgressive move from Judaism to the “Other” was itself his act of redemption. No other is required.

⁶⁶ Fol. 8b: “In this matter [the meaning of “above,” “below,” “before,” and “after” in the Mishnah, Hagigah 2:1] there is a profundity which [the ancient sages] kept carefully hidden, which no one was authorized to reveal to me. Yet by fleeting hints have I come to understand that Messiah ben David will, in the future, explain it to all. O wait for him!”

Appendix: The Conclusion to *Va-avo ha-Yom* (ms. Oxford 955, fols. 34b-35a)

[1] During all this time, then, that [the God of Israel]⁶⁷ sends down no “rain”—on what does the world survive? It is maintained entirely by the “dew” equivalent that descends from the Ancient One, as we have described.⁶⁸ This “dew” is never stopped up, as the Gemara explains, and on it the world can sustain itself. True, it is not much. Yet it is not stopped up, and it bestows a certain limited measure of life, keeping things from becoming entirely corpse-like. It cannot, however, pour out blessing,⁶⁹ since it lacks the capacity to bear fruit.

[2] Upon this “dew,” which “Little-Face”⁷⁰ receives from the {Holy} Ancient One, the Shechinah must subsist in the absence of “rain” and seed, and go to the *Tehiru* to receive female juices. So says the Bible: *To Benjamin he said: Blessed of YHVH is his earth, from the dew that is the gift of heaven, and from the abyss that crouches*, and so forth⁷¹—from which we learn that she enters the *Tehiru*-waters equipped only with this “dew.” Yet, inasmuch as no sex is involved, she is missing {the heat} of that Northern fire that manifests itself during intercourse as *his left hand under my head*,⁷² which is the principal element of sexual coupling. Lacking fiery heat—the fire upon the altar, so to

⁶⁷ Brackets like these [] indicate my own explanatory insertions. { } indicate words that are found in ms. Jerusalem 2491 but not in ms. Oxford 955, < > words found in ms. Oxford but not ms. Jerusalem. (In the quotations I use in the body of the paper, I do not indicate these manuscript distinctions.) Round parentheses () are the author’s own explanatory remarks.

⁶⁸ See above, pp. 122-126, on the qualities of the God of Israel’s “rain” vs. the Ancient One’s “dew.” There are a few rabbinic quotations in this discussion, but nothing that would suit what the author here attributes to “the Gemara,” and I cannot identify his referent.

⁶⁹ So ms. Oxford. Ms. Jerusalem: “It is not the effluence of blessing.”

⁷⁰ *Ze’ir Anpin*, the Kabbalistic “shape” that for our author is the “enclothement” of the God of Israel. (Cf. above, n. 1294.) The allusion will make more sense in the light of what follows. I follow ms. Jerusalem here, which is slightly clearer and smoother than ms. Oxford.

⁷¹ Deuteronomy 33:13; only the addressee of the blessing is not “Benjamin” but “Joseph.” The Biblical reading will suit the author’s argument better, since Joseph is *Yesod* in the traditional Kabbalah, and also the Shechinah in the author’s. I have no idea how he made this error, which is in both mss. “Earth” is of course understood as the Shechinah.

⁷² Song of Songs 8:3, understood following the Zohar. On the symbolism of left=north=fire, cf. above, p. 173. I follow ms. Jerusalem, *be-sod semolo tahat le-roshi*.

speak, having gone out⁷³—she has no way to purge and purify the *Tehiru*-waters. The only heat at her disposal comes through her fasting, since she does not receive any male juices. Yet fasting does generate heat, as is well known, and one can employ that fasting-heat to perform purgations.⁷⁴ Understand.

[3] At such a time, the vessels⁷⁵ receive “dew” from the {Holy} Ancient One as we have said, and the God of Israel⁷⁶ ejaculates⁷⁷ no seed or “rain” into the Female. Quite the contrary—he appears⁷⁸ as passive and receptive, in that “Little-Face” (who is his Enclothement) must receive everything from the Holy Ancient One and from the Father-and-Mother of Enclothement;⁷⁹ he must enter <into> the womb of Smallness and Suckling,⁸⁰ inasmuch as no “rain” falls upon the earth and all life has come to an end.

[4] This is the significance of what was said by Job,⁸¹ in the person of the God of Israel: *Now those younger {than I} do “play” upon me.*⁸² In receiving effluence one partakes of the nature of the female,⁸³ while “playing” is the prelude to sex,⁸⁴ as we well know. (*Let the lads rise up and “play” before us.*⁸⁵) Thus he says, *Now those younger*

⁷³ See above, p. 78, for the context of this image.

⁷⁴ Both mss. are awkward here—*ve-‘al-yedei hom zeh meva’erin sod ha-ta’anit* (ms. Jerusalem, *me-ha-ta’anit*)—and the author’s thought less than clear. (I do not know any background material, Talmudic or otherwise, that would elucidate it.) By “fasting,” does he refer to the Shechinah’s sexual deprivation?

⁷⁵ That is, the sefirotic entities.

⁷⁶ So ms. Jerusalem.

⁷⁷ *Mashpia’*; is this too definitive a translation?

⁷⁸ *Ra’ui*, in ms. Oxford; ms. Jerusalem has *r’h*. Perhaps read *nir’eh*?

⁷⁹ Ms. Jerusalem; ms. Oxford’s *hityabbeshut* is an obvious error.

⁸⁰ Ms. Oxford, *le-tokh mei qotnut vi-niqah*; ms. Jerusalem, *me’ei qotnut vi-niqah*. Ms. Jerusalem’s reading is obviously preferable; but I wonder if the original might not be *yemei qotnut vi-niqah*, “the days of Smallness and Suckling.” The details are a little unclear, but the image of the God of Israel’s physical manifestation hiding in the maternal womb, from drought and devastation, is very powerful.

⁸¹ Ms. Jerusalem inserts at this point the abbreviation *lamed-mem-dalet*. I do not know what this is supposed to mean.

⁸² Job 30:1. In this and the following quotation ms. Oxford reads *zahaqu*, while ms. Jerusalem keeps the Bible’s *sahaqu*.

⁸³ So ms. Jerusalem. Ms. Oxford: “is called female.”

⁸⁴ *Mevo tashmish*; ms. Jerusalem’s *mi-zet ha-shemesh* is obviously an error, although how it came to be perpetrated is not so clear.

⁸⁵ 2 Samuel 2:14. Why the author argues from this passage that “playing” is a prelude to sex is unclear; in the Bible it is a prelude to mass slaughter.

{*than I*} do “play” upon me, referring to the upper worlds,⁸⁶ which are “younger” than he, in that he is “Adam, the first of {them} all.”⁸⁷ Yet *they do “play” upon me*, making sexual use of me, while I serve them as female.

[5] It follows that, <in time of exile,> we must *not* dedicate our intention and prayer {when we say, *Blessed are you, O Lord*} to the God of Israel and his Shechinah, in the manner set forth previously,⁸⁸ with the aim of attaching them to the Root. He does not ejaculate into the Shechinah;⁸⁹ “a heaven’s distance separates her from him”;⁹⁰ and consequently, when we set our intention to bring down the effluence, it all comes in the form of a spermatoc ejaculation in which the Female plays no part. {It thus brings about devastation, Shattering of the vessels in all the worlds. For inasmuch as he has no connection with his Female,} he is precisely like the Ancient One <to whom> we must not dedicate our prayers.

[6] This is communicated by the verse, *Above Zot*, “*this one*,” *let all the pious pray*.⁹¹ One must pray to the entity that is above the Shechinah (who is called *Zot*, “this one”), namely <to> the God of Israel. <But the text goes on to specify,> *in a time he may be found*, in a time when he is found here and does not hide himself—not when he is in a state of concealment. The Bible then gives the reason why we must not pray to him in a time when he does not couple with the Shechinah, just as we must not pray to the Ancient One Holy of all the holy, {Concealed of all the concealed}. *The many waters*, it says, *must not reach him with their flooding*—he must not {again} undergo a Flood and a

⁸⁶ That is, the higher *sefirot Keter, Hokhmah* and *Binah*, the “shapes” of “Long-Face” (*Arikh Anpin*), “Father,” and “Mother.”

⁸⁷ *Adam qadma’ah de-khulla* (ms. Jerusalem, *de-khulho*), quoted from the *Zohar*, II, 55a; cf. *Tiqqunei Zohar* 70, 120a. On “Adam” as a representation of the God of Israel, see above, pp. /.../.

⁸⁸ Above, pp. 242-243.

⁸⁹ So ms. Jerusalem; ms. Oxford is corrupt.

⁹⁰ *Shamayim* [ms. Jerusalem, *ha-shamayim*] *beno le-venah*; an expression of alienation of wife and husband, drawn from the Mishnah (Nedarim 11:12, glossed in the Palestinian Talmud, Nedarim 39b; cf. Tosefta Sotah 5:7). This precise language, however, is found only in Abraham ben David’s comment on Maimonides, *Hilkhot Ishut*, ch. 14, which draws on the rabbinic passages and may have served as immediate source for our author.

⁹¹ Psalm 32:6.

Shattering of vessels, { which is the *flooding of many waters*. For when [the effluence] takes the form of uncontained male ejaculate,⁹² its nature is that of a *flooding of many waters*. Understand.

[7] All this is the evident lesson of the Shattering of the vessels: } they received their effluence in the form of uncontained ejaculate, and therefore were shattered. This is conveyed by the *Idra*, which quotes *These are the kings* and so forth,⁹³ and says of it: “This is the secret of testimony concerning the secret of prayer {of faith}”⁹⁴—which at first sight seems unintelligible.⁹⁵ } But in accord with what we have said it makes perfect sense. [The Shattering of the vessels] teaches us that, inasmuch as they were Shattered because they received uncontained ejaculate, we therefore must not pray to the Ancient One, or even to the God of Israel when he is not coupling with his Shechinah. For the consequence will be uncontained ejaculate, laying waste to the worlds.

[8] Our prayer, rather, must be to join the Shechinah to “Little-Face,”⁹⁶ from there to Father and Mother, and from there to “Long-Face”—all of it via the path of Enclotement, which, as we learn from [fol. 35a] Luria and from the Zohar’s *Idra Zuta*,⁹⁷ is the path of the effluence.⁹⁸

⁹² My latest stab at *zera’ le-vattalah*.

⁹³ ... *who reigned in the land of Edom*; Genesis 36:31. The reference is apparently to the exposition of this verse in the *Idra Rabbah* (Zohar, III, 128a), which however differs substantially from our author’s quotation of it. See the following note.

⁹⁴ *Da hi* [ms. Jerusalem, *hu*] *raza de-sahaduta ‘al raza di-zelota* [ms. Jerusalem adds *di-mehemanuta*]. The standard edition of the Zohar has, more briefly, *de-hu sahaduta ‘al mehemanuta* (or, *di-mehemanuta*), without the twice-repeated *raza*, although the preceding line calls the verse *razei de-razin de-orayta*. More important, it omits any reference to prayer (*zelota*), which is the pivot of the author’s argument. It is hard to believe he invented this reading out of whole cloth. More likely, *di-zelota* is a textual variant of *di-mehemanuta*, quoted by the author and followed by ms. Oxford, while ms. Jerusalem conflates it with the standard reading. (Which may have originated as a “correction” of the difficult *di-zelota*.)

⁹⁵ For how could the Shattering of the vessels be a “testimony concerning the secret of prayer”?

⁹⁶ Following ms. Jerusalem. Ms. Oxford reads *ha-shokhen* in place of *ha-shekhinah*, which requires the reading *la-haver ha-shokhen bi-z[e’ir] a[npin]*, “to the Friend who dwells in ‘Little-Face,’” in place of *le-habber ha-shekhinah bi-z[e’ir] a[npin]* (as the context demands). Perlmutter, following the Oxford reading, was led to the exciting but erroneous conclusion that the author requires us to worship the “Friend,” namely Sabbatai Zevi, who has taken the place of the God of Israel.

⁹⁷ In place of ms. Oxford’s abbreviation *bet-aleph-zayin* (= *be-idra zuta*), ms. Jerusalem reads *kammah derakhi[m]*, “several paths.” This seems very awkward in its present location, and I suspect it is an error based on a reading akin to ms. Oxford’s, with the *dalet-resh* of *idra* misread as the beginning of *derakhim*.

⁹⁸ So ms. Jerusalem. Ms. Oxford, *ha-mashp[i’a]*, “the giver of effluence.”

[9] This is why the Bible says that *Israel shall pass many days without a true God*,⁹⁹ namely that for the bulk of the exile—the time of self-concealment and hiddenness—they cannot direct their prayers <and intentions> toward the God of Israel, who is the *true God*. Indeed, so long as effluence is given by the God of Israel and goes down into the Shechinah, it is precisely him to whom prayer and intention ought to be directed, for he is <our> God and we his servants.¹⁰⁰ Yet it is written, *They cry aloud {and there is none to save,} to YHVH, and he does not answer them.*¹⁰¹

[10] But know this: the true Messiah couples with the Ancient One. He stands in for the Shechinah; and with him, [as with the Shechinah,] the ejaculate is not uncontained.¹⁰² He prays in [the Ancient One's] presence; and this is the esoteric meaning of the *prayer of the Poor Man when he enwraps himself*,¹⁰³ for [the Messiah] is called *poor man, riding a donkey*.¹⁰⁴ *When he enwraps himself*: enwraps himself in {their} prayer¹⁰⁵ unto the very highest level, as the Zohar tells us that the Poor Man's

⁹⁹ 2 Chronicles 15:3, a standard Sabbatian motto (see above, n. 1319). Ms. Oxford slightly misquotes the Biblical text.

¹⁰⁰ Following Psalm 100:3; above, n. 1617.

¹⁰¹ Psalm 18:42; and thus we have an explanation of why prayers go unheeded. It is perhaps inconvenient that, in the Biblical context, “they” are the psalmist's enemies; also that the Biblical text says, not *el YHVH*, “to YHVH” (as our author quotes it), but *'al YHVH*, “above YHVH,” a distinction to which the author attributes considerable significance.

¹⁰² The text of this important passage is difficult. Ms. Jerusalem: *ve-da' ki mashiah ha-amitti mezavveg 'im 'atiqa she-hu be-sod rosh ha-shekhinah ve-gam ezlo eno z'l [zera' le-vattalah]*. For the last two words, ms. Oxford has *itto zivvug*, “there is coupling with him”; the Jerusalem reading seems preferable. But what are we to make of *she-hu be-sod rosh ha-shekhinah*? Is “he” the Messiah or the Ancient One? And what does it mean to call either one “the head of the Shechinah”? My guess is that the current mss. conflate two readings: *she-hu be-sod rosh* (“who is represented as the ‘head,’” referring to the Ancient One), and *she-hu be-sod shekhinah* (“who represents the Shechinah,” referring to the Messiah). The latter seems better to accord with the context—note the repetition below of *hu be-sod ha-shekhinah*—the Messiah has stepped into the role played by the Shechinah vis-à-vis the God of Israel, as female partner to the Ancient One, so the Ancient One's ejaculate (consisting of pure Grace) is contained within him, and therefore can cause no harm. I have translated accordingly. If we follow the reading *she-hu be-sod rosh*, this passage will anticipate the conclusion of the treatise, where the equation *rosh* = Ancient One is crucial.

¹⁰³ Psalm 102:1.

¹⁰⁴ Zechariah 9:9, interpreted as in the *Ra'ya Mehemna* (Zohar, III, 238a, 275b, 279a)—not to mention the Gospels.

¹⁰⁵ Ms. Jerusalem, *bi-zelotehon*, perhaps based (as the Aramaic suggests) on Zohar, II, 86b, which speaks of *kol zelota de-yisra'el*, “all the prayer of the Jewish people.” See the next note.

prayer rises to the <very> highest level;¹⁰⁶ and he is a representation of the Shechinah.¹⁰⁷ He then *pours out his speech prior to YHVH*, which is to say, he prays to the Ancient One who is called “prior to YHVH.”¹⁰⁸

[11] In the same vein: *he remains fixed in Supernal Grace*.¹⁰⁹ Again in the same vein, Rav Hamnuna Sava says in the person of the Messiah, *To the Possessor of the Nose do I pray*,¹¹⁰ speaking allusively of the Ancient One who has one nose. You must realize that the Ancient One consists of pure Mercy, without any Judgment whatsoever, even for those who violate the Torah. This is significance of the verse that speaks of the *Af*, the “nose,” which is the Holy Ancient One—who has one *af*, one “nose,” as opposed to the God of Israel <who has *appayim*, “two noses,” and is therefore called *erekh*> *appayim*, <“long” of noses”¹¹¹—this *Af loves the nations*,¹¹² even the Gentiles, since he is <entirely> without Judgment. And this is why on the Purim festival, {over which the Ancient One holds sway,} “one must get so drunk <on Purim> that he cannot tell the difference {between ‘Cursed be Haman’ [and ‘Blessed be Mordecai’]}¹¹³—for he is pure Mercy.

[12] He is the one mentioned in Hannah’s prayer: *Do not speak profusely toward the Lofty, or let Ancientness emerge from your mouth*¹¹⁴—do not, in other words, speak

¹⁰⁶ Probably referring to II, 86b: “the poor man’s prayer ... rises to the King’s throne of glory and becomes a crown upon his head.”

¹⁰⁷ *Ve-hu be-sod ha-shekhinah*.

¹⁰⁸ See above, n. 1275.

¹⁰⁹ Psalm 21:8, speaking of “the king” (i.e., Messiah), who remains permanently in the realm of the Ancient One who is *hesed* ‘*elyon*, “Supernal Grace.”

¹¹⁰ Zohar, III, 130b (*Idra Rabbah*).

¹¹¹ A hyper-literal understanding of the Biblical phrase meaning “patient, long-suffering” (normally said of God, e.g., Exodus 34:6).

¹¹² Deuteronomy 33:3. In the Biblical context, *af* is a particle meaning “even” or “indeed”; the author prefers to take it as a noun meaning “nose” (which, in a different context, would be possible).

¹¹³ Talmud, Megillah 7b; the repetition of “on Purim” (which ms. Jerusalem omits) is in accord with the Talmudic passage. In the pure Grace of the Ancient One, such moral distinctions as that between the noble Jew Mordecai and the genocidal anti-Semite Haman lose their relevance.

¹¹⁴ I Samuel 2:3. The word I have translated “ancientness,” ‘*ataq*, is usually taken to mean “arrogance,” “impudence,” or the like. But it is from the same root as ‘*atiqa*, “the Ancient One,” and our author understands it accordingly.

or pray to the Ancient One or to the Root.¹¹⁵ *{For} YHVH is a God of knowledge,* referring to the Ancient One, who is his Knowledge and Thought as we have said.¹¹⁶ *But his plans do not become deeds,* again referring to the Ancient One, whose *plans do not become deeds* because destruction and Shattering are inherent to him (whereas the God of Israel is able to copulate with the Shechinah).¹¹⁷ This is why the Biblical text goes on—as far as the words *the barren has borne seven, while the mother of many is dejected*¹¹⁸—to describe the Shattering of the vessels. So we learn from Luria, who expounds this passage in reference to the Shattering.¹¹⁹

[13] Know:¹²⁰ a time will come when the Shechinah will be sexually opened. So the Bible says: *Fallen, no more to rise is <Israel's> virgin*¹²¹—meaning, no longer shall she stand as a virgin, for at that time there will be no fear of the Insolent Waters since they will all have been mended. She will be open sexually; to her will apply the verse, *Spread wide the place of your “tent”*,¹²² and so the Bible says, *The moon will be “dug” <and the sun linger>*.¹²³ “Dug,” as in *the well that the princes dug*,¹²⁴ and so forth; meaning, she will be sexually opened.

¹¹⁵ Ms. Oxford adds the word *u-le-hashiv*, which appears in ms. Jerusalem as *ve-heshivani* (or *va-hashiveni*). Neither reading makes much sense in the context, and I suspect both are based on an erroneous repetition of the preceding *ve-la-sh[oresh]*.

¹¹⁶ Above, pp. 200-201. It is not clear whether “his” refers back to the God of Israel, or to divinity in general; I suspect the former.

¹¹⁷ And, since the Female is receptacle for his ejaculate, it does not have the destructive force inherent within the solitary Ancient One.

¹¹⁸ That is, 1 Samuel 2:4-5.

¹¹⁹ So ms. Jerusalem. Ms. Oxford: “...from Luria’s essay on the Shattering.”

¹²⁰ Ms. Jerusalem, *ve-da’*. Ms. Oxford mistakenly reads *sheva’*, which makes no sense here.

¹²¹ Amos 5:2.

¹²² Isaiah 54:2. Ms. Jerusalem adds, “and so forth”; and the Biblical context indeed strengthens the sexual imagery the author sees in this passage.

¹²³ Isaiah 24:23. “Moon” and “sun” here are the Shechinah and the God of Israel.

¹²⁴ Numbers 21:18: *The well that the princes dug, the nobles of the people hewed out, with a rod and with their staffs.* (This is the “and so forth” indicated by the author.)

[14] *And the sun linger.* At present their coupling is intermittent; but a time will come when it will be continual, the word “linger” used as in *Moses lingered*,¹²⁵ meaning that he will remain with her perpetually.¹²⁶ The Bible goes on to explain: *For YHVH rules in Zion*, referring to the God of Israel, *and in the presence of his elders he is a Glory*.¹²⁷ This means that he is a “Glory” in the presence of the Root, i.e., that it is he who is called his Female’s “Glory.”¹²⁸

[15] A time will come when the Higher Shechinah will be above the God of Israel, as represented in *a noble woman is her husband’s crown*.¹²⁹ This is the significance of, *Then Moses shall sing*.¹³⁰ {As matters now stand, whenever the Shechinah wants sex she does the serenading, as in, *I am a rose of Sharon*.¹³¹ But a time will come when the God of Israel will serenade her, and this is what is meant by *then Moses shall sing*,} “Moses” being the God of Israel.

[16] This is the inner meaning of the verse, *The moon’s light shall be like the sun’s light*,¹³² conveying that the Shechinah will be in a lofty place like the God of Israel,¹³³ who is symbolized by the “sun”; {while the “sun’s” light will take the place of the “moon.” So the verse goes on to say:} *and the sun’s light shall be [...] like the light of Seven-days*,¹³⁴ i.e., {like the light of} the Shechinah, who is called “Seven-days.”¹³⁵

¹²⁵ Exodus 32:1; the author explains *boshah* in Isaiah by *boshesh* in Exodus. Recall that “Moses” is one more symbolic representation of the God of Israel, a function he will exercise again in the next paragraph.

¹²⁶ Or, “will be in a state of permanent erection” (*she-ya’amod tamid*).

¹²⁷ The continuation of Isaiah 24:23, its first part slightly abridged.

¹²⁸ Vs. the present condition, where it is the Shechinah who is God’s *kavod*, “Glory.”

¹²⁹ Proverbs 12:4; see above, p. /.../.

¹³⁰ Exodus 15:1. The Hebrew verb “sing” is in the future tense, although all modern translators, following the context, treat it as past.

¹³¹ Song of Songs 2:1; following the interpretation in Zohar, I, 221a (=III, 107a), which derives “Sharon” from *sharah*, “she sings,” and says that the Shechinah is called “rose” (*havazzelet*) “at the time when she wants to have sex with the King.”

¹³² Isaiah 30:26.

¹³³ *Le-ma’lah ke-e[lohei] y[isra’el]*, in both mss. But it would suit the context better to read, as above, *le-ma’lah me-e[lohei] y[isra’el]*, “higher than the God of Israel.” The point seems to be, not that “sun” and “moon” will be equal, but they will trade places, the “moon” being as the “sun” is now. But this is uncertain; and the divergences between mss. Oxford and Jerusalem, in the remainder of this paragraph, may reflect two divergent understandings of the author’s intent.

¹³⁴ Omitting Isaiah’s *shiv’atayim*, “sevenfold,” which does not quite suit the author’s argument.

¹³⁵ Above, p. 212.

Not meaning, of course, that his light will be diminished; rather, that the Shechinah's rank will be elevated {until the God of Israel will be in comparison to her as the Shechinah is now} in comparison to him.¹³⁶ At that time *YHVH will be One and his name One*.¹³⁷ **Blessed be he forever! Amen!**

[17] This is why David, when *he came to the Head*¹³⁸ (symbolizing the Ancient One) *where he was to prostrate himself for God* (indicating sexual coupling),¹³⁹ “David sought to engage in alien worship,”¹⁴⁰ {in accord with} *Af loves {the nations}*.¹⁴¹

Understand.

¹³⁶ So ms. Jerusalem. Ms. Oxford has *she-yassig ma'alato* in place of *she-yisgav ma'alatah*, which, with the omission of the following words, would require us to translate: “... rather, he will achieve the rank of the Shechinah, which will correspond to his own.” This seems awkward, but it must be admitted that the “equality” interpretation better suits the following words than the “female above” interpretation. (To speak of *ma'alato shel shekhinah* sounds grotesque, but the feminine forms have been used with very shaky consistency throughout this text.)

¹³⁷ Zechariah 14:9, regularly used by the Kabbalists (and in the *Lekha Dodi* hymn) to describe the ultimate harmonious synthesis of all the Divinity's diverse aspects.

¹³⁸ Ms. Jerusalem inserts at this point the word *qibalti*, “I have received as a tradition”—marking it, however, with an overline, which may mean it is to be excised. The equation of “Head” with the Ancient One has been a staple of the author's argument throughout.

¹³⁹ By prostrating himself, he offers his back parts for penetration. This takes up the theme of pp. 254-255, that the “true Messiah” (=David=Sabbatai Zevi) will step into the role of the Ancient One's missing female. On the feminization of David, cf. above, pp. 214-217.

¹⁴⁰ 2 Samuel 15:32, Talmud Sanhedrin 107a: “David sought to engage in alien worship, as it is written: *David came to the head* [in the Biblical context, the “summit” of the Mount of Olives] *where he was to prostrate himself to God* [or, “the gods”]; and the word *head* must refer to alien worship, as in *that image had a head of fine gold* [Daniel 2:32].” The Talmud goes on to explain David's motivation: so that people will not speak ill of God's justice, he must commit a crime worthy of the punishment that his son Absalom is trying to kill him. The author ignores this, however, and plainly represents the Talmud's opening assertion as referring to the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi, which he interprets as a transition from—or transcendence of—the domain of the “God of Israel,” in favor of the loftier, judgment- and distinction-free realm of the higher divinity who “loves the nations.” **This seeming afterthought is the single most pivotal passage of *I Came This Day to the Spring*, for the understanding of the author's Sabbatian convictions.**

¹⁴¹ Deuteronomy 33:3; see above, n. 1712. Between “alien worship” and “understand,” ms. Oxford has only the words *av* [in place of *af*] *hovev*, “loving father.” Whether the replacement of *af* with *av* is simply a scribal error, or whether it is significant, I am unable to say.